

**Reinventing Ranchera: Music, Language, and Identity in the
Southwest**

A dissertation submitted by

Elijah Wald

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Interdisciplinary Doctorate

Tufts University

May 2015

© 2015 Elijah Wald

Adviser: Deborah Pacini Hernández

Abstract

Musicians in the southwestern United States have been blending styles from both sides of the Mexican border since before that border was established in the mid-nineteenth century. In New Mexico, a population that traces its roots to the first Spanish-speaking settlers who arrived from Mexico in the sixteenth century developed a new style of music in the 1960s that has become known as “New Mexico music. In Los Angeles, a Chicano rap scene emerged in the early 1990s, followed in the early twenty-first century by a new style called banda rap that used Spanish-language lyrics and samples of Mexican *ranchera* music. These three styles show different mixes of Spanish and English lyrics, and of music referencing different degrees and forms of Mexican, Hispanic, or Chicano heritage. Exploring these styles in an interdisciplinary process blending ethnomusicology, sociolinguistics, and social theory suggests ways in which they have reflected and influenced different and evolving concepts of Mexican, Hispanic, or Chicano identity. The divergences between these styles and concepts challenge some common formulations of ethnic identity, language, and musical style, while suggesting some of the varied ways in which individuals and groups have rooted their present identities in a mix of historical and cultural traditions from both sides of the border.

It is easier to know man in general than to know a particular man.

—François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*

Human experience is usually paradoxical, if that means incongruous with the phrases of current talk or even current philosophy.

—George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

Ni sé si soy mexicano, americano o chingao.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Yo No Fui, Fue Teté*

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Illustrations	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	x
A Note on Orthography and Translation	xix
 Section One: “Soy mexicano de este lado”: Language, Identity, and Music	 2
1. Defining Language, Defining Music, Defining Self	3
2. What’s in a Name?	20
3. What Is a Language?	47
4. Who Is “Us” and Who Is “Them”?	61
5. Southwestern Traditions	87
6. Passing, Loss, and Power	116
7. Borders, Bilingualism, and Third Spaces	136
8. Code Switching and Performance	163
9. Bimusicality and Other Linguistic Metaphors	198
 Section Two: Rocking Ranchera in Hispanic New Mexico	 232
1. Local Background	234
2. Al Hurricane, the Godfather	246
Early Life: Ethnicity and Language	247
Musical Development	259

Personal Tastes: An Afternoon with Al Hurricane	287
3. Musical Evolutions in Northern New Mexico	301
4. New Mexico Music Radio	320
5. The Languages of New Mexico Music	356
6. Core Region, Core Repertoire	396
 Section Three: Rapping Ranchera in Mexican Los Angeles	 428
1. Local Background	430
2. Chicano Rap: The First Ten Years	474
3. Rap Meets Ranchera	522
Chalino and the Corrido Boom	423
Corridos Meet Rap	530
Akwid Arrives	537
Ni de aquí ni de allá	550
Illusions of Fusion	560
4. West Coast Party al Estilo Mexicano: Comparative Bilingualisms	577
Conclusion	625
Interviews	651
Selected Bibliography	653

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Shorty and the Corvettes, “La del moño colorado” LP, circa 1965.	4
Fig. 2: Manuel Pineda’s Aztec dance and Jesús Helguera’s iconic painting.	96
Fig. 2: Mariachi Vargas with the Orquesta Típica Lerdo de Tejada, 1935.	110
Fig. 3: Al Hurricane LP covers: <i>Mi saxophone</i> and <i>Canciones del alma</i> .	280
Fig. 4: People attending the Holy Rosary Fiesta, Albuquerque, 2012.	398
Fig. 5: East Side Revue poster, 1965.	441
Fig. 6: Art Laboe's <i>Memories of El Monte</i> LP, 1960.	452
Fig. 7: <i>Lowrider Oldies, Volume 1</i> (1993) and <i>Latin Oldies</i> (1996).	455
Fig. 8: The Electrobeat Records crew, c. 1984.	475
Fig. 9: Chicano rap CD covers.	507
Fig. 10: “Tres Delinquentes” single cover.	517
Fig. 11: CD covers of Duetto Voces del Rancho and Lupillo Rivera.	527
Fig. 12: Covers of <i>Proyecto Akwid</i> and <i>Ni De Aquí Ni De Allá</i> CDs.	574
Fig. 14: Language use in YouTube comments on “La Raza” and “Al Estilo Mexicano.”	601
Fig. 15: Language use in Kid Frost’s “La Raza” and “Ya Estuvo” and Jae-P’s “Al Estilo Mexicano” and “El Nuevo Sonido.”	606

Maps

New Mexico	233
Los Angeles County: Racial/Ethnic Diversity 2000	429
Patterns of Mexican immigration and remittances	435

Acknowledgments

As with any book-length, multi-year project, this one's creation involved many more people than the named author. I must especially thank those who accepted me into the Tufts University community and shepherded me through this process. First of all, Robin Kanarek, who initially interviewed me for the Interdisciplinary Doctoral (IDOC) program, the other committee members who accepted me despite my lack of pre-doctoral academic degrees, and in particular Susan Ernst, the head of the program during my period of study, who was infinitely welcoming and supportive throughout the process.

Deborah Pacini Hernández told me about the IDOC in the first place and volunteered to chair my advisory committee, but her contribution went far beyond that, including innumerable conversations, both formal and informal, that shaped both my general understandings and the specifics of my work on this project. Her comments and criticisms were invaluable, and her friendship even more so.

I was fortunate in all the members of my advisory committee, and must thank all for the time and effort they put into helping me. Jeffrey Summit, whose class in ethnomusicological fieldwork brought me gently into the world of academia and who also supported my desire to retain some of my more familiar frameworks. James Ennis, who provided grounding in the sociological literature, and whose absence from the later stages of this process due to health issues is much regretted. David Locke, whose rigorous critiques led to fruitful additional research and sharpened my focus—with more sharpening to come as I try to turn this into a published book—and whose dry humor I much appreciated. Doris

Sommer, who was kind enough to add this to her already overcrowded schedule, and who taught a class at Harvard that not only forced me to improve my Spanish language skills but introduced me to many of the writers and concepts that have formed the theoretical foundation of this study. And Catherine O'Connor, my outside reader, whose class in sociolinguistics at Boston University provided broad, solid grounding in what became a central discipline for my work, and whose encouragement was above and beyond the call of duty.

Many other teachers contributed to this process: as a freelance music journalist, author, and historian, I had not previously engaged with much academic theory and was particularly grateful for the opportunity to broaden my understanding, albeit at times with a degree of resistance and skepticism. Sarah Pinto's class in Anthropological Thought was particularly helpful, as well as being an exemplary model of how to conduct a fascinating, exciting class in a complex subject. Rich Jankowsky's seminar in ethnomusicology provided a sense of previous work and varied approaches, and a chance to explore those ideas with fellow students whose interests and skills were quite different from my own. Calvin Gidney's course in bilingualism was an excellent introduction to the range of current linguistic theory. Wayne Marshall's class in hip hop around the world provided a larger framework in which to place Chicano rap. And Andy Klatt's course in Spanish translation forced me to confront the difficulty of conveying ideas in different languages, providing insights that informed many other areas of this study.

I must give particular thanks to my wife, Sandrine Sheon, who was behind

me all the way, despite the oddity of taking this route in my fifties, and who helped out in so many ways that I can't begin to acknowledge them properly here. Maria Nipson was kind enough to open her home in Albuquerque, as well as showing me around town—and that's just the immediate help on this project, a tiny fraction of all she has shared with me over the years.

Innumerable other people helped in various ways, and I obviously cannot thank them all. But I would be remiss if I did not end by giving special, particular thanks to all the musicians, deejays, record producers, radio programmers, concert promoters, and audience members who shared their time and knowledge both in New Mexico and in Los Angeles. Some gave a great deal of time to help me, and yet are not quoted in the body of this work. I hope to publish some of my research in other forms and give further credit, but can never fully acknowledge all the help I received, and can only say again how grateful I am.

My apologies to the many other people whose names might be included here. This has been a fruitful and enjoyable process, and the chance to meet and engage with all of you was what made it that way.

Introduction

This study began as an attempt to explore and contrast two styles of music from the southwestern United States, *New Mexico music* and *banda rap*, both of which explicitly mix Spanish with English and Mexican *ranchera* with Anglo pop (using *Anglo* broadly for mainstream English-language styles from rock 'n' roll to rap).¹ *Ranchera* is the term used by Mexican and Mexican American music listeners for a broad range of music associated with rural culture and traditions, from the iconic trios and mariachi singers in the cinematic *comedias rancheras* of the 1930s and 1940s to the accordion-powered *norteño* groups and brass bands that continue to draw crowds and sell millions of recordings on both sides of the US-Mexico border. As with Anglo country and western, one of the primary appeals of ranchera is its connection to a symbolic past, a sense that wherever one is living and whatever one is doing in the present, the music provides a link to an ancestral or cultural heritage, an enduring sense of *mexicanidad* (Mexican-ness). Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Hispanic, or Latino artists—choose your term—in the southwestern United States have regularly referenced ranchera as a way of preserving or asserting connections to their past on either or both sides of the modern border. Like Spanish speech, this music may be associated with modern Mexico or with local traditions, and both speech and music remain potent

¹ When juxtaposing *Anglo* and *Latino* culture and music (or, more often *Latin music*), I use both terms broadly for those aspects of US culture linked to English and Spanish language use, regardless of the race, ethnicity, or nationality of the individuals involved. For example, many people discussed in this work have pursued dual or mixed Latin and Anglo musical careers. In terms of individuals and groups of people, I at times distinguish African Americans as a third group, but in terms of Latinos playing and reshaping Anglo pop styles and mixing them with Latin/Spanish styles, I include the music of African-American swing, rock 'n' roll, and rap artists as Anglo—just as I include the Spanish-language music of Mexicans and other Latin Americans

signifiers of identity even for people who do not speak Spanish and prefer listening to rock, country, or rap.

I chose New Mexico music and banda rap in part because the styles are respectively associated with the oldest and most deeply rooted Hispanic community in the United States and with a modern binational urban identity, and thus provide a way of looking at how Hispanic/Chicano/Mexican cultural identities have evolved, shifted, varied, and diverged. My focus shifted somewhat in the course of research and writing, expanding to include a third style, Chicano rap, and also to query many of the assumptions on which my original choices were grounded. The result is an attempt to grapple not only with the complicated histories of these styles and the broader cultures from which they emerged, but with more fundamental questions about the ways people (myself included) define and understand music, language, and identity.

This dissertation is the product of several years of study and research at Tufts University, as well as fieldwork in New Mexico and Los Angeles, but also of many prior years of study, research, and experience as a musician, writer, reader, and traveler. As someone in his mid-fifties who has written or co-written a dozen books and thousands of articles for the popular media, but attended only one year of college almost forty years ago, I entered graduate school in a somewhat different situation from most students and both the advantages and disadvantages of that situation are undoubtedly reflected in this work. The world of modern academic interchange and analysis was in some ways as foreign to me

of many hues and ancestries as Latin. Like all generalizations this is at times unsatisfactory, but no other solution seemed more appropriate or helpful.

as the worlds of New Mexico music and Los Angeles Chicano or Mexican rap, and although many of the techniques I employ and the themes I explore are extensions of my previous research and writing, others reflect an attempt to confront or absorb discourses and approaches that in the past I might have missed. As a result, this manuscript ended up being considerably longer than I expected or intended—I had a rough sense of what I wanted to write about the musical styles and cultures that were the ostensible foci of my research, but had not expected to write more than the standard preparatory chapter about my theoretical and conceptual approaches. That preparatory chapter grew into nine chapters, in part because I was in foreign territory and wanted to demonstrate my willingness to immerse myself in its culture, learn its language, and grapple with the complexities of its customs and strictures, but also because I was fascinated with what I was learning.

In particular, although I proposed from the outset to look at the overlap of music and language in two regions where artists and audiences commonly speak both Spanish and English and listen to both Mexican ranchera and US pop, I did not realize the depth and richness of current sociolinguistic research and theory or the extent to which my readings in sociolinguistics would influence and affect my relationship not only to language but to music and concepts of group identity. In keeping with the interdisciplinary spirit of the IDOC program, I have tried to use a variety of approaches, and have drawn on many writers who were not primarily concerned with speech or language, but it is the linguistic component of this project that was least familiar to me and most clearly distinguishes it from my

previous work, and those first nine chapters are to a great extent an attempt to explain why and how that component became central.

Identity has been a hot topic both within and outside academia for many years, and it requires a degree of hubris to tackle it yet again, especially in the context of writing about people and cultures to which I am in many respects an outsider. That said, I chose this topic in part because I am dubious of formulations that make easy ascriptions of insider and outsider status. When I write about the musical culture of a Chicano man in his fifties, I do not write as a Chicano but do write as a man in his fifties who for many years made a living as a musician—and I am aware that those commonalities not only mean we may share a degree of understanding, but also that I bring my own experiences and prejudices to the conversation.

The first duty of anyone writing about identity is to give some sense of the writer's own background and influences, so to begin: my mother and all four of my grandparents were born in Central Europe and I was raised with the understanding that although we were in the United States we came from elsewhere and remained European—though not necessarily linked to any particular region. My paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother were from the eastern edge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and presumably spoke Polish and Yiddish as their first languages, but I never heard a word of Polish at home and the only Yiddish I recall was in reminiscences of my father's youth in Brooklyn. My paternal grandmother and maternal grandfather were from Munich and Vienna respectively, and spoke German as their first languages, and that was

the home language of my father's childhood in New York as well as my mother's in Austria. My maternal grandparents spoke German with my mother, but although I often heard them as a child, I never learned more than a few words of the language, nor did my parents ever encourage me to learn it. However, it was extremely important to them that I be connected to European culture, they encouraged me to learn French and Spanish, and I now speak those languages with some facility and have a French-American wife and dual citizenship. It was also important to my father that I be conscious of being a Jew, important to my mother that I think of that identity as a choice rather than an unchangeable fact, and important to both of them that I not become a Zionist, in the sense of thinking that being Jewish gave me unique rights to a particular geographical homeland. When I turned eighteen, I left school to make a career as a musician, and spent much of the next fifteen years in Europe, particularly in Spain and Belgium, as well as traveling for almost a year in Asia, another year in Africa, and about a year in Mexico and Guatemala, almost always traveling by hitchhiking and earning a living by playing guitar. In my early twenties I also began writing about music, primarily for the Boston Globe, and by the 1990s had become that paper's regular "world music" reporter. I published my first book in 1998, a biography of the blues singer Josh White, and went on to write ten more books on blues, Mexican, international, and US pop styles.

That précis may be helpful in weighing my viewpoints, opinions, and prejudices in the work that follows, as well as suggesting some reasons I was initially interested in the themes I explore. My background, linguistic and

otherwise, necessarily affects my thinking about other people's heritage and my understanding of how they formulate and conceive both their own and other people's identities and identifications. Among other things, it has made me mistrustful of assertions of insider status that imply an ability to understand other individuals by virtue of a shared group membership, and also to mistrust assertions of outsider status that imply objectivity. At times in the course of this work I felt a close degree of kinship with the people around me, at other times I felt very foreign, and undoubtedly both of those feelings affected my understanding and interpretations.

This manuscript is organized in three sections. The first, “‘Soy mexicano de este lado’: Language, Identity, and Music,” is an attempt to outline my theoretical approach and provide some grounding in the scholars who have influenced me and the issues and histories underlying the next two sections. As noted above, it is longer than most introductory sections, but I felt the material deserved the attention and also that it would be helpful for readers to become acclimatized to a broad range of Mexican and Chicano culture: for example, I had not planned to devote ten pages to the evolution of mariachi, but that history turned out to be fundamentally different from what I had understood in ways that were relevant to a discussion of “invented traditions” and also provides a foundation for understanding later evolutions of ranchera. More generally, my decision to use sociolinguistics as an inspiration and frame for explorations of music and other aspects of culture required that I provide a sense of how and why I made that decision, which involved retracing my steps in some detail, a process I have tried

not to make too agonizing. Finally, this section is long because I enjoyed the process—having spent my life writing for a broad popular audience I embraced the opportunity to grapple with theoretical abstractions and arguments, hoping academic readers will appreciate this effort and begging their indulgence.

The first section is divided into nine chapters: “Defining Language, Defining Music, Defining Self,” is an introduction to the issues confronted in the next eight. “What’s in a Name?” and “What Is a Language?” explore some basic problems and tools of sociolinguistics and provide some background in the history of *ranchera* and related musical styles. “Who Is ‘Us’ and Who Is ‘Them’?” explores concepts of group identity and some of the ways Spanish, Chicano, Hispanic, and Mexican identities have been framed in the southwestern United States. “Southwestern Traditions” looks at some ways traditions are invented or shaped, with particular reference to New Mexico and the history of mariachi. “Passing, Loss, and Power” and “Borders, Bilingualism, and Third Spaces,” look at the logic and limitations of some common academic formulations of language, identity, and culture. “Code Switching and Performance” explores the performance of bilingualism and the history of mixing Spanish, English, and other southwestern speech styles in song lyrics. “Bimusicality and Other Linguistic Metaphors” looks at the advantages and disadvantages of using sociolinguistic tools to study music and provides some background in the evolution of Mexican *cumbia*.

The remaining two sections deal with specific geographical areas and musical styles, section two with what is called “New Mexico Music” and section

three with Chicano and Mexican rap in Los Angeles.

“Rocking Ranchera in Hispanic New Mexico” explores the evolution and definition of a particular southwestern musical genre, so-called “New Mexico music.” It consists of a brief chapter of historical background, followed by five chapters based predominantly on fieldwork conducted in Albuquerque and northern New Mexico in the fall of 2012. The first of these chapters is devoted to Al Hurricane, “The Godfather of New Mexico Music,” and is divided into three sections: two trace his early life, his language use and formulations of ethnic identity, and his career as a professional musician, while the third looks at the range of material he chose to play during an impromptu performance at his home. The intent behind this approach is to highlight the breadth of experience and musical tastes of the defining figure in the New Mexico genre, and thus both the range of influences that inform the genre and the limitations and misunderstandings inherent in defining it. The next chapter, “Musical Evolutions in Northern New Mexico,” looks at how the music played by Spanish-speaking people in rural Northern New Mexico developed and changed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the various influences involved. The fourth chapter, “New Mexico Music Radio” traces the history of Spanish radio in New Mexico and its role in defining a specific New Mexico Music format. The fifth chapter, “The Languages of New Mexico Music” explores the linguistic choices (in terms of both speech and musical style) that inform the New Mexico genre. Finally, “Core Region, Core Repertoire” looks at how the repertoire and stylistic approaches common in live performances of Northern New Mexico

music have narrowed since the 1990s, and explores some possible reasons for these changes.

The third section, “Rapping Ranchera in Mexican Los Angeles,” is based on a mix of fieldwork done before and during this project and a broad survey of recordings, videos, and other materials. It is divided into four chapters: “The Local Background” outlines patterns of Mexican settlement and population distribution in the Los Angeles area, and looks at the evolving musical tastes and expressions of that population through the 1970s. “Chicano Rap: The First Ten Years” explores how Chicano rap emerged and evolved in Southern California in the 1990s, with a focus on how various rappers and producers chose to formulate their linguistic and musical identities and in particular the ways they chose to recognize or distance themselves from Mexican and immigrant identities. “Rap Meets Ranchera” looks at the brief rise and fall of what was publicized as Urban Regional or Banda Rap music, a style intended to express a modern Mexican identity in California by fusing hip-hop with ranchera. “West Coast Party al Estilo Mexicano: Comparative Bilingualisms” contrasts the language-mixing of the defining Chicano rapper, Kid Frost, with that of one of the main banda rappers, Jae-P, suggesting the differences in their portrayals of bicultural identity through overt performances of bilingualism and codeswitching.

A note on orthography and translation:

In a book dealing with multiple language systems, one has to make choices about orthography. In quotations from written sources I have tended to maintain the orthographic quirks of the originals, both because it seemed presumptuous to change other people's orthography and because this book is concerned with language, and divergent ways of writing language are useful clues to how different people understand that language. In my own orthography, including translations from other writers, I have tried to maintain the standard rules of English and Spanish: among other things, this means I capitalize words like Spanish, Mexican, and Indian, but not *español*, *mexicano*, or *indio*, and capitalize all the key words in English song and movie titles, but only the first word and proper names in Spanish titles. I am not consistent about the latter practice, in some cases following the model of composers or marketers based in the United States who write in Spanish but use English-style capitalization.

Transcribing the speech of people who switched between Spanish and English presented particular problems. I have tended not to italicize either language when the switching was relatively smooth, since doing so would inevitably suggest that one language was a norm from which the other diverged. However, I have italicized single words or brief phrases when they occurred within otherwise uniform speech and were pronounced with the accent of another system. For example, in the quotation, "I know people are saying *Latino* but I, am I really a Latino?" the italics signal that the speaker pronounced "Latino" with a marked Spanish or Mexican accent in the first phrase, but not in the second. I

have not been entirely consistent in this, but tried to be as clear as possible. If some orthography remains confusing, that is in part because written systems are imperfect means of conveying the nuances of spoken language, and in part because in many instances I remain confused.

For quotations or lyrics included in the original Spanish, I have provided various forms of translation: sometimes alongside the original, sometimes below, sometimes in a footnote. In a couple of instances, when a speaker was switching between Spanish and English and conveyed substantially the same information in both languages, I have not provided further translation. In each case, I was trying to make the best of what is always a difficult situation—however one translates, it distances the reader from the original even while making the original comprehensible—and although I chose to be inconsistent in part because some solutions worked better in some situations and others in others, I also wanted to foreground that difficulty. Doris Sommer has suggested the importance of being attentive to the discords and particularities in voices different from our own, of recognizing the power relationships inherent in fantasies of universalism, and of willingly acknowledging “the distances and the refusals” of language that pushes readers—or in this case, listeners—to recognize their own distances and limitations.² Translation is always a process of distancing as well as approach—the message is both that one can convey the meaning of the original and that the original remains inaccessible—and I would hope not only that readers unfamiliar with Spanish will be prompted by some of my choices to struggle a little with the original, but that those who are fluent in Spanish may find my choices at times

helpful and perhaps at others perplexing. The people I interviewed did not always share the same understandings of words, nor did I always think I understood them, nor, I am sure, was I always right when I thought I did.

A note on quotations

All unfootnoted quotations are from my own interviews, for which dates and places are provided in the endnotes.

²Sommer, *Proceed with Caution*, 2, 9 and passim.

Reinventing Ranchera: Music, Language, and Identity in the Southwest

Section one: “Soy mexicano de este lado”

Por mi educación bilingüe hablo chicano y gabacho,

Y se despide este pocho,

Hasta luego, ¡y ahí lo watcho!

--Lalo Guerrero, “El Chicano,” 1977.

1. Defining language, defining music, defining self

Enrique Lamadrid, longtime head of the Chicano Hispano Mexicano Studies program at the University of New Mexico and currently chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, tells a story of one of his students, a young man who played in a local dance band, coming to him with a question about Spanish grammar. The student was perplexed by the title of what he called “the red devil song,” wondering why it was “La demonio colorado” rather than the grammatically correct “El demonio colorado.” As it happened, the student was accompanied by a woman wearing a red ribbon in her hair, providing Lamadrid with a visual aid to explain: a *moño colorado* is a red ribbon, and “La del moño colorado”—the title of the song—means “the woman with the red hair ribbon.”

Lamadrid’s student was far from alone. Al Hurricane, whose brother Tiny Morrie had a local hit with the song around 1970, recalls, “Everybody thought it was...[about] a demon,” and this interpretation remains sufficiently common that a YouTube video of the song performed by a group in Raton, New Mexico, is labeled “JD Castillo y Los Compas - La Demonio Colorado.”³ I often repeated Lamadrid’s story during interviews with New Mexico musicians as a way of introducing the issue of Spanish language skills within the community, and when I told it to Eddie Roybal, a popular guitarist and singer of the 1970s, he laughed and began to talk about how few people in his audience know the real meaning of *moño*—to him, it was a bandana—but the conversation startled his wife Grace, who had always thought the song was about a demon.

³ Al Hurricane, interviewed by author; “JD Castillo y Los Compas - La Demonio Colorado,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUXrfbTvogk>, posted Jul 11, 2011, accessed 12/3/12.



Figure 1: Shorty and the Corvettes, “La del moño colorado” LP, circa 1965.

“La del moño colorado” was originally a hit in the mid-1960s for a Texas band called Shorty and the Corvettes (see figure 1) and became a New Mexico standard a few years later, thanks to Tiny Morrie. Shorty Ortiz and Morrie Sánchez both recorded mixed repertoires of Spanish-language ranchera and English-language rock ’n’ roll in the 1960s, but in later decades have tended to sing only in Spanish. Indeed, Ortiz currently leads a mariachi in Austin that plays traditional Mexican music, and has translated his old band name to fit that style, calling it Mariachi Corbetas.

Those overlapping stories, names, and interpretations suggest a broad range of linguistic and cultural issues that have intersected and influenced ranchera music in the southwestern United States. Although linguistic issues are not often considered central to musical studies, they can provide alternate ways of approaching music and culture, opening up new avenues of discussion. Language is central to any written study—it is what we write in—and the musical styles discussed in this book include a range of linguistic choices, skills, and tactics (Spanish, English, Spanglish, bilingualism, codeswitching) that parallel and

provide insight into other cultural interactions. The minutiae of cultural affiliation and differentiation are arguably easier to isolate and highlight in words than in music, and inarguably easier to present on the printed page. For example, it is not at all simple to sort out which aspects of Anglo country and western music may have been adapted from the music of Mexican cowboys, and harder still to make a case about such adaptations without playing musical examples. But it is easy to sort out and present the words adapted from Mexican cowboys in common Anglo sentences like, “I’m riding a *bronco* in the *rodeo* in *El Paso*.”

In many situations, linguistic identities are less fraught—or at least less obviously fraught—than ethnic, racial, or cultural identities. Many of the people I interviewed for this project were somewhat uncomfortable about defining their ethnic, racial, or cultural affiliations, but talked freely and comfortably about their varying command and mixed use of Spanish and English, even when they were telling me they spoke a bad or “broken” dialect or expressed regret at not speaking one or both languages better.⁴

Language is something we all use in a wide variety of ways, often with the consciousness that we are expressing ourselves badly or that the way we are talking to a particular person in a particular situation would be understood very differently by another person in another situation. We may speak of our linguistic identities in bipolar terms, describing ourselves as speaking Spanish and English or a bilingual mixture called Spanglish, but we are all conscious that we have more than two ways of talking. And while we routinely describe other people as sharing our language—likewise speaking Spanish, English, or Spanglish—we are aware that some of them speak very differently from us, sometimes to the point

⁴ The somewhat disparaging term “mocho Spanish” was mentioned by several informants in New Mexico, as well as by previous researchers, e.g. Galindo, D. Letticia, “Language use and language attitudes: A study of border women.” *Bilingual Review*, 21:1, 1996.

that we have difficulty understanding them. That is, we all accept a degree of variation and fuzziness in language that may be harder to recognize or acknowledge in discussions of ethnic, racial, national, or cultural affiliations: a claim to be “a hundred percent American”⁵ or “cien por ciento mexicano” may be made by someone who at the same time cheerfully acknowledges mediocre skills in the language she associates with that identity or as part of a description of meeting someone else who shares that identity but speaks an incomprehensibly different dialect.

The way I framed the misinterpretation—or reinterpretation—of “La del moño colorado” suggests some linguistic quirks and complexities that will crop up frequently in this book. To start with, there is the name of Lamadrid’s old department: “Chicano Hispano Mexicano Studies.” That mix of ethnic signifiers would not be chosen by a department anywhere but New Mexico, and suggests the difficulties and disagreements involved in naming ethnic identities,⁶ and yet it fails to include the most common local term, *Hispanic*, which was preferred by a substantial majority of the people I interviewed, while including terms that are rarely used and may be explicitly rejected by people the department considers within its field of interest.

One might argue that *Hispano* is just the Spanish equivalent of *Hispanic*

⁵ The term “American” for citizens of the United States is controversial in some circles, for good reason. I use it both because it was the standard term used by virtually all of my informants and because I prefer to acknowledge the ideological baggage rather than avoiding it. The history, power relationships, and arrogance involved in citizens of one country calling themselves and being called by a name that could fit anyone on either of two continents are inseparable from the cultural relationships discussed in this study. There is power in being a citizen of the United States, and the acknowledgement of that fact, along with a not always well-deserved pride or pleasure in that power tends to be shared by even very recent immigrants. My use of “American,” to the extent it is significant, is meant to underline rather than obscuring that fact.

⁶ When I mentioned Chicano Hispano Mexicano Studies to my main academic advisor, she at first assumed I was using the multiple terms in an attempt to highlight the difficulty of coming up with appropriate nomenclature, and was startled to find that this was the department’s official name.

and the choice to use the Spanish variant, like the choice to use *Mexicano* rather than *Mexican*, is simply a choice between two equally valid options expressed in different languages. One could also recognize this use of Spanish as an explicit assertion of difference and of pride in a non-English-language heritage. Or, since the term *Hispano* has often been used by academics to designate a specifically New Mexican identity and the term *Mexicano* has traditionally been used by New Mexicans in a regional sense (as their local identity relative to Anglo neighbors, but distinguished from the national identity of the people across the border, whom they called “mexicanos de México”), these terms can be seen as regionally specific. In any case, there is a choice to access two languages simultaneously—the Spanish of the identity terms and the English of “Studies”—which is notably lacking in the name of Lamadrid’s current academic home, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese.

That discrepancy might indicate a degree of uncertainty about the perception of local speech or local identity. Spanish and Portuguese are established academic languages with departments for their study in universities all over the world, so there is no need to assert their proud difference by calling them *Español* and *Portuguesa*. As with the NPR newscasters who refer to France and Paris without any attempt at a French accent but carefully pronounce *Nicaragua* and *Managua* with Spanish inflections, there is a gesture toward respecting another culture, but also potentially a degree of patronization: the dominant culture respects the subalterns and, because its respect will matter to them, wants to signal this respect by pronouncing their language the way they do.

The choice to use a non-English variant or pronunciation of a national or linguistic term rather than its English translation may be framed as an in-group expression of pride, but the need to assert pride is almost by definition reactive.

When I was living in New York in the 1970s, old Jewish men gathered in Washington Square every weekend to sing songs in their native language, and when they spoke about those songs in English they called the language “Jewish,” just as French people speaking English call their language “French.” In universities, though, and in books, and indeed among non-Jewish-speaking Jews in casual conversation, the language is normally called Yiddish—the term for “Jewish” in that language.⁷ The choice to say *Yiddish* in English when speaking of the Jewish language, but not *Français* when speaking of the French language, might be a patronizing gesture by Gentiles eager to show their sympathetic understanding of another culture. But my impression is that it is something quite different, a Jewish decision to label the language in a way that suggests a foreign, potentially national identity rather than a frequently despised local minority. (Jews of my generation grew up with frequent admonitions from our elders not to act or sound “too Jewish.”) In the same way, there are many situations in which people feel that being labeled “Hispanic” or “Mexican” by outsiders is a slur, and the insistence on claiming one’s own terms, *Hispano* and *Mexicano*, resists the Anglo labels. But as with Jews, that process is reactionary: the French, not having been made to feel inferior, do not feel a need to escape the English-language label.

There is another force in play as well—the relationship of each language to the people who share its name. The study of French, Spanish, or Portuguese frequently involves no study of French, Spanish, or Portuguese people, and indeed

⁷ The use of “Yiddish” as a language label in English only gained primacy in the 20th century. Max Weinrich writes, “To this day one hears the word *Jewish* in speaking, but after the publication of Alexander Harkavy’s *Yiddish-English Dictionary* in 1898 and Leo Wiener’s *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* in 1899, the transcribed name began to take root (*History of the Yiddish Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980, 322). At the turn of the century it was still frequently glossed as “Yiddish (Judeo-German),” e.g. in Leo

is often connected to the study of people who have cast off the colonial yoke of French, Spanish, or Portuguese oppressors. There is an obvious paradox here, which some groups have dealt with by changing their language label—Haitians, who once called their language a dialect of French, now call it Kreyòl; Italian, French, and Spanish people who speak dialects of the Latin imposed on them by Roman overlords now call those dialects Italian, French, and Spanish (when they don't call them Napolitana, Gascon, and Catalan); and H.L. Mencken argued that the principal language spoken in the United States was American, related to but different from English.⁸

Whatever the reasons for the divergence in the University of New Mexico's naming practices, it is not meant to imply that students majoring in Chicano Hispano Mexicano Studies are expected to be more comfortable with Spanish than English, or even as comfortable with Spanish as their peers who are Spanish majors. The concentration includes an intermediate Spanish requirement, but most of its courses are in English and language is not a principle focus, for the good reason that most Chicanos, Hispanos, and Mexicanos living in the southwestern United States primarily speak English. They may speak distinctive varieties of English—there is by now a large academic literature on “Chicano English”—and at times use Spanish words and phrases that are unfamiliar to most Anglos, but for most people in the United States who define themselves as Chicanos, Hispanos, or even Mexicanos, Spanish is more likely to be regarded as a traditional or heritage language than as their main means of communication.

Hence the confusion about “La del moño colorado.” A child who speaks Spanish only with older relatives, if at all, and who talks about hair ribbons with

Wiener, *The history of Yiddish literature in the nineteenth century*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899, vii.

young English-speaking peers, is unlikely to know the word *moño* or the locution *la del*. Nor, for most people listening to the song, does this matter. Many Anglophones are familiar with the phrase “Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo,” but think it means “where are you, Romeo,” and yet they cheerfully repeat the phrase and it has meaning for them as a quotation from a romantic play—indeed, as “where are you, Romeo,” it is easier to slip into conversation than “why are you Romeo” would be. Similarly, it can be more fun and exciting to sing about a demon than about a hair ribbon.

In any case, many listeners and dancers pay only minimal attention to the meaning of song lyrics. At my high school dances in the 1970s we sang “Voulez-vous coucher avec moi” along with LaBelle, and some enthusiastic singers had no idea what the words meant. Even in our day-to-day languages, we all mishear lyrics on occasion. (Folklorists have a term for this, *mondegreen*, derived from a listener mishearing an old ballad in which someone took a dead man and “laid him on the green” as a reference to “Lady Mondagreen.”⁹) Such mishearings, if repeated frequently enough, cease to be regarded as mistakes and become new words. The English language is full of words that evolved from mistakes: “a napron” sounds just like “an apron” and, after being misheard that way enough times, *napron*, from the same root as napkin, became “apron.” Such shifts from error to idiom are especially tempting if they make sense: calling flamboyantly large cowboy headgear a “ten gallon hat” makes sense as comic exaggeration, so what originated as a misunderstanding of the Spanish *galón*—a kind of ornamental braiding still used on fancy sombreros—became an accepted English

⁸ Mencken, H.L., *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1921.

⁹ This term was coined by Sylvia Wright in “The Death of Lady Mondegreen,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Nov 1954, 45-51.

idiom.¹⁰

Such derivations and the ways in which they are remembered or forgotten provide clues to how cultures evolved and how people think about themselves and their relationships to others. The many Spanish words that have become standard among Anglo southwesterners indicate the extent to which southwestern culture was shaped by Hispanic culture. Lists of such words are often produced as evidence of the ubiquity of Mexican influence—rodeo, ranch, lariat, lasso, quirt, cinch, chaps, canyon, mesa, chaparral, adobe, stampede, corral, calaboose, hoosegow, buckaroo, jerky. Folk etymologies at times add further items: a New Mexico musician explained to me that cowboy dancing was derived from Mexican dancing, part of his evidence being that the square-dance call “do-si-do” is from the Spanish *dos a dos*, or “two by two.” As it happens, like most non-English square-dance instructions this call was originally French—*dos à dos*, meaning “back to back,” which is the movement indicated—but I do not introduce that example to mock anyone’s linguistic mistakes, much less to suggest that Hispanic southwesterners are particularly prone to such errors. On the contrary, my point is that language travels and changes along with the people who use it, and people who make scholarly explications of those changes are sometimes misled by our own beliefs and agendas, like anyone else.

Just as mistaken or quirky usages may come to be accepted as correct and standard, once-standard usages may come to seem odd or incorrect. Tiny Morrie’s wife, Gloria Pohl, recorded a song in the early 1970s called “Malas nuevas,” and when I first came across that title I thought it was an example of a *calque*, or translation of a phrase from one language to another—the standard Spanish translation of “bad news” is *malas noticias*, and since I had never heard the other

¹⁰ Cq *Spanish Word Histories and Mysteries: English Words That Come From Spanish*.

phrase I assumed local bilinguals had adapted the English “news” to Spanish as “nuevas.” Pohl’s song is about a boyfriend killed in Vietnam and this seemed like a good example of a local experience being reflected in Anglo-inflected Spanish—but my discovery was simply a product of my ignorance. In New Mexico, as in isolated areas of the Appalachians and Louisiana, European words and phrases that are considered archaic elsewhere have remained current, and what I took to be a borrowing from English is a retention from old-world Spanish: *buenas nuevas* for “good news” is still common in Spanish Evangelical Christian writing, where its archaic flavor lends it the weight of tradition.¹¹

Although I was wrong about *malas nuevas* being derived from an English phrase, that does not mean its use in New Mexico is unrelated to the English phrase. In bilingual situations, a word or phrase that exists in both languages will often become dominant over a word or phrase that is unique to one or the other, because the parallel usages reinforce each other. If *malas noticias* and *malas nuevas* are both acceptable options, people who are used to hearing and saying “good news” are likely to find *malas nuevas* more natural. So, although the phrase was standard Spanish when the first settlers arrived in North America, its survival in New Mexico may be due to English-language contact as much as to isolation from Mexico or Spain. (This interpretation is supported by the observation that New Mexicans consistently say this phrase in the plural, although in older Spanish it was equally common to say *mala nueva*.)

Because they are open to varying interpretations, linguistic terms often become Rorschach tests for researchers: one scholar could argue that Pohl used *malas nuevas* rather than *malas noticias* to emphasize a traditional New Mexican

New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007.

¹¹ Eulalio González, “Piporro,” also used the term, possibly indicating his norteño speech style, writing “me dio la buena nueva...” (González, *Autobiogr...ajúa!*, 101.)

identity (“that’s how we say it here”), another that she was stressing her modern, bilingual sensibility (“it’s like you say in English, ‘bad news’”), and a third that as an isolated New Mexican she would not be aware that it was an unusual locution. Each of those assumptions could be presented positively or negatively: framed as an archaic survival, the phrase could be applauded as showing pride in local heritage or condemned as the bad Spanish of uneducated peasants; framed as English influence, it could be applauded as modern cosmopolitanism or condemned as the contaminated Spanish of people losing touch with their identity.

Musical choices can have similarly multiple interpretations and valences. I was struck by the prominent use of electric guitars in New Mexico music and understood it as a modern innovation, a fusion of ranchera with rock ’n’ roll. I framed this fusion positively, as helping ranchera to remain a living language in modern New Mexico, but was aware that other people dismiss it as contamination, commercialization, and gringoization of the Mexican form. However, when I began interviewing New Mexico musicians I found that most did not think of electric guitar in terms of modern fusion, positive or negative: they spoke of it as a traditional local instrument, the guitar, which their ancestors brought from Spain and Mexico. In this formulation, amplifying the guitar is just like amplifying the voice, making it louder but not fundamentally changing it. With amplification out of the equation, New Mexicans can frame their preference for guitars as more traditional than the use of accordions or trumpets, anchoring a repertoire that has largely been imported since the 1960s in the centuries-old musical traditions of their rural forebears. Ernie Montoya of the band Cuarenta y Cinco covers Van Morrison and Carlos Santana along with Antonio Aguilar, but rather than describing his instrument as a borrowing from rock he says northern

New Mexico musicians continue to favor the guitar because it can be played not only in nightclubs but also around campfires during hunting trips.¹²

Such varied interpretations need not be seen as contradictory or specific to a particular style. Country and western music makes similarly simultaneous appeals to modern and traditional tastes, with guitars providing a similar bridge. Montoya was unusually insistent about his grounding in local tradition—he was the only artist I interviewed who distanced himself from his English-language repertoire, saying it did not touch him as deeply as his Spanish songs. But the use of “traditional” to describe songs written in the 1960s or 1970s and learned from records is common throughout the New Mexico music scene, and in my experience is always applied to Spanish-language repertoire, not to rock ’n’ roll or country songs, even though some rock ’n’ roll songs may have been common in the local repertoire longer than most of the ranchera songs.

I will explore the overlaps and interactions between rock ’n’ roll and ranchera on the New Mexico scene in later chapters, but to wrap up the linguistic loose ends in the story of “La del moño colorado,” there is the matter of a widely covered Spanish-language ranchera song being popularized by a group that chose to call itself Shorty and the Corvettes and brought to New Mexico by an artist who chose the professional name Tiny Morrie. Throughout the Southwest there is a rich history of Spanish-speaking musicians using English-language names, either to appeal to a broader audience, to seem modern or hip, or simply because they are known by that name in daily life. In Mexico as well there was a wave of rock ’n’ roll bands that, although they sang in Spanish, called themselves Los Teen Tops, Los Black Jeans, Los Johnny Jets, Los Crazy Boys, Los Hooligans,

¹² All unsourced quotations are from author’s interviews, a full list of which is provided in the end notes.

Los Blue Kings, Los Sleepers, Los Silver Rockets, and Los Gibson Boys.¹³ Nor was this restricted to rockers—the cumbia “Rosa Maria,” still played by many New Mexico bands, was originally recorded by a Tijuana group that specialized in tropical and romantic music and sang all of its hits in Spanish, but was named Los Moonlights.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican American artists including Shorty, Morrie, Sunny and the Sunliners, and Little Joe and the Latinaires recorded both English- and Spanish-language material. This was nothing new: in 1928 a Texas duo of yodeling cowboys, Val & Pete, recorded in English, while Valentín Martínez without his brother Pedro recorded Spanish-language ranchera. Nonetheless, it is significant that Shorty and the Corvettes used a name that suggests a doo-wop group while recording an overwhelmingly Spanish-language repertoire. It is likewise significant that Shorty now performs as Mariachi Corbetas, although his current audience is as likely to be Anglophone as the fans of the old Corvettes. The new name is doubly notable because the Corvettes—like dozens of teen rock ‘n’ roll bands—named themselves after a car, and although *corbeta* is the Spanish translation of the French *corvette*, meaning a kind of warship, the car is commonly called a Corvette in Mexico as well as in the United States. For a pop group to translate that name into Spanish would thus make little sense on either side of the border, but mariachis are symbols of *mexicanidad*, so even a mariachi consisting entirely of Anglo musicians will typically take a Spanish name—it is a cultural signifier unrelated to the ethnicity of the players, comparable to rockers calling themselves Jets, Jeans, and Boys.¹⁴

¹³ This list of early Mexican rock ‘n’ roll bands is drawn from Carrizosa (*Onda Grupera*, 16). Of nineteen groups he listed, only three had fully Spanish names, and that is counting Los Rebeldes del Rock as Spanish.

¹⁴ The Corvettes/Corbetas translation is not unique. One of the defining figures in northern New Mexico music, Eddie Roybal, led a band called the Larks in the 1960s and 1970s, and when

Like music, names often bridge linguistic divides—an English name for a band playing rock 'n' roll makes sense to a lot of people even if its songs are in Spanish, Japanese, or Wolof. This kind of symbolic bilingualism is a reminder that culture evolves in inexact tandem with language, and also that bipolar notions of interacting languages—the idea that two separate systems are mixing rather than that the process includes shared roots as well as shared branches—are often misleading. Even if one can trace clear ancestry for a word, that does not mean one can assign it to one or another language: One of the most popular Mexican rock bands of the 1970s was called Three Souls in My Mind and started out singing English-language, blues-inflected songs, but soon switched to writing their own Spanish-language lyrics. Their fans, meanwhile, colloquially shortened the band's name to “El Three,” just as they call the Rolling Stones “Los Stones,” and since Spanish speakers tend to shift the English “th” to “t,” they pronounced the second word like the English “tree.” After a decade of hearing this name, in 1984 the band issued an LP titled *Simplemente el Tri*, which is how it has been known ever since. Given this etymology, one could classify “Tri” as an English word, a Spanish word, a Mexican word, a bilingual hybrid, or a proper name that belongs to no particular language.

Alberto, Amador, and Gabriel Sánchez chose to become Al Hurricane, Tiny Morrie, and Baby Gaby, while also choosing to spend most of their careers singing in Spanish, and those choices presumably reflect aspects of how they thought about themselves and their music and how they wanted prospective fans to think about them. But such choices are complex, multivalent, and often confusing. Ernie Montoya lists himself on his CDs as Ernie, not Ernesto, but lists his band as Cuarenta y Cinco—which is how I always thought of the group until I

he recorded a mariachi album he called the band Mariachi las Alondras, the Spanish translation of

was sitting in an Albuquerque nightclub with two local rodeo hands who spoke Spanish with one another but referred to the band as “Forty-Five.” This startled me: the band’s logo is a Colt .45 pistol and the club marquee listed it as “.45,” but on its CDs and t-shirts the logo is always accompanied by a banner with the name in Spanish, so I was puzzled that people who normally spoke Spanish would translate that name into English. On further thought, I would guess that they were not translating: they think of the pistol as American, hence call it a “forty-five,” and extended that habit to the band. But the way I frame this choice may itself be misleading. When I asked Montoya about people calling his band “Forty-Five,” I had to phrase the question several different ways before he understood that I was asking about the use of English versus Spanish, and I had similar difficulty discussing the linguistic duality of the band’s name with a local record store owner, José Merlin Trujillo. Both men have spent their lives using English and Spanish interchangeably and my question apparently made no sense to them: the band was named for the pistol, the pistol is known by a number, and numbers are neither Spanish nor English. They spoke of the band interchangeably as “Cuarenta y Cinco” and “Forty-Five,” were equally comfortable with both, whether we were speaking Spanish or English, and heard both as the same name. (In an extension of my misunderstanding, I attempted without success to find early Mexican recordings of the song Montoya lists on his first CD as “Mi cuarenta y cinco.” When it finally occurred to me to search instead for “Mi 45,” I found multiple recordings from the 78 rpm record era, always titled in that form.)

Such intricacies of linguistic taxonomy suggest the similar intricacies of other taxonomies. My inclination to regard “cuarenta y cinco” as different from “forty-five” is perfectly rational, but no more rational than regarding the names as

“larks.”

interchangeable or as a single name. Similarly, a red demon is clearly different from a red hair ribbon, but “La del moño colorado” is the same song as “La demonio colorado,” and it is perfectly possible to sing along with the song without imagining either a demon or a ribbon. It is also possible for the act of singing along in Spanish-inflected sounds to have meaning for singers or listeners who do not understand those sounds as distinct words, but nonetheless regard the sounds as Spanish and regard Spanish as “their” language. And they may associate those sounds with Mexico, or New Mexico, or Spain, or Texas, or something non-geographical, like their family or a dance style. Shorty and the Corvettes’ original single of “La del moño colorado” was labeled “canción swing,” suggesting that one of its salient social characteristics was a similarity to other swing dance records.¹⁵

When I attempt to tease apart the myriad threads of language, music, and other associations involved in a song, artist, or style, I am trying to understand processes I find interesting and make no pretense to objectivity. My descriptions and analyses reveal as much about me and my cultural, musical, and linguistic influences as about my subject—starting with my inclination to untangle those threads. It is common to regard southwestern culture as mixed or hybrid, reflecting the confluence and division of the US-Mexico border, but although English and Spanish are established languages with distinct national provenances, each has a history that is as mixed, hybrid, and mestizo as the history of southwestern Spanglish. The exercise of picking out the Spanish words in the

¹⁵ Shorty and the Corvettes: “La Del Moño Colorado,” El Zarape 177. It is unclear what *swing* means in this context. It might seem to suggest a particular dance rhythm, but a song list used by Eva Nuñez, a Denver-based fiddler born in 1921, classifies a broad range of selections with quite varied rhythms as “swing,” including “Sentimental Journey” and “Isle of Capri,” the country song “Your Cheating Heart,” the pseudo-Mexican “South of the Border,” the Mexican bolero “Muñequita linda” and the ranchera standard “Borrachita me voy.” An internet search for the term “canción swing” finds it used over the years to describe records by Frank Sinatra,

sentence “I’m gonna ride a *bronco* in the *rodeo* in *El Paso*” could be paralleled by the exercise of picking out the French words in the sentence “I’m drinking *juice* at the *table* in my *dining* room,” or picking out the Germanic words in the sentence “*I’m drinking juice at the table in my dining room.*”

One can play similar games with taxonomies of music, nationality, ethnicity, culture, or whatever other classification one chooses. Or not play them, and not even notice that one is not playing them, which is what we normally do whenever we say anything without analyzing it. The dual exercises of this book are to try to pick apart some of the mingled threads of language, music, and identity and to try to understand and accept the limitations of that process—to accept confusion as normal and all taxonomies as flawed, and to work within that framework. Starting by accepting the mingled usefulness and drawbacks of the terms Spanish and English, which I will routinely apply to the speech of a broad variety of people who often sound very different from one another and none of whom sound like they come from either Spain or England.

2. What's in a name?

“Words and images are like shells, no less integral parts of nature than are the substances they cover, but better addressed to the eye and more open to observation.”

--George Santayana¹⁶

“Over the years, I have referred to my English-speaking friends as blancos, güeros, gringos, whites, Americans, and Anglos. They have called me Mexican, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano. And those are just the nice names!”

--Lalo Guerrero¹⁷

“La del moño colorado” and “La demonio colorado” are the same song, and to that extent are ways of expressing the same idea, though the idea varies depending on the band and region: in Texas the song is normally played as a cumbia and in New Mexico it is normally played as a ranchera, which means not only that Texas dancers and New Mexico dancers classify it differently but that way the music is played in the two regions is objectively different.

That tension is present in all words: *cumbia* does not mean the same thing to a New Mexican or Texan that it means to a Colombian, even if they are all talking about a familiar song like “La múcura” and all agree it is a cumbia. Colombians tend to be horrified at the way Mexicans and southwesterners play

¹⁶ Quoted in Erving Goffman, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life [1959], in Craig Calhoun et al., *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, 52.

¹⁷ Guerrero and Meece Mentos, *Lalo*, 23. He continues: “It’s hard to keep track of them all. About the time I get used to the politically correct designation, it becomes an insult. Throughout my story, I’ll use whatever terms we were using at the time I’m talking about.”

cumbias—sometimes to the point of denying that they are really playing cumbias—while Mexicans and southwesterners tend to react to Colombian performances of familiar cumbias as sounding foreign. In Mexico and the Southwest, the term has also expanded in many instances to include virtually any music with a *tropical*¹⁸ or Caribbean rhythm, including songs that originally might have been marketed as mambo or salsa—at one show, I even heard the Louisiana zydeco hit “Don’t Mess with My Toot-Toot” introduced as “otra cumbia para Ustedes.”¹⁹ This terminology reflects regional performance practices: just as Cuban bands adapted the Colombian rhythm of “La múcura” for dancers who preferred *guaracha*, southwestern bands tend to shift any Caribbean rhythm towards a standardized *cumbia norteña*. However, that does not mean all southwestern cumbias are fitted into a single, uniform style: in New Mexico, groups like Al Hurricane’s band and Cuarenta y Cinco play cumbias quite differently from the way local tropical bands play them, and for different audiences—tropical bands tend to draw recent immigrants from Mexico, while New Mexico music bands draw deep-rooted New Mexico Hispanics, and that separation is strictly maintained.

To further complicate matters, words are not reliably stable over time and although everyone in the Southwest today would agree that “La múcura” is a cumbia, no one seems to have called it that before the 1970s. The song originated in Colombia as a *porro* (a related rhythm, normally somewhat faster than cumbia) and was popularized internationally by the Puerto Rican singer Bobby Capó and other artists in the late 1940s, variously labeled a porro, a guaracha, or a

¹⁸ As a genre, *tropical* music or *música tropical* is understood throughout Latin America, with regional variations, to comprise styles with strong African or Afro-Caribbean rhythmic roots, such as cumbia, mambo, merengue, salsa, and bachata. It probably derives from the international popularity of Cuban-style *orquestas tropicales* around the turn of the twentieth century.

¹⁹ Severo y Grupo Fuego, performing at the Holy Rosary Fiesta, Albuquerque, 10/6/12.

combination of those rhythms. The Cuban bandleader Pérez Prado recorded two popular versions in Mexico in 1949, on a 78 featuring Beny Moré (labeled a *guaracha*) and in a movie with the *rumbera* star Ninon Sevilla. The first recording of the song in the Southwest seems to have been by the Texan Beto Villa and his orchestra around the same time, labeled a *guaracha* and opening with a Cuban-style *clave*, but the New Mexico versions all seem to descend from a recording by the New York-based Trio Los Panchos, which was labeled a *porro guaracha*. This double-barreled rhythmic label (or the synonymous *guaracha porro*) was attached to numerous songs in the 1940s and 1950s, not only in Cuba and Mexico but in Spain, and seems to have indicated not a fusion of *porro* and *guaracha*, but rather a fast Afro-Latin beat that could be danced as either.²⁰

In Mexico and the Southwest the term *porro* remained fairly common into the 1960s but was supplanted by *cumbia* in the 1970s,²¹ and although presumably those terms must have overlapped at least briefly, I can find no evidence that there was a period in which anyone in those regions distinguished *porros* from *cumbias*—any song labeled a *porro* in the earlier period is now commonly labeled a *cumbia*. Another Colombian *porro* that is common in the New Mexico repertoire, “La llorona” (sometimes called “La llorona loca,” and unrelated to the Mexican *son huasteco* with the same title), was likewise imported to Mexico by

²⁰ “La Múcura” was adapted from Colombian folk sources by the flute player and composer Crecensio Salcedo in the 1930s, and was first recorded circa 1948 by Los Trovadores De Baru Con El Trio Nacional on the Colombian label Discos Fuentes, credited to the label’s owner, Antonio Fuentes. Capó recorded it in 1949 (claiming composer credit until taken to court by Fuentes) and it was shortly recorded in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States, where Cab Calloway did a Latin swing version sung in English and mock Spanish. The Los Panchos recording opens with an instrumental introduction that I cannot find on any other recording before 1970/71, when it was revived by Al Hurricane, the source for later New Mexico versions. This introduction was also used on a 1974 recording by the north Mexican *gruper*o singer Rigo Tovar, the most influential figure in the Mexican and Southwestern *cumbia* craze of the 1970s, probably inspired by Hurricane’s recording.

²¹ The UCLA-Frontera collection of Mexican and southwestern Hispanic 78 and 45 r.p.m. records, includes 221 songs labeled as *porros* and 1277 labeled as *cumbias*, but while more than

Pérez Prado and has been variously labeled porro, cumbia, twist, and *ranchera rítmica*.²² In some cases this labeling indicated that a group was playing the song in a new rhythm, while in others it simply indicated that twists or cumbias were selling better than porros that year.

The word *ranchera* has had a particularly ambiguous and polymorphous range of meanings. It derives from *rancho*, which originally meant a mess or group meal, by extension a group eating together, and by extension from that a camp—early uses in the Americas are typically references to Indian camps. By the seventeenth century it was also being used for a hut or simple house, and a group of such houses was called a *ranchería*.²³ In some areas of Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America *rancho* is still used this way (“pequeña, modesta o humilde sitio”²⁴) for a rural grouping smaller than a town. *Ranchero* or *ranchera* means someone or something connected with a rancho, and by extension someone or something rural, naïve, boorish, or countrified—it is often used negatively, as in “*no seas ranchero*” (don’t be a boor, a hick), but also can suggest someone or something traditional, pure, honest, and culturally authentic.²⁵ *Rancho* is also often used as a precise equivalent of the Anglo American *ranch*, as in *rancho ganadero*, livestock ranch—unsurprisingly, since it is the source of the English term.

half the porros are on 78s, the only cumbias on 78 are Colombian imports, and all the Mexican or Southwestern cumbias are on 45s.

²² It was listed as a porro by Los Xochimilcas (Peerless 3590), a cumbia by Los Tremendos Gavilanes (Bernal BE-211), a twist by Gilberto Lopez (Ideal 1969-A), and a ranchera rítmica by Steve Jordan (Falcon 1889).

²³ Cervantes uses *rancho* to mean a hut in *Don Quixote*, and Alonso de Ovalle, in *Historica relacion del Reyno de Chile y delas misiones, y ministerios que exercita en el compañía de Jesus* (Rome: Francisco Cavallo, 1648), uses it for an Indian camp (“a lo mas retirado del rancho”) and a hut (“en su chosa, o rancho,” “entré en un rancho abierto”).

²⁴ Santamaria, *Diccionario de mejicanismos*, 915.

²⁵ “Que pertenece a los ranchos o a sus habitantes o que se relaciona con ellos... Que es tímido o vergonzoso: *una muchacha muy ranchera*, ‘¡No seas *ranchero*, saluda a los demás!’” Lara, *Diccionario del español usual en México*, 754.

In the early twentieth century the term *música ranchera* tended to be used synonymously with *música campirana*, meaning rural peasant music,²⁶ much as *country music* and *folk music* were used interchangeably in the United States. Like those terms it took on other meanings as record companies and music marketers adopted it as a commercial label, but the evolution of the terminology did not precisely parallel the evolution of the music. Theaters in Mexico City began featuring music based on regional folk styles in the late 1800s and the Revolution increased urban interest in rural proletarian culture as symbolic of a shared national spirit. The musical revues *México lindo* and *Del rancho a la capital* in 1919 were models for later cinematic *comedias rancheras*, and in the 1920s Lucha Reyes became internationally famous singing what are now considered typical ranchera songs, accompanied by *orquestas típicas* or *mariachis* wearing theatrical variations of rural *charro* costumes.²⁷ However, in 1934 a Mexico City writer was still using the word in its older sense, complaining that “with very few exceptions, those charros are to the true charro what the theatrical gaucho is to the authentic gaucho, [or] what the vernacular song created in the city is to the true *canción ranchera*.”²⁸ Two years later, *Allá en el rancho grande* became the first great international hit from the Mexican film industry and prompted a wave of singing charros, and *canción ranchera* became the standard term for exactly the sort of commercial confections this writer decried.²⁹ The

²⁶ Antimaco Sax, *Las Mexicanos en el Destierro*, San Antonio: International Printing, 1916, 71, refers to a satiric lyric that people “cantaba con música ranchera.” Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta, *México marimacho: novela histórica revolucionaria*, Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1933, 95, refers to “Una música ranchera de violines, contrabajos, tamboras,” organized “en ‘mariachi’.” In New York, a book reviewer in *The Survey* magazine, vol. 48, 1922, 280, suggested “The Mexican *cancion ranchera* is a lineal descendant, words and music, of the Arab love song.”

²⁷ Moreno Rivas, *Historia*, 71-3.

²⁸ López y Fuentes, Gregorio. *Mi general!* Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1934, 150 (my translation).

²⁹ Emilio García Riera writes in his *Breve historia del cine mexicano: Primer siglo 1897-1997* (Mexico, DF: Ediciones Mapa, 1998, 81, 102) that only eight of the 98 sound films made in

transition was not immediate, and both the music and the leading characters in that film maintained close links to the older concept: although the hero was played by an operatic tenor, Tito Guízar, he acted the role of a humble ranch hand, dressed in simple rural clothing, and all the film's music was based on rural styles and accompanied only by guitars and occasionally a fiddle. Some later comedias rancheras employed similar instrumentation and featured regional styles like *huapango* and *son jalisciense*, but increasingly these folkloric styles shared the screen with generically international-sounding pop ballads sung in rich bel canto and accompanied by a *mariachi sinfónica* (the standard mariachi of guitars, vihuelas, violins, trumpets, and guitarrón, filled out with a full complement of symphonic strings, woodwinds, and whatever other instruments the orchestrators chose). This musical shift was matched by the shifting social status of the cinematic protagonists: rather than ranch hands or peasants, the heroes and heroines of the later movies were typically wealthy *hacendados* who signaled their rural affiliations with beautifully tailored and ornately embroidered charro costumes—a parallel to the lords and ladies of European romantic fiction.

The Mexican historian Héctor Vega writes that the comedias rancheras of Mexico's cinematic golden age “played a determining role in the diffusion of the figure of the mariachi and the charro as the national stereotype...[and] recalled aspects of a postcard Mexico that no longer necessarily corresponded to reality. But for sure, there were always lots of mariachis and lots of tequila.”³⁰ Like the

Mexico before 1936 were set in an “*ambiente ranchero*...and it was only with the enormous success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* that people understood what afterward may seem obvious: it would be the exploitation of Mexican folklore, of local color, and above all, of songs, that would give Mexican film its commercial success in the whole American continent.... A simple numeric tabulation gives a sense of the influence *Allá en el Rancho Grande* had on the industrial development of Mexican cinema; if in 1936 there were 24 films produced nationally, in 1937 there were 38 and, of those, more than half, some twenty stuck to the formula proposed by Fuentes's film: local color, regional customs, and folklore” (my translation).

³⁰ Vega, “La música tradicional mexicana,” 156-7 (my translation).

cowboy songs of Gene Autry and the Sons of the Pioneers, most movie ranchera songs bore little relationship to the songs of actual ranch hands. The comedias were idyllic evocations of pre-industrial (or at least pleasantly non-industrial) Mexico, set not on working ranches but on luxurious haciendas where elegant charros competed for the affection of their lady loves. *Música ranchera* could include virtually any music that fitted this image, from sprightly huapangos to romantic boleros and proto-power ballads like “Cuando vuelva a tu lado,” which became an English standard as “What a Difference a Day Made.” One of the best-loved ranchera movies, *Dos tipos de cuidado*, begins with Jorge Negrete singing a Spanish version of “O Sole Mio,” accompanied by a symphonic mariachi and choir, as the camera shows a panorama of mountain lakes and waterfalls. Strummed guitars remained consistently prominent, lending even the most overblown arrangements a bit of mariachi flavor, and could be considered a defining aspect of the ranchera style—but if Negrete’s arranger had dispensed with the guitar for this song, no one would have leapt up to complain that the music was no longer ranchera.

Into the 1990s many people who loved and valued ranchera music as a symbol of treasured Mexican traditions—whether played by mariachis, guitar trios, or orchestras—firmly distinguished it from the newer and rowdier music of accordion-based *norteño* bands. In this context, analogies to Anglo American culture get confusing, since *música norteña* is associated with the Texas border region and people who dress like Hollywood cowboys and it is common for writers to describe ranchera movies as the Mexican equivalent of Hollywood westerns.³¹ Some comedias rancheras were set in northern Mexico and used

³¹ Raciél D. Martínez Gómez writes of the construction of a mythic past “by way of imperial, colonial, centralist, federalist and/or essentializing strategies, as occurred with the cinematic *western* in the United States and with the *comedia ranchera* in Mexico”

cowboy rather than charro costuming, so they clearly share those aspects of the ranchera mythology with *norteño*. However, the mythic cowboy—whether Anglo or Mexican—is a romantic hero but not a wealthy landlord, and the desert frontier was a very different setting from the lush hills and lakes of Jalisco, which became the archetypal ranchera landscape.³² From an Anglo perspective the romantic charros in their rural haciendas often seem less like cowboys than like the plantation aristocracy of *Gone with the Wind*, complete with scenes of happy dark-skinned laborers singing while working in the fields.³³ What is more, although parallels of ranchera with country and western or Hollywood cowboy music make sense up to a point, all of those styles included varied and sometimes contradictory mythologies, making it hard to precisely define them or draw strict musical, geographical, or genre boundaries.

The music called ranchera in the mid-twentieth century was principally associated with western central Mexico, but also included plenty of *huapangos* and *sones huastecos* from the eastern highlands, *trova yucateca* from the Yucatan Peninsula, and *boleros*, a Cuban import gone native, and this mix tended to be

(*Multiculturalismo, cine mexicano e identidad: Los desafíos primordializantes de El jardín del Edén*. Xalapa, Veracruz: Biblioteca Digital de Humanidades, Universidad Veracruzana, 2010, 15) (my translation).

³² “The Yankee cowboy costume is that of a working man—plain, homespun with no fancy frills (with the possible exception of the costumes that Gene Autry and, particularly, Roy Rogers wore). The charro is magnificently attired in an embroidered riding suit that bespeaks a hoary tradition of rural aristocracy. His environment is not a wild frontier area but a minutely ordered feudal society in which the *hacendado* presides with paternalistic yet firm authority over his socioeconomic inferiors” (Mora, Carl J. *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society 1896-1980*. Berkeley: University of California, 1982, 47).

³³ Though often considered emblematic of *mexicanidad*, ranchera is specifically symbolic of *criollo* or very limitedly *mestizo* Mexicans—any dark skinned or Indian featured actor in a ranchera movie can be assumed to be playing a subsidiary and frequently a comic role. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, charro dress was a sufficiently elite uniform that the Emperor Maximilian wore it on formal state occasions. (José Luis Blasio, *Maximiliano íntimo: El emperador Maximiliano y su corte*. Originally published 1905, reprint Mexico, DF: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996, 82.) The parallel between “old south” plantation nostalgia and ranchera movies is obvious from the opening scene of *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, in which the hacienda owner basks in the love of his happy, singing peons and exhorts his son to always behave like a father to them.

presented both at home and abroad as a single, shared national style. In keeping with this unifying role, Mexican artists from the northern border regions as well as the south and center sang and played ranchera, including the *norteño* accordion groups, and as *norteño* became increasingly popular some ranchera singers from other regions made recordings with accordion backing. While many ranchera fans continued to regard *norteño* as a contaminated border style analogous to rock 'n' roll—low-class, modern, unmusical noise that replaced the more melodious and respectable music of the past—others seem from the outset to have thought of it as a cousin or variety of ranchera.³⁴ Mariachi has continued to be considered more respectable and middle class than *norteño* in terms of where and how it is presented, but by the 1990s *norteño* recordings were routinely marketed as a subgenre of ranchera along with mariachi, guitar duos, and the *banda* style of the West Coast (which features brass bands and has been used occasionally by ranchera singers since the 1960s³⁵), as well as groups using mixtures of instrumentation from these various styles.

As a broad marketing category, *ranchera* is now roughly synonymous with what in the United States is called “Mexican Regional” or “Regional Mexican,”

³⁴ Piporro wrote that when he first performed in Mexico City *norteño* music was so unfamiliar to the urban audience that when they saw he was backed by accordion and guitar many people assumed he was going to sing tangos (González, *Autobiogr...ajúa*, 125). However, judging by press reports, most Mexican critics classed him as a ranchera artist from the outset, albeit an odd, northern one. I have not come up with a solid date for the earliest use of *ranchera* that clearly includes *norteño*, but have no reason to think the early *norteño* stars sharply differentiated themselves from other contemporary Mexican pop musicians. Claes af Geijerstam, whose terminology seems to reflect the opinions of ranchera experts in Mexico City in the early 1970s, writes that “the *norteña* is most accurately described as a species of ranchera songs” (*Popular Music in Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1976, 46). On the other hand, in the same decade Moreno Rivas seems to maintain a distinction, describing Chicano music as a “hybrid that arises from the collision of three genres of popular music: traditional *música norteña*, *música ranchera*, and the rock of the United States” (Moreno Rivas, *Historia*, 58).

³⁵ José Alfredo Jiménez recorded an album with the Banda El Recodo in 1968, signaling the regionalism of this choice with his “Corrido de Mazatlán,” which begins with a verse about how he has come to visit the Pacific Coast and “es necesario la Banda del Recodo para cantarle un corrido de Mazatlán,” and Antonio Aguilar used banda backing in 1984 for a corrido hit about a Sinaloan drug lord, Lamberto Quintero. (Simonett, *Banda*, 36, 153.)

comprising all the styles that sound distinctively Mexican rather than like international pop, rock, or tropical music. Like *country and western*, it is a catch-all for styles typically associated with rural tastes and cultural conservatism but often written, played, and consumed by modern urbanites and disseminated through the commercial media of movies, recordings, and radio. It also overlaps the instrumentation and rhythms of Anglo country and western, and many of the artists I interviewed in New Mexico drew this parallel and expressed their appreciation for both styles.

Along with this broad, vague definition of ranchera, there is also a secondary and more specific definition common in some parts of the Southwest: Mexican-style polkas or sometimes specifically polkas with Spanish lyrics.³⁶ When I write that a New Mexico band plays a mix of cumbias and rancheras, that simply indicates the two most common dance rhythms in the region, and although most of the familiar rancheras, in this sense, were originally popularized by people who are considered ranchera singers, the overlap is not precise. Ranchera singers sing plenty of songs that are not rancheras by a dancer's definition, and country and rock 'n' roll bands in northern New Mexico routinely play a few rancheras along with their waltzes, two-steps, jitterbugs, and line dances.

These terminological shifts and overlaps are no more confusing or imprecise than the shifts and overlaps of Anglo terms like ballad, blues, classical, rock, and jazz, which likewise suggest different things to different people depending on the period, region, and situation. Scholars may choose to define these terms more precisely, but the precision is often misleading: musical styles do not have neat, discrete borders, and their terminology is amorphous both

³⁶ Guadalupe San Miguel writes that in the period following World War II “the ranchera—that is, the polka with lyrics—as well as the instrumental polka, became the dominant form of

because the stylistic boundaries are themselves amorphous and because the styles and the boundaries constantly shift and change.

In the late nineteenth century, Ferdinand de Saussure argued that words (signs, labels, names) are arbitrary in two ways: they are attached to concepts arbitrarily, so the same concept can be signaled by completely different words in different languages; but concepts are also shaped and grouped arbitrarily, so that one language will have a word for a concept that is unnamed (and potentially nonexistent) in another language.³⁷ Any attempt to sort out the history of a word thus begins with two questions: how did the word come to be associated with the concept, and why did someone feel the need to name that concept in the first place. In the case of musical styles, the answer is often simply that someone wanted a new marketing label: *rock 'n' roll*, when Alan Freed began using the term in 1954, meant exactly the same music that was called *rhythm and blues*, but the latter term was racial code for music marketed principally to African Americans and Freed wanted to attract white teenagers. He changed the name to expand his potential audience rather than to designate a different sound—but then, over time, as more white performers began playing the music and white and black teenagers diverged in their musical tastes, people began drawing a distinction between the sounds they called rhythm and blues and the sounds they called rock 'n' roll. No two people drew that distinction in exactly the same way and when one reads writers from the early 1960s it is often difficult to understand why they

song and dance in música tejana” (*Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, 2002, 11).

³⁷ De Saussure, Ferdinand, *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959. Saussure used the term “arbitrary” only in the first sense: his “first principle” of linguistics was “the arbitrary nature of the sign” (67). However, many later writers have grouped this with his argument that words do not stand for “pre-existing concepts” (116), e.g. “according to Saussure... The signs of a language are unions of arbitrary signifiers and signifieds which are just as arbitrary. In this respect, one may say, it is the nature of the sign to be *doubly* arbitrary” (N.

label one group a rock 'n' roll band and another a rhythm and blues band—and once again, the confusion is appropriate and useful, because it reminds us that not only the terminology but the distinction itself was unstable and evolving.

Bilingual situations are rich in these kinds of linguistic clues and also provide infinite opportunities for terminological confusion. No one would be surprised to find a book on Hollywood westerns in which the setting was described as follows: “In films, the frontier has been a fantastic and violent region, full of Apaches, miners, strong and sensual barroom and saloon women, fierce gunfighters, and criminals fleeing from justice.”³⁸ As it happens, that sentence is from a book on Mexican *cinema fronteriza*, which in this instance I would translate as “frontier cinema.” The English words *frontier* and *border* convey quite different meanings: when we talk about the frontier girlhood of Laura Ingalls Wilder we don’t mean that she was growing up on a national border, and we would find it odd to refer to someone in modern Los Angeles as living a frontier lifestyle, though it makes perfect sense to describe the city as a center of border culture. But the Spanish word *frontera* includes the idea of a wild, unexplored or uncivilized region—the Spanish version of *Star Trek* begins with the words, “el espacio: la última frontera”—and also the dividing line between two countries.

In academia it has become standard to translate the Mexican phrases *música fronteriza* and *cine fronterizo* as “border music” and “border film,” and it is easy to gloss over the way this translation emphasizes the importance of the border and by extension of the United States in Mexican culture. If one instead translates the word as “frontier,” it reminds us that New Mexico was part of Mexico’s northern

Praetorius, *Principles of Cognition, Language and Action*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 2000, 131).

³⁸ Iglesias, *Entre yerba, polvo, y plomo*, 18.

frontier long before the United States was a significant factor in the region, and the founding myth of settler ancestors claiming frontier homesteads and grazing rights while fighting off wild Indians is recalled by Hispanics in Santa Fe as well as by Anglos in Dodge City. English-speaking musicologists have tended to refer to *norteño*, *conjunto*, *tejano*, and other southwestern Hispanic styles as border music, but in 1983, before border studies had become such a popular academic field, an English-language article based on research in Mexico City referred to the wild, unsophisticated *norteño* sound as exemplifying “frontier” music and culture.³⁹ *Norteño* was unquestionably influenced by its origins on both sides of the national border, by Mexican music and also by Anglo (and German immigrant) styles, just as the music of Gene Autry and George Strait has Mexican influences—but when we call the Anglo style “country and western” while calling the Mexican style “border music,” this suggests that the Anglos are playing music from a region of their own country while the Mexicans are playing a music on the border with another country, which in turn suggests that the Anglo style is fully Anglo but the Mexican style is only partially Mexican.

Academics frequently note the subtle ways in which terminology influences perception and argue that particular terms should be dropped from the lexicon because they carry unpleasant or inappropriate baggage.⁴⁰ The problem with such arguments is, first, that all terms carry baggage and the choice to use one rather than another may satisfy some people but will inevitably confuse or annoy others;

³⁹ Bensusan, Guy. “A Consideration of Norteña and Chicano Music,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 4, 1985, 158-169.

⁴⁰ Robert B. Moore, in an influential 1976 article, “Racism in the English Language” (reprinted in Jodi O'Brien, *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2010) argued for avoiding such terms as *underdeveloped*, *minority*, and *Third World*. More recently, I have been warned by colleagues not to use the term *illegal* in reference to immigration (the preferred term is *undocumented*), or the word *Hispanic*, which some people regard as imposing Spanish identity on people of African or indigenous American ancestry.

second, that if we want to understand a situation we often need to be reminded of that baggage; and, third, that our choices also have baggage. The choice to say rap is a kind of music is a choice to file it in the same category as Beethoven—which, depending on one's views, may be a compliment or a neocolonial imposition.⁴¹ Such choices have real-world consequences—a musicologist must define rap as music if she wants to teach about it in her department, just as an English professor must define it as poetry—but that is all the more reason to remember that these are choices and to try to understand their drawbacks and the reasons why they have been made by particular people in particular situations, which means querying not only their reasons for their terminology, but also our reasons for ours.

The ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin writes that relying on any particular conceptual grid can be useful but is also limiting, because “terms are creatures of discourse, somewhere between stalking horses and red herrings.” He cites James Clifford's phrase “translation terms” for big, familiar words like *culture*, *art*, *society*, or *music*, which are often universalized to denote vague generalizations made across cultural divides, and notes that “all such translation terms get us some distance and fall apart.”⁴² This is also true for small, prosaic words: *guitar* can mean the instrument Segovia played or the instrument Jimi Hendrix played, and there are notable similarities between those instruments as well as notable differences. Whether one wants to emphasize the differences or the similarities will influence whether or not one is happy that the two concepts are conveyed by

⁴¹ Joe Schloss, author of the most thorough academic study of hip-hop production (*Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2004) writes, “I was intrigued by the answer that many of my consultants gave when I asked them what they would say to someone who thought hip-hop wasn't music: ‘OK. It's not music.’ In other words: I don't care what you think; ‘music’ is just a word...If you don't think what I do fits into that category, then that's fine” (personal communication, 4/19/11).

the same word—but either way, the same name is being used for somewhat different objects. Likewise it is significant when people choose to use different words for the same object—say, calling Hendrix’s guitar his *axe*.

Edward Sapir famously argued that “human beings...are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society” and “the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.”⁴³ This is worth keeping in mind, but can also be overemphasized. Wittgenstein described all language, along with the actions and situations into which it is woven, as a kind of game, writing that “the question ‘What is a word really?’ is analogous to ‘What is a piece in chess?’”⁴⁴ That analogy suggests the possibility of chess pieces that are just scraps of cardboard cut into abstract geometrical shapes with no significance beyond a particular board on a particular afternoon, but also of the queen being a picture of a player’s mother and the castle a picture of her childhood home, with all the associations those images carry.

Words and languages do not have equal associations and sometimes “the worlds in which different societies live” are not distinct worlds—or at least no more distinct than the worlds in which any two individuals live. Wittgenstein pointed out that spoken language is only part of a far larger and more varied system of communication, using the example of someone pointing to a particular square on a sheet of color samples and asking for something “this color.”⁴⁵ Colors are notoriously variable from language to language—some languages do not

⁴² Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 12-13, citing a 1990 talk by James Clifford, “Traveling Selves, Traveling Others.”

⁴³ Edward Sapir, “The Status of Linguistics as a Science” [1928], in Sapir, *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1958, 162.

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 5, 47.

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 7.

distinguish between green and blue, while the English term *yellow* comprises what in Russian are two distinct colors—but researchers testing Sapir’s argument have established that these linguistic divergences do not affect people’s ability to match color swatches to objects.⁴⁶ They may disagree about whether two swatches are variants of the same color or two different colors, but they do not live in differently colored worlds.

That distinction may seem subtle, but it is a basic issue in any discussion of interacting languages, cultures, or musical styles. There are situations in which a red devil and a *moño colorado* are completely different things, described in different languages, and also situations in which they are the same song, played by the same band and recognized as identical by a single person. In recent years, some sociolinguists have urged their peers to stop defining and reifying language. Roy Harris writes, “the fundamental error in contemporary linguistics is still...a crude process of abstraction by which certain phenomena are segregated from the continuum of human communication, and these segregated phenomena are then, rather capriciously, set up for academic purposes as constituting the *linguistic* part of communication.” He suggests researchers should move beyond “interpretation of arbitrary vocal signals” and “deal with the reality of language in all its complexity.” To him, this is not simply a matter of expanding the definition of language, but of asking “whether *any* a priori attempt to delimit language as a well demarcated field of inquiry can possibly be successful.”⁴⁷

Harris is not throwing up his hands and saying that linguistic inquiries are inevitably hopeless because communication is infinitely complicated. Rather, he is urging researchers to do what ordinary people do every day: deal with that

⁴⁶ The relationship of color perception to language is explored at great length in Deutscher, Guy. *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*. Croydon, UK: Arrow, 2011.

complexity rather than imposing theoretical systems that provide a false sense of order. We constantly point to objects, react to vocal inflections and facial expressions, and refer to shared knowledge and experiences. Sometimes we understand one another and sometimes we fail to communicate, and that is equally true whether we consider ourselves to speak the same language or not. If I now refer to “a ‘moño colorado’ situation,” someone who has been reading this book will understand roughly what I mean even if they speak no Spanish, and someone who has not been reading this book will have no idea what I mean, even if they speak perfect Spanish and know the song.

Music is similarly informed by shared points of reference: when rap producers sample a familiar style or hit they remind listeners of shared experiences, and any meaningful understanding of what those listeners hear has to include those associations as well as the sounds. Any dance musician knows it is easier to get people on the floor with a familiar song played competently than with an unfamiliar song played expertly—if the first notes are recognized as a favorite dance number, people get out of their chairs. Similarly, it is easier to move people emotionally with a song that already has resonance in their past than with a song that has no prior associations. As Adelaida Reyes writes, any expressive culture “presupposes a frame of reference that is historically constructed, a treasury of collective experience and associations... It is the kind of meaning that makes ‘inside jokes’ intelligible only to those who have an insider’s knowledge of the culture. It is the kind of meaning that music conveys, over and above the meaning made accessible by the discovery of the internal logic that makes the music coherent.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Harris, “On Redefining Linguistics,” 21, 38.

⁴⁸ Reyes, Adelaida. “What Do Ethnomusicologists Do? An Old Question for a New Century.” *Ethnomusicology*, 53(1), 2009, 14. The Texas blues musician Mance Lipscomb phrased

Norma Mendoza-Denton writes that “as meaning-making individuals, we utilize not only language but also symbolic elements at many different levels (gesture, historical references, dress, music, and other aspects of material culture) to craft our stylistic practice.”⁴⁹ There is no way to acknowledge all those elements, much less to categorize them or fit them into a cohesive system. Therefore, as part of the process of understanding what we observe, it is tempting to limit our research in ways that allow us to define patterns and formulate rules. If I say that a quartet of two electric guitars, electric bass, and drums is a rock ’n’ roll line-up, I can categorize a ranchera song played by that band as a rock ’n’ roll/ranchera fusion. If I say that “Qué onda” is a Spanish phrase and “homie” is African-American English, I can categorize the phrase “Qué onda, homie” as bilingual code-switching. The problem is that my categories and systems, useful as they are for my own stylistic practice, may have little to do with the way other people understand their stylistic practices. Ben Rampton, whose research focuses on the ways speakers adopt and adapt other groups’ linguistic systems, criticizes attempts to seek and codify underlying patterns in code-switching and bilingualism, writing that sociolinguists are in danger of “waving an antiquated banner of holistic coherence at precisely the moment when the crucial values became transition and hybridity.”⁵⁰

There is an inherent tension here. As Borges wrote, “to think is to forget differences, to generalize, to abstract.”⁵¹ The paradox of his story “Funes el memorioso” is that the title character was capable of perceiving every detail of everything he observed, and thus had to shut himself in a darkened room to

this thought more simply and eloquently: “If you caint bring remembrance back in music, why, you just hearin noise.” (Lipscomb, *I Say Me for a Parable*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1995.)

⁴⁹ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 216.

⁵⁰ Rampton, “Language crossing,” 311.

escape the intolerable complexity of his perceptions. Generalization is always simplification and requires ignoring particulars, which means it is always flawed and potentially misleading. Kofi Agawu warns of the inherent drawbacks of cross-cultural ethnographic analogies, writing “it is not immediately clear why the view of identity developed from, say, a study of urban musicians in Ibadan ought to form the basis of a study of Powwows in North Carolina.”⁵² But the procrustean process by which complex situations are made to resemble other equally complex but quite different situations is often useful as a way of putting our thoughts in order, formulating patterns and categories, and exploring how previous researchers have approached previous projects. And, useful or not, we are stuck with it: as Borges pointed out, it is basic to the process of thinking.

Marshall Sahlins writes that “recognition is a kind of re-cognition: the event is inserted in a preexisting category...by thus encompassing the existentially unique in the conceptually familiar, people embed their present in the past.”⁵³ All words are historical analogies: when we say “table” or “sit” we mean “something like the things that in the past I have heard called tables or the actions that have been called sitting.” By the same token, all are categories: the category “table” can include a simple square of plastic, a masterpiece of oak carpentry, a plank laid across sawhorses, or a discarded cable spool. It is easy to forget this and to think that things or actions that share a name must be fundamentally the same, or at least must share something fundamental in common, but Wittgenstein warns, “Don’t say: ‘There *must* be something common’...but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at

⁵¹ “Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer.” Jorge Luis Borges, “Funes el memorioso,” [1942], at <http://www.literatura.us/borges/funes.html>, accessed 11/24/13.

⁵² Kofi Agawu, “Response to Rice,” *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2) 2010, 327.

that. To repeat: don't think, but look!"⁵⁴ That last phrase is an apt maxim for those of us with a tendency to over-theorize, but the larger point is that all words take on a life of their own and often substitute for observation.

There is no way to escape this process: we can go on and on about the dangers of reifying, but words and phrases are only useful because they take on meaning, and if a word or phrase survives, its meaning inevitably becomes more fixed as its rough edges are smoothed by the flow of use and it gathers the lichen of history. Stuart Hall introduced the phrase "new ethnicities" in an essay that never used that phrase except in its title, and he intended it not as way of defining certain people but rather as an attempt to query definitions. He argued that instead of replacing old ethnic labels with new ones we need to recognize that all such labels are based on histories rather than essences, necessarily crossed and contradicted by other definitions, and asked his readers to come to terms with "the deep ambivalence of identification and desire."⁵⁵ But later writers adopted "new ethnicities" to refer to groups based on modern transnational or postnational identifications—Roxy Harris describes the British Asian youth he studied as a "new ethnicity" linked by their combination of cultural, geographical, and linguistic influences⁵⁶—and in that process the phrase became a label.

Ethnic labels are particularly tricky because, unlike chairs or tables, people talk back and have their own ideas about who they are, and also about who we are. In 1710 the English essayist Joseph Addison began his series of *Spectator*

⁵³ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 146.

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 31. Similarly, Sahlins quotes Plato: "He who follows names in the search after things, and analyzes their meanings, is in great danger of being deceived." And Michel Bréal: "languages are condemned to a perpetual lack of proportion between the word and the thing. The expression is sometimes too wide, sometimes too narrow." (Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 136, 148.)

⁵⁵ Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities" [1989]. Reprinted in Hall, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

⁵⁶ Harris, *New Ethnicities*.

pieces with the observation that “a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor; with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author.”⁵⁷ What Addison meant by “black” was quite different from what a modern reader is likely to imagine, and those divergent understandings are a good example of Saussure’s thesis of linguistic arbitrariness: “Languages do not simply name existing categories; they articulate their own.”⁵⁸ In eighteenth century England, dark-haired people were thought to have different character traits than light-haired people—a personal rather than genetic distinction, since the two could be brothers. In modern usage, we would not call Shakespeare a “black man,” since we use the term to indicate African heritage rather than dark hair. But what makes this a good example of linguistic arbitrariness is that we not only do not use “black” that way, we longer have any word for the concept Addison conveyed with “black,” and indeed do not have the concept.⁵⁹

Similarly, Hall writes that the concept of “black” as generally used in modern England did not exist in Jamaica when he was young—the significant color divisions in his world were among people all of whom in Britain would be considered black and they used a variety of more specific terms and did not think of themselves as ethnically unified:

I had never ever heard anybody either call themselves, or refer to anybody else as ‘Black.’ Never. I heard a thousand other words. My grandmother could differentiate about fifteen different

⁵⁷ Addison, Joseph. *The Spectator*, No. 1, 1 Mar 1710, 1.

⁵⁸ Culler, Jonathan D. 1986. *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 31. (This is not a direct quote from Saussure, but a paraphrase based on the recollections of his students.)

⁵⁹ One could argue that Addison’s usage survives in the concept of the “dumb blonde,” but the example still makes my point, which is that both terms and the concepts they signify change.

shades between light brown and dark brown... Black is not a question of pigmentation... [It] is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category... We have to create an equivalence between how people look and what their histories are.⁶⁰

For Americans, Hall's British concept of "black," which includes Indians and Pakistanis along with Africans and West Indians, is as strange as the absence of that category in his Jamaican youth, and these differences underline the Saussurian point that the word not only means different things in different contexts, but that those meanings do not exist independently of the naming.

I make no claim of accuracy for the ethnic labels I use in this book, since I don't know what it would mean to call an ethnic label "accurate." Hall writes that identity is a process of "saying that this here is the same as that, or we are the same together, in this respect."⁶¹ That may seem sufficiently vague and safe, but there is always the difficulty that people may not perceive the same similarities, accept the perception of those similarities, want to be grouped together, or accept my right to do the grouping. As Fernando Peñalosa writes in the introduction to his *Chicano Linguistics*:

Terminology that refers to ethnic groups, whether used by themselves or by others, is invariably and necessarily imprecise, inconsistent, often emotionally charged, and fraught with underlying ideological and theoretical assumptions. Expressed in the simplest terms, the Chicano population consists of persons of Mexican descent who are resident in the United States. They are overwhelmingly of United States birth and citizenship; in fact, a great majority are native born of native parents. The unity of this

⁶⁰ Hall, "Old and New Identities," 53.

population is contested by some who prefer to distinguish the “assimilated” from the “nonassimilated,” or Mexico-born “Mexicans” from U.S.-born “Chicanos,” or Spanish Americans from Mexican Americans. Such simplistic dichotomizing or typologizing is probably fruitless, as Chicanos are an extremely heterogeneous population that varies along every conceivable social dimension.⁶²

I thought that was a good summation, and planned to follow Peñalosa’s example and use *Chicano* as a loose, general term in this book, although I was aware that many young people in Los Angeles prefer to be called Mexican. But during the first interview I did in New Mexico, with Ernie Montoya, my mention of a group named Fuerza Chicano⁶³ sparked a diatribe from him about how the word was demeaning and no one should ever use it. I had become familiar with *Chicano* as a term of ethnic pride during the political movement of the 1960s and that understanding was reinforced by the way the word is commonly used in academia. I knew that people in Mexico sometimes use it negatively as an equivalent of *pocho*, meaning Mexican-Americans who have lost touch with their roots and culture. I also knew that a lot of young people regard it as signifying a political stance rather than an ethnic group. But Montoya regarded it as an ethnic slur, derived from *chico* and meaning a small, negligible person. Etymologists commonly derive the word from the old pronunciation of *mexicano*, in which the *x* sounds like an English *sh*, and well into the twentieth century it was still used

⁶¹ Hall, “Old and New Identities,” 47.

⁶² Peñalosa, Fernando. *Chicano linguistics: A brief introduction*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1980, 2.

⁶³ The use of a male-gendered adjective with the female-gendered noun presumably reflects English-language interference: to an Anglophone, it can feel weird to call a group of young men *chicana*. Similarly, the male Los Angeles singing team calls itself Dueto Voces del Rancho rather than Las Voces del Rancho.

more frequently for Mexican immigrants than for people born in the United States.⁶⁴ However, etymology is irrelevant to people's feelings—the fact that many people believe niggardly is related to nigger makes the word hurtful to them even though the etymology is inaccurate.

Montoya expressed his feelings particularly strongly, but during my research I interviewed numerous New Mexicans who objected to being called Chicano and very few who spontaneously chose that term to identify themselves. (Though one who did, María Garduña, echoed Montoya's derivation, saying the word means "Spanish and Mexican, Indian...*chicos* from here.") Several specifically associated the word with street toughs, the guys who speak cholo slang and drive low-rider cars. Nor is this unique to New Mexico: Carmen Fought, writing about the use of "Chicano English" by teenagers in Los Angeles, says some of her informants "had mixed feelings about 'Chicano,' which was sometimes associated with radical politics, or surprisingly even with gang members." Though most viewed the word as neutral or positive, "the vast majority of my US-born young adults identify themselves as simply 'Mexican.'" She added, "The main term about which speakers expressed dislike was 'Hispanic,' which was often described by the speakers as a 'white person's word.'" ⁶⁵ By contrast, an overwhelming majority of the people I interviewed in New Mexico identified themselves as Hispanic and only two expressed any

⁶⁴ Song lyrics from the first half of the twentieth century preserve this usage, for example "Lo que dice un Mexicano que vino a suelo texano," a song in which a recent immigrant responds to a pocho who acts superior by saying, "Veo que usted es tejano/Mas su abuelo fué chicano/Tan pelado como yo." (I see you are Texan, but your grandfather was *Chicano*, as downtrodden as I am.) (McNeil, Norman Laird, "Corridos de Asuntos Vulgares Corresponding to the Romances Vulgares of the Spanish." MA thesis, University of Texas, 1944, 239.) Though many people regarded this usage as a slur, some immigrants claimed it with pride: Lalo Guerrero's mother was born in Sonora, and he recalls that during his childhood in Tucson in the early 1920s, "I often heard my mother say, very proudly, 'Soy pura chicana, pura chicanita'" (Guerrero and Meece Montes, *Lalo*, 178).

⁶⁵ Fought, *Chicano English*, 17.

negative feelings about the word, while many made it clear that they did not think of themselves as Mexican.

I would ideally identify each person or group I write about with the terms she or they preferred, but that would require a consistency and unanimity that rarely exists. It also fails to cover the frequent situations in which I am referring to a group of people, implying that they are in some sense similar or unified, but am aware that they disagree about what their group should be called. People who call themselves Chicano and people who call themselves Hispanic often include each other in their group and use their preferred terminology to cover each other, even though they may be aware that some of the people they are talking about resent that choice. Montoya not only disliked being called Chicano, but argued that “no one should ever use that word,” and several people who identify as Chicano have told me I should avoid the term Hispanic even in the New Mexico context because the people who prefer it are denying their Chicano identity and expressing a sort of retrograde self-hatred. In the later twentieth century many academic researchers in New Mexico have finessed this problem by using the term *Hispano* for people who tend to identify as Hispanic—thus maintaining the locally important distinction between those people and more recent Mexican immigrants without using a word that many Latinos resent—but none of the people I interviewed used this term in reference to themselves, including the president of the New Mexico Hispano Music Association.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Casey Gallegos, the current president of the NMHMA, used the term Hispanic throughout our conversation. When I asked him about *Hispano* he at first treated it as the same word, and when I specifically asked why the Association uses Hispano rather than Hispanic, he laughed and said, “I don’t know, I really have no idea.” In the early 1970s, Joseph Metzgar did a survey of which terms were preferred by people with Spanish names in Albuquerque and found that 9% of men and 5% of women viewed “Hispano” positively, while 14 and 15% viewed it negatively. He suggested that Hispano’s poor showing was at least in part because it was a new coinage: “many New Mexicans are simply not cognizant of the word... The author was born and raised in Albuquerque and cannot remember ever hearing that term used [there]...or anywhere

Other writers have dealt with this problem by exploring their options in an introduction and explaining why they settled on particular labels.⁶⁷ As an outsider I would not feel comfortable making this decision even if I thought I could do it consistently. I prefer to be openly inconsistent, using individuals' own terminology when I write about them and making an attempt to reflect my perception of majority rule when writing about groups who seem to share a particular terminology, but also reminding readers that these choices are transitory and unstable and if anyone objects I will not defend them. They are choices I made at particular moments and in particular contexts, sometimes with clear reasons, but all are flawed and subjective and I encourage any reader who is bothered by the use of, say, *Hispanic* to simply cross it out wherever it occurs and substitute *Chicano*, *Mexican*, or their term of preference.

This solution may please no one, but it is how language works—we constantly have to grapple with one another's differing and at times annoying terminology, or instead of grappling simply accept a degree of confusion and contradiction. An old Jewish story situates my terminological choices within my own cultural heritage: It tells of an unhappy couple who go to a rabbi for marriage

else in New Mexico until very recently... [It] seems to have been used almost exclusively by scholars and professional writers." ("The Ethnic Sensitivity of Spanish New Mexicans: A Survey and Analysis," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 49(1), 1974, 56.) Metzgar's survey did not provide *Hispanic* as an option, so there is no way to know how it would have scored.

⁶⁷ David Gutiérrez writes, "although I fully recognize the impossibility of reducing to simple categories the almost infinitely complex amalgams that constitute people's sense of personal and collective identity, for the sake of brevity I use the terms 'Mexican' to refer to citizens of the Republic of Mexico (regardless of their ethnic background and/or primary language preference); 'Mexican national' to describe citizens of Mexico physically present in the United States; 'Mexican American' to refer to United States-born or naturalized American citizens of Mexican descent (however distant that descent may be); 'Chicano' to refer to Mexican Americans who use this term as a self-referent; and 'ethnic Mexican' as an overarching descriptor of the combined population of Mexican origin or Mexican descent living on both sides of the current border between the United States and Mexico (that is, regardless of their formal nationality). As a matter of convenience, I use the umbrella term 'Latino' to describe all other residents of Latin American or Spanish-speaking Caribbean descent... I hope the text makes clear just how crude and arbitrary I consider each of these terms to be." ("Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the

counseling. The rabbi says he will first see the wife alone. “My husband is impossible,” she says. “He thinks he knows everything, he treats me like dirt, he has never taken proper care of our family...” The rabbi listens until she has finished, then nods solemnly and says: “You’re right.”

Then the husband comes in and launches into his complaints: “My wife makes my life a misery, she is bossy and scolding, she has let our home go to ruin...” The rabbi listens until he is finished, then nods again and says: “You’re right.”

The couple leaves, and a student who has been listening to the conversations approaches the rabbi in consternation. “They disagreed about everything, but you told them both they were right. That’s not possible!”

The rabbi nods, and with a gentle smile says: “You’re right.”

‘Third Space’: The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico,” *Journal of American History*, 86 [2], 1999, 481-2fn.)

3. What is a language?

Despite frequent disagreements about ethnic terminology, none of the Chicanos, Hispanics, or Mexicans I spoke with in the course of this project expressed any doubt about calling their ancestral language *Spanish*. That struck me because when I lived in southern Spain in the late 1970s many people insisted that their language should be called *castellano* rather than *español*, since it is only one of four official and distinct Spanish languages, along with gallego, catalán, and basque. These people were often Andalusians who favored autonomy from the central Spanish government, and they did not call their language castellano because they had any affection for Castille—on the contrary, their point was that Castilians should not presume to place one regional language ahead of the others. Nor did they mean to suggest they spoke like Castilians: a popular bumper sticker of that period read “Zoy andaluz y zoy orgullozo,” emphasizing that whereas Castilians only lisp the letter z, Andalusians also lisp the letter s.

Visiting Andalucía a dozen years later, I got caught in the middle of a dinner table battle between a father who said andaluz was a dialect of castellano and his daughter who insisted it was a separate language like catalán. His evidence was that he could travel all over Spain and people would understand him. Her evidence was that if she spoke the way her friends talked on the street, people in Madrid or Barcelona would find many of the words unfamiliar. I tried to suggest a middle ground, saying that there is no bright line between a language and a dialect and their positions were both completely reasonable. This pleased neither the father, who thought his daughter’s intense regionalism was silly, nor the daughter, who thought it was insulting to call her language a dialect. But the more closely one looks at the ways people communicate, the harder it is to define

a language, a dialect, or even a style of speech.

If we agree that the main languages spoken in the southwestern United States today are Spanish and English, we do not mean that many people there talk like natives of Spain or England. We do not even mean that the way people talk is uniform within those two categories and a single region. In 1947 George Barker described “four main variants of Spanish” common in Tucson: “first, the Southern Arizona dialect of Spanish; second, standard Mexican Spanish; third, the Pachuco dialect [a form of hipster speech analogous to African American jive talk]; and fourth, the Yaqui dialect of Spanish.”⁶⁸ That may seem like a good beginning, but one could similarly dissect his component categories: for example, in terms of vernacular speech there is no “standard Mexican Spanish,” any more than there is a “standard United States English.” One might argue that there is a theoretical standard defined by dictionaries and grammar books, but it is not what one typically hears on the streets of Tucson or anywhere else.

Otto Santa Ana observed that the Mexican Spanish he heard in Los Angeles was mostly rural speech from Michoacan and Jalisco, and specifically the speech of the poorest, least educated people from those regions, since anyone with a school education was more likely to find work in Mexico City or Guadalajara than to make the tough trek to the United States.⁶⁹ One could dispute Santa Ana’s claim, but a broad study of broadcasting in the Southwest suggests his perception was widely shared: the authors found “almost all announcers on Spanish-language

⁶⁸ Barker, George C., “Social functions of language in a Mexican-American Community” [1947]. In Hernández-Chavez, Eduardo, Andrew D. Cohen, and Anthony F. Beltramo (eds.). *El lenguaje de los Chicanos: Regional and social characteristics used by Mexican Americans*. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975, 175. He described the Southern Arizona dialect as “characterized by the use of some archaic forms of Spanish, by the use of many *pochismos*, and by the tendency of its speakers to rely almost entirely upon the familiar verb endings, and by its intonation patterns or *sonsonete*, which may easily be distinguished from that of the standard Mexican Spanish of Mexico City.”

stations—radio and television—are imported from Mexico or other Latin-American countries. The complaint is that the American version of Spanish is either too pocho (i.e., too intermixed with English words or constructions) or too ‘peasantry’.”⁷⁰

There are at least two basic problems in defining a language, dialect, linguistic variety, or speech community, and the simpler of these is the taxonomy of those terms. As in my Andalusian dinner table battle, people sometimes try to distinguish languages from dialects on the basis of comprehension, but comprehension is infinitely variable. I have had satisfying conversations in which I spoke Spanish and the other person spoke Italian, so on the basis of comprehension I could say both are simply dialects of Latin. However, I have also failed to communicate with Italian-speakers despite knowing Spanish, so on the same basis I could say they are separate languages.

One can try to avoid the language/dialect binary by thinking in terms of linguistic families, each including multiple speech varieties. Like human families, such families are often complicated: I have a half-brother who is as old as one of my uncles, and cousins who are as old as my mother, so sorting my family into generations is no simple matter. But one can still use the family model to define levels of linguistic relationship: People in Chimayó, New Mexico, who are over seventy years old and learned Spanish as their first language might be considered a cohesive speech community that speaks a variety or dialect of local Spanish; that local Spanish is in turn a dialect of New Mexico Spanish; New Mexico Spanish is a dialect of southwestern Spanish; southwestern Spanish is a dialect of

⁶⁹ Baquedano-Lopez, Patricia. “On Chicano languages and Chicano life: An interview with Otto Santa Ana,” *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 6 (1), 1995, 79.

⁷⁰ Gutiérrez, Félix F., and Jorge Reina Schement. *Spanish-Language Radio in the Southwestern United States*. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1979, 11 (quoting Grebler, Moore and Guzmán 1970).

Central American Spanish, which is a dialect of the broad international range of what is normally called Spanish; all forms of Spanish are a dialect family within the larger family of Latin; and Latin is a dialect of Indo-European.

It is more usual to say that the shift in level from regional varieties to the international form called Spanish is a jump from a dialect to a language, and that the Latin (or Romance) languages and Indo-European are families of languages rather than of dialects, and there are perfectly reasonable arguments to support that choice. But it is a choice based on politics and history, not on abstract or objective linguistic realities: The “dialects” of Arabic spoken in Morocco and Saudi Arabia are more different than some of the “languages” in the Latin family, and the reason for the taxonomic discrepancy is that the leaders of Arabic-speaking nation-states chose to accentuate pan-Arab unity while the leaders of Latin-speaking nation-states chose to accentuate their separate identities. Such discrepancies also exist within Europe: Provençal is often referred to as a dialect of French, while Catalan is rarely called a dialect of Spanish, not because Provençal is more like Paris French than Catalan is like Madrid Spanish but because there is a vibrant Catalan nationalist sensibility and no comparable effort to distinguish Provence from France. Such political choices in turn create linguistic realities: schoolchildren in Provence learn French while schoolchildren in Cataluña learn Catalan, and over time that has led to the local speech of Provence becoming less distinct from what is spoken elsewhere in France, while the local speech of the political area defined as Cataluña—which did not previously have clear linguistic borders—has become more distinct from what is spoken in neighboring areas where schools are conducted in castellano.

Along with the complex taxonomy of languages and dialects, there is a more basic problem in defining even small, local dialects or speech communities:

No two people talk exactly alike or have exactly the same vocabulary, and any group of people that spends time together very quickly develops shared linguistic tics and shortcuts. As André Martinet wrote in 1953:

Linguistic diversity begins next door, nay, at home, and within one and the same man. It is not enough to point out that each individual is a battleground for conflicting types and habits... What we heedlessly and somewhat rashly call “a language” is the aggregate of millions of such microcosms many of which evince such aberrant linguistic comportment that the question arises whether they should not be grouped into other “languages.”⁷¹

To define a language one has to start by defining the attributes and limits of that language, which means at least to some extent ignoring the infinite idiosyncrasies of individuals, subgroups, and borderline varieties that diverge from that definition. Some sociolinguists in recent years have begun to argue that it is therefore misleading to define a language and that the field has been led astray by attempts to, in Harris and Rampton’s words, “unearth...an orderliness and uniformity” linking all the individual variations within what a researcher has arbitrarily defined as a cohesive speech community.⁷² The advantage of defining such communities is that one can produce studies that seem rigorously scientific, in the sense of including graphs and numbers, or at least can clearly define one’s field of study. But critics of this approach argue that it is a circular process, since the only way to define a uniform language or speech community is to decide a priori what one will include and exclude, and the only way to tabulate data is to

⁷¹ Martinet, André. Preface to Uriel Weinrich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1963, vii.

⁷² Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton, “Creole Metaphors in Cultural Analysis: The Limits and Possibilities of Sociolinguistics,” working paper, King’s College London, 2000, at www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/creole.pdf, 7.

create categories in which different people are understood to be doing the same thing, defined as “the same” by one’s own criteria.

As R.A. Hudson writes, “Information about the use of individual variants is lost when they are merged into variable scores, and information about the speech of individuals is also lost if these are included in group averages. At each stage the method imposes a structure on the data which may be more rigid than was inherent in the data, and to that extent distorts the results.”⁷³ One can argue that this distortion is acceptable or necessary since it allows one to look at language in a systematic way. But the question remains: if the language one is studying is defined by what one chooses to study, what is one looking at, and why? Roy Harris writes, “we can *make* linguistics scientific by deliberately restricting it to the consideration of certain correlations, which we (linguists) will determine..., [but] a science constructed by choosing to wear blinkers is going to leave the world poorer, not richer, than having no science at all.”⁷⁴

Of course, linguists are not the only people who define languages or perceive them as discrete entities. Martinet added a caveat to his insistence on linguistic individuality, writing, “What further complicates the picture, and may, at the same time, contribute to clarify it, is the feeling of linguistic allegiance which will largely determine the responses of every individual.”⁷⁵ Each of us speaks differently, but if we think of ourselves as speaking the same language then we adapt our speech to our perception of shared norms and the result is a shared system of communication. As Bourdieu writes, “since every language that makes itself heard by an entire group is an authorized language, invested with the authority of this group, it authorizes what it designates at the same time as it

⁷³ R.A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, 1996, 181, quoted in Wardhaugh, *Introduction*, 161.

⁷⁴ Harris, “On Redefining Linguistics,” 2003.

expresses it, drawing its legitimacy from the group over which it exercises its authority and which it helps to produce as such by offering it a unitary expression of its experiences.”⁷⁶ That is, if a group of people agree that they all understand what they are hearing, it is at least for the moment their shared language, and the fact that they experience it as shared is part of what makes them feel like a group.

Actually, Bourdieu is more careful than that: he does not insist that the group understand what they hear, but only that they hear it together. Nor is that distinction just academic hairsplitting, since one of the shared languages that bound together an important group of his fellow citizens was the Latin of the Catholic mass, which virtually none of them understood. There are many languages that function in similarly symbolic ways, including, for most young listeners, the Spanish of New Mexico music. One can treasure a language and consider it one’s own despite being unable to speak or understand it, and that is one of the things that distinguishes the concept of languages as discrete entities from the concept of language as a means of speech and communication. The two concepts overlap and are often confused, since it is common to think of what one speaks as a cohesive language shared with other people, but they also regularly come into conflict: over and over, people I interviewed in the Southwest described their own speech as “bad Spanish” or “bad English.” Sociolinguists do not recognize any form of speech commonly used by a group of people as “bad,” since it is correct within that community, but if I tried to make that argument people regularly countered by explaining what they meant by “good” speech and how their own speech failed to meet that standard.

No one I interviewed defined “good” Spanish as the Spanish spoken in

⁷⁵ Martinet, André. Preface to Uriel Weinrich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1963, vii.

Spain, and only a few defined it in terms of school. The accepted standard was Mexican Spanish, and if I pressed people to define what they meant by that, they often referred to Mexican commercial culture: good Spanish was the Spanish of José Alfredo Jiménez, Pedro Infante, and Jorge Negrete, or the Spanish spoken on radio and television. The role of mass media in defining shared language and thus defining national consciousness was emphasized by Benedict Anderson in his discussion of “imagined communities.” Writing of the rise of European nation-states in the sixteenth century, he put printing at the center of his story:

Print-languages...created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged.⁷⁷

Anderson noted that for centuries the overwhelming majority of books printed in Paris had been in Latin, the common written language of literate Europe, but “after 1575 a majority were always in French.”⁷⁸ The concept of “French” is central to his larger point, which is that there was no such language until that period. As long as Latin was the shared literary language, what people spoke in southern and northern France were vernacular dialects of Latin, and the vernacular spoken in Nice was closer to the vernacular of northwestern Italy than

⁷⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, 129.

⁷⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.

to the vernacular of Normandy or Champagne. Someone walking from the southern tip of Italy to northern France would never have crossed a national linguistic boundary: the local speech changed from town to town and region to region, but until people on either side of the modern border between France and Italy began reading in different national languages, their local vernaculars were unaffected by our modern political boundaries.⁷⁹

One could make an analogy to vernacular cuisine: The amount of chile used in the average kitchen does not change dramatically when one crosses from Mexico into Texas or California, nor does it change dramatically from one town to the next as one moves north, but by the time one reaches Oregon or Minnesota the food tastes very different.⁸⁰ Such gradual variation leading to overall regional change is quite different from the explicit regional borders of what could be called “food capitalism” in an analogy to Anderson’s “print capitalism”: Now that food is mass-produced and sold in national chains, some foods are made available according to abstract concepts of what is eaten in a particular region and McDonald’s restaurants in New Mexico serve green chile cheeseburgers, while McDonald’s restaurants in neighboring states do not.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 18.

⁷⁹ A modern-day journey from Calabria to Wallonia would still take one through areas in which Romance languages other than French or Italian are spoken, including Calabrian, Neapolitan, Emilian, Romagnol, Genoese, Piedmontese, Occitan, Provençal, Poitevin-Saintongeais, Picard, Norman, and Walloon. That list is by no means exhaustive, and reflects how some speech styles have been reified and survived in different ways than others. For example, Emilian is often broken down into sub-dialects (Pavese-Vogherese, Piacentino, Parmigiano, Reggiano, Modenese, Bolognese, Mantovano, Ferrarese, Carrarese, Lunigiano, Commachiese, and Lagosanto), while the neighboring and similar Romagnol is not, because Romagnol became a literary language and thus accepted as a shared form by people who live in different towns and speak slightly differently, while Emilian never became a literary language, so speakers of the local vernaculars grouped by academics as Emilian do not think of themselves as sharing a common dialect, but as speaking their various village dialects.

⁸⁰ *Chile* is the pepper; *chili* is the English spelling of a food made with meat, beans, tomatoes, and chiles.

⁸¹ I have simplified the story somewhat. A Facebook page requesting that McDonalds start serving green chile cheeseburgers in Denver notes that this dish is available in the chain’s Pogosa Springs locations

The effects of recording on music have in many ways duplicated the effects of print on language. On a philosophical level, it had a similar effect of redefining what it supposedly preserved: Spoken language involves not only words and sentences but intonation, gestures, and the reciprocity of two or more people interacting, and before literacy became widespread those latter aspects of language were not considered separate from the aspects that can be communicated on a page. Similarly, recording redefined music as simply sound, where before it had always involved a broader range of interactions. Mark Katz writes that classical violinists began using more vibrato in the twentieth century in part to “give a greater sense of the performer’s presence, conveying to unseeing listeners what body language and facial expressions would have communicated in concert.”⁸² Any musician who has attempted to make audio recordings of her most successful concert pieces is aware that the process can be surprisingly difficult and frustrating, because what makes the piece successful in a concert setting often involves factors that cannot be heard through amplifiers in a room where no musician is playing. Musical language, like spoken language, is a process of communication, not just a way of organizing sounds, and its meaning changes if the communication is limited to sounds.

As with printing, recording dramatically changed the ways music was disseminated, and if in some ways it limited the scope of musical communication it also made new meanings possible. With recording, distinctive regional styles of playing or singing could become shared national languages, recognized and treasured by people as “their” music although differing from what had previously

(<http://www.facebook.com/McDonaldsWeWantGreenChileCheeseBurgersInDenver>, accessed 1/8/13). But that confirms the central point, which is that there is a defined boundary beyond which the product is not available, though some people on both sides of that line share a taste for green chile on their hamburgers.

been played in their region or what was played by local artists. As Spanish is the national language of Mexico despite the fact that many people still speak indigenous languages and may have little working knowledge of Spanish, ranchera is a universally recognized signifier of *mexicanidad*: it is easy to find people in Mexico and the Southwest who do not like ranchera, but virtually impossible to find one who would not describe it as sounding Mexican. When an electric guitar band in New Mexico or a rapper in Los Angeles quotes a song by José Alfredo Jiménez, their audience responds not only to the notes but to a shared frame of reference and a shared history. It can be shared in very direct, specific ways, like everyday speech, or in more abstract, symbolic ways, like church Latin, but in any case it helps people recognize themselves and others as members of larger communities.

The analogy of music to speech breaks down fairly quickly if one thinks of it as something that musicians make and everyone else just hears, so the idea of music as a shared language requires that we think of it in broader terms. People use music to communicate in many ways: by choosing a recording, dancing with one another, listening together, or referring to songs either by name, lyrics, or by humming a snatch of melody.⁸³ As with spoken language, this communication is contextual. Bourdieu considered a central issue of sociolinguistics to be the ways in which people understand not only what is said by themselves and others, but also how speech is judged in different situations:

We never learn language without learning *at the same time*

⁸² Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California, 2004, 93.

⁸³ Christopher Small has proposed that *music* be understood as a verb, meaning “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.” (Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, 9; cited in Auslander, “Musical Personae,” 105.)

the conditions of acceptability of this language. In other words, learning a language means learning at the same time that this language will be profitable in this or that situation...; the relation of communication is never just a relation of communication, it is also an economic relation in which the speaker's value is at stake; did he speak well or poorly? Is he brilliant or not? Could one marry him?⁸⁴

The analogy to musical communication is obvious—we have all had the experience of revealing our taste for a song or artist and someone instantly filing us in a social category on the basis of that taste: “Really? You like Katy Perry?” “You’re the only person I know who listens to classical music.” “I knew you weren’t from around here as soon as I saw you dancing.” We put on different music depending on who is visiting us, not only to please them but to indicate who we are and how we want them to think of us, and to make our visitors feel comfortable, or impressed, or cheerful, or romantic. Sapir noted that speech also functions this way in social situations, giving the example of party chat:

It is not what is said that matters so much as that something is said. Particularly where cultural understandings of an intimate sort are somewhat lacking among the members of a physical group it is felt to be important that the lack be made good by a constant supply of small talk. This caressing or reassuring quality of speech in general, even where no one has anything of moment to communicate, reminds us how much more language is than a mere technique of communication.⁸⁵

In such situations, music and speech can serve as overlapping aspects of

⁸⁴ Bourdieu, “What Talking Means,” 62-3.

language. Smiling or bobbing one's head in recognition when a ranchera song comes on the radio conveys a message in some ways very similar to dropping a phrase of Spanish into a conversation. Some of the most common subjects of small talk are music, television, movies, or books, which establish shared frames of reference simply by being mentioned. A lack of familiarity with a musical style can mark one as an outsider, not only to the immediate group but to that group's conception of a larger culture. Not speaking Spanish or not liking ranchera are not simply skills or tastes; they are social markers. R.B. Le Page wrote that "individuals *create* (the use of this word does not imply consciousness or 'rationality') their linguistic systems so as to resemble those of the group or groups they wish from time to time to be identified with, or so as to distinguish themselves from those they wish to distance themselves from." The same is true of their musical systems, and as with speech this is not a simple matter. Le Page suggests that people's success in creating an appropriate system will depend on four factors: "their ability to identify the groups; the extent of their access to them and ability to analyze their linguistic systems; the strength of their motivation, which is likely to be multidimensional; and their ability to change their behavior."⁸⁶

One could come up with further categories, but these four already suggest the complicated process of signaling camaraderie. There are contexts in which it is useful to talk about language or music using broad categories like "Spanish" or "ranchera," but how those categories relate to any particular discussion depends on something resembling Le Page's factors: different people will have different definitions of the categories, different degrees of access to and understanding of

⁸⁵ Sapir, "Language," 16.

⁸⁶ R.B. Le Page, "The Evolution of a Sociolinguistic Theory of Language," in Florian Coulmas, *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997, 29.

what might be included in those categories, attach different importance to the categories, and have different abilities to move between categories. Nor should one assume that large differences count for more than small ones. Some New Mexico music fans will enthusiastically dance through a set that includes rancheras, cumbias, rock oldies, and country two-steps, but insist that they cannot dance to *tejano* bands that play a virtually identical repertoire slightly slower or with slightly different instrumentation. To me the differences may be indistinguishable, but to them those subtleties signal a Texan rather than New Mexican aesthetic. As Sapir wrote of speech, “The extraordinary importance of minute linguistic differences for the symbolization of psychologically real as contrasted with politically or sociologically official groups is intuitively felt by most people. ‘He talks like us’ is equivalent to saying ‘He is one of us.’”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Sapir, “Language,” 16.

4. Who Is “Us” and Who Is “Them”?

“We are one thing to one man and another thing to another.”

—George Herbert Mead⁸⁸

In 1989 the film scholar Norma Iglesias interviewed Juan Torres, owner of San Diego’s only venue for Mexican movies, the Bay Theatre. A native of Guadalajara who had come to the United States in 1957, Torres had gone back to attend a film convention and was troubled by the contempt his erstwhile compatriots showed for Mexican cinema and their enthusiasm for Hollywood product. He feared that Mexican film was dying and its home constituency did not appreciate the loss, while “for those of us outside, the cinema is one of our main forms of contact with Mexico, with our roots... Here it is like losing a part of ourselves.” Torres suggested this discrepancy was part of a deeper problem:

In Mexico they feel angry toward the Mexicans in the United States, they feel angry with those of us who live here, they are angry with us because they want everything that is from here, they admire what is here. They want to dress, dance, see American movies, so what are they angry at? The anger is because they can’t all come here. Especially the ones who have money, everything they buy is American. The Mexican cinema here is sustained by the humble Mexicans, the ones who have had to abandon their families and their country to live better, not to imitate the gringos, but from pure necessity. They are the ones who deserve our

⁸⁸ George Herbert Mead, “The Self” [1934], in Craig Calhoun et al., *Classical Sociological Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, 286.

respect.⁸⁹

Torres's comments imply a range of intertwining affiliations: he is Mexican, but different from the people in Mexico because he lives in the United States, and one of the ways he is different is that he cares about Mexican culture while they are in love with the United States. He is a successful theater owner and distinguishes himself from the *mexicanos humildes* who are his main customers, while insisting that they deserve our respect—"us" presumably being middle class people like him and Iglesias.⁹⁰ And he differentiates all the people he is discussing, even the rich Mexicans who imitate American styles, from the gringos.

In other contexts Torres would undoubtedly group the same people quite differently. Talking about weather, he, his customers, and the local gringos would be in the same category—"we're having a heat wave here." Talking of the problems of keeping his business alive in an era of home video, he might group himself with theater owners all over the United States. Talking about musical tastes he might group himself as a fan of ranchera, jazz, or classical music, or generationally as a fan of a pan-national pantheon of "good music" including both Jorge Negrete and Frank Sinatra.⁹¹ In a group of men kidding each other about their problems or success with women, he might speak as a fellow male. Chatting with a Filipino or Peruvian he might discuss the ways white people discriminate against anyone with brown skin, and chatting with white neighbors he might discuss the problem of Chicano gangbangers moving into the neighborhood.

⁸⁹ Iglesias, *Entre yerba, polvo y plomo*, 111-12 (my translation).

⁹⁰ The original phrase is "Ellos nos merecen respeto."

⁹¹ I have no reason to think Torres was a fan of classical or jazz music, but also no reason not to. An outsider might assume that people who work in Mexican popular culture are ranchera fans, but this is often wrong. For example, Felix Fausto, a Los Angeles radio program director who was largely responsible for the banda and norteño music booms of the 1990s, says "If you

That list is hypothetical but reflects my conversations with people in Southern California and elsewhere, and my perception of some typical “scripts” of collective identities. The idea of social scripts, drawn from the work of Erving Goffman, is that people perform identities they learn in their particular societies.⁹² For example, the philosopher Anthony Appiah writes that he has an African phenotype and sleeps with men, but those are simply individual characteristics unless they are fitted into cultural scripts of blackness and gayness, generalized understandings of how a generalized mass of black people or gay people acts.⁹³ Such scripts are familiar to all of us: in the course of my interviews I often heard statements like, “New Mexicans like their rancheras played faster than in Texas,” “Mexicans are sentimental, we like songs that touch us in the heart,” “Latinos are family-oriented.” The people making these comments meant them positively, describing what they appreciated in their own culture, but in the process they were also defining other people and suggesting how someone who did not follow their script might not be properly New Mexican, Mexican, or Latino. Similarly, descriptions of language tend to simultaneously be descriptions of an idealized or stereotyped speaker: the New Mexico musician Ernie Montoya referred to “the color and the passion” of Spanish while describing English as “bland” and “precise.”⁹⁴

Such scripts often come with assigned soundtracks: Mendoza-Denton wrote of a party of Mexican immigrant *fresas* (upper class or preppy girls) in the San Francisco Area at which the fourteen-year-old hostess, born in the central

want to know which one is my type of music: I like Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Mozart...” (Simonett, *Banda*, 44).

⁹² Goffman, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

⁹³ Appiah, K. Anthony, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival,” in Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1994, 161.

Mexican city of Puebla, “was playing Rock en Español, but accepting requests for techno and a little bit of house music. Rancheras, banda, and especially cumbias with their tropical rhythms were totally out of the question.” Mendoza-Denton noted that although banda was one of the most popular styles at the local high school and used in celebrations on the school grounds, the hostess claimed to have only heard it in a movie about a small town in Mexico, and explained, “when you are from the city, you just aren’t going to go for things from a little town.” The girl added, “I don’t know whether you’ve noticed that the only ones who dance Banda are the ones from the barrios... I like Rock en Español, Techno, you know, a style that is more American although it is in Spanish.”⁹⁵

Social scripts and their soundtracks may be understood similarly by people whose relationship to them is quite different. A working-class immigrant in the same area told Mendoza-Denton, “Banda is the music of Piporros. I might like to dance it but out of pride I don’t listen to it.” When she asked him to define a *piporro*, he said: “A Piporro is someone from a rancho, who just came down from the mountains... An Indian! Someone who makes his living tending cows and goats!”⁹⁶ This is a neat linguistic link between a social script and a musical prototype, since the source of the term is presumably the singer and movie actor Eulalio González, “El Piporro,” who exemplified the rural, working class Mexican of the frontera and often made reference to the cultural problems of

⁹⁴ Interview with the author, 11 Oct. 2012.

⁹⁵ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 14 [her translation]. In another example, James Vigil wrote of Latino gangs in one Los Angeles neighborhood: “In the 1980s, for example, the Mara Salvatrucha youth were mostly stoners, that is, adherents of hard-rock music who were known for heavy drug use. The other gangs...tended to favor disco music and dressier clothing.” (Vigil, James Diego. *A Rainbow of Gangs: Street Cultures in the Mega-City*. Austin: University of Texas, 2002, 143.)⁹⁵

⁹⁶ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 15.

immigrants in the United States.⁹⁷

As for the young man's broader comments, banda music was originally limited to a few states in northwestern Mexico, and although many Mexicans associate it with low-class or village tastes it requires a full complement of brass instruments and hence would have been unlikely to conjure up images of goatherds or Indians. Nor did his use of *indio* necessarily imply a distinct racial background or phenotype—he was himself dark with indigenous features, and the term is often used as an insult in Mexican and Mexican American culture, meaning someone lower class or countrified, a peasant.⁹⁸ In his local youth script, recent immigrants were equated with rural poverty and lack of sophistication and by extension with *indios* and a banda soundtrack, attributes that might have quite different associations in other contexts. Helena Simonett, in her exploration of banda music and its listeners on both sides of the border, writes that banda was adopted as a symbol of Mexican pride by many young people in Los Angeles who had no direct rural roots or immigrant experience. She describes a heavy metal fan getting into banda because it was the trendy new dance style in her peer group, and another saying, "I'm more into [Mexican music] than my parents are... I'm listening to [it] while my mom is listening to oldies in English."⁹⁹

Simonett found that although many people in Mexico associated banda with

⁹⁷ This etymological link is conjectural, but *piporro* does not seem to have any other source in Mexican Spanish. In Spain the word exists in four senses: most commonly for a bassoon, but also for a sort of clay bottle used in rural areas to keep drinking water cool, for large seeds or fruit stones, and for the inhabitants of Aceuchal, Extremadura, who apparently got this name from their main crop, garlic. I can find no trace of any of these uses in the Americas, nor any use of the word that does not seem to derive from the name of the comedian, for example a mocking reference to someone in cowboy wear, "cuando he visitado piporrolandia así se visten todos," and the name of a recent norteño group, Los Piporros de la Sierra.

⁹⁸ DJ Bean of Aztlán Underground explained, "to call someone out when you're ready for a fight you call someone a Indio - it's funny cause it'll be someone really dark who'll call someone lighter than him an Indian because it's an insult." (Raegan Kelly, "Aztlán Underground," in Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 265.)

⁹⁹ Simonett, *Banda*, 89.

sleazy barrooms and lower class tastes, “For most young people in the United States, technobanda and its catchy and danceable rhythms were something new, something that had no dark past yet was inherently Mexican.”¹⁰⁰ I was familiar with banda in the latter context, greeted in Los Angeles clubs as a symbol of Mexican heritage, but found that in New Mexico many people think of it as the antithesis of traditional Mexican or Mexican American styles. Radio stations that play a broad mix of tejano, mariachi, New Mexico music, and norteño still draw the line at banda because listeners actively dislike it, and I heard an older woman in Española file it with hip-hop, saying, “I can’t stand all that new stuff, that rap and banda.”

None of those comments touches on the sound or instrumentation of banda, and it is striking how rarely any of the Californians quoted in Simonett’s book phrase their love (or dislike) for the style in musical terms. Over and over, it is described as sounding “traditional” or “really Mexican,” or by its critics as “low-class,” suggesting its association with familiar life-scripts rather than any sonic qualities that might make it attractive or unappealing independently of those scripts. Simon Frith suggests that this is basic to popular music consumption:

The first reason we enjoy popular music is because of its use in answering questions of identity: we use pop songs to create for ourselves a particular sort of self-definition, a particular place in society. The pleasure that pop music produces is a pleasure of identification—with the music we like, with the performers of that music, with the other people who like it. And it is important to note that the production of identity is also a production of non-

¹⁰⁰ Simonett, *Banda*, 95. Technobanda was a variant of the older brass band style in which most of the brass sounds were played on synthesizers, and Simonett treats it as a briefly successful

identity—it is a process of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁰¹

This analysis need not be limited to pop music, since everything Frith says is equally true of fans of classical or avant-garde styles, and it is obviously a generalization to say that “we” enjoy music for any particular reason. As with language, music can be used to signal our membership in a group but also to signal our individuality.¹⁰² The singer Lupillo Rivera, who grew up in Long Beach dressing like a gangbanger and conversant with the current rap hits and gangster movies, told me that banda was not yet popular when he was in high school and his friends made fun of him for listening to it—but his description suggests that they thought of it as a personal quirk: “They’d say, you know, what was that clown music doing and all that. You know how la banda sounds kind of like circus music.”¹⁰³ To describe banda as circus or cartoon music suggests that it is childish or silly, but not that it is associated with a particular group or class of listeners—circuses and cartoons have no distinct ethnic or cultural associations, and Lupillo’s friends were not implying that his taste for banda meant he liked circuses or clowns. By contrast, when banda is described as sounding Mexican or filed alongside rap, it is being heard not as brass instruments playing polkas, but as a soundtrack associated with particular groups of people.

In a rough parallel to Goffman’s idea of social scripts, Benedict Anderson

offshoot that introduced a wave of new fans to banda but was overshadowed and replaced by full brass ensembles once the music became widely popular.

¹⁰¹ Frith, Simon. “Towards an aesthetic of popular music,” in Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, *Music and society: the politics of composition, performance and reception*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 140.

¹⁰² Sapir writes: “In spite of the fact that language acts as a socializing and uniformizing force, it is at the same time the most potent single known factor for the growth of individuality. The fundamental quality of one’s voice, the phonetic patterns of speech, the speed and relative smoothness of articulation, the length and build of the sentences, the character and range of the vocabulary, the scholastic consistency of the words used, the readiness with which words respond to the requirements of the social environment, in particular the suitability of one’s language to the language habits of the persons addressed—all these are so many complex indicators of the personality. (Sapir, “Language,” 17.)

¹⁰³ Interview with Lupillo Rivera, spring 2000.

described modern national identities as “imagined communities...*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” He emphasized that the idea of nations as imagined did not imply any degree of “falsity,” since that would suggest “that ‘true’ communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations.” On the contrary, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹⁰⁴

While Anderson distanced himself from the idea that nations, classes, or other groups were false constructs, he suggested that they might be imagined very differently by different people. This can be thought of as a variation of Saussure’s concept of the dual arbitrariness of language: it is an act of imagination to say that people form a particular group, and a further act of imagination to say that this group shares characteristics beyond the criterion that defines them as a group. For example, people may not only have very different ideas about who is and is not Mexican or Latino, but also very different ideas about what “Mexicans” or “Latinos” are like.

Anderson’s primary focus was how modern nations differ conceptually from earlier kingdoms or empires: rather than simply being the geographical region and people under the control of a particular ruler, nations are groups of people who think of themselves as sharing customs, languages, and culture—most of us have an idea of what it means to be “Mexican” that is not simply or exclusively a matter of living within the borders of the Mexican republic or

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

having Mexican citizenship papers. He also discussed other ways of imagining communities, such as religion, class, ethnicity, and language, and his concept of imagination has been adopted and expanded by later theorists such as Arjun Appadurai with particular reference to globalization. Appadurai is best known for his five “scapes,” a framework for looking at global interactions as consisting of intersecting relationships between “five dimensions of global cultural flow which can be termed: (a) ethnoscaples; (b) mediascapes; (c) technoscapes; (d) finanscapes; and (e) ideoscapes.” He explained that he chose the suffix scape, as in landscape, “to indicate first of all that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors.”¹⁰⁵ Other writers soon added “musicscapes” to Appadurai’s list,¹⁰⁶ and this provides a nonjudgmental way of acknowledging music’s presence in people’s environments: just as the landscape of Los Angeles includes freeways and strip malls, the musicscape includes ranchera, which is heard by everyone, whether they recognize it, like it, or even notice it.

I am wary of the narrative of modern globalization, which often projects an ahistorical sense of isolation and cohesiveness on the past. The musicscapes of the regions now comprising Mexico and the United States included melodies, rhythms, and instruments from the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia before the nations of Mexico and the United States existed. Nonetheless, the ways people imagine their communities today are certainly influenced by factors that were relatively rare or absent in the past. In the words of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The

¹⁰⁵ Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture, Society*, 7, 1990, 296.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 17.

speed at which commodities, information, and individuals travel and, conversely, the decreasing significance of face-to-face interaction influence both the kinds of communities people wish to be part of and the kinds of communities to which they think they belong.”¹⁰⁷ The instant global availability not only of music, but of music in specific contexts—videos, movies, advertisements, television programs, concert footage, social media posts—means that even people who live where their ancestors did and share many of those ancestors’ experiences are likely to imagine new kinds of kinships and adopt personal and cultural soundtracks that draw on a very different range of sources. A teenager in New Mexico or Los Angeles can think of her community as including people whose music, clothes, or dancing appeals to her, even though she may have no idea where those people are located geographically, and she can shape her own music, clothes, or dancing to reflect that kinship. She can also choose to hang out with other kids in her neighborhood who share those tastes, and in that process the global can affect and become inseparable from the local. Nor need her models be “real” people. It is not just a postmodern game to insist on the blurriness of the lines between fact and fiction in a world where generations of teenagers have adopted Al Pacino’s Tony Montana as a model of street cool and Latino pride.

It can be exhausting to try to sort out the academic terminology of group identity, from Goffman’s social scripts and Anderson’s imagined communities to Durkheim’s “collective representations” and Mead’s “generalized other,” but all are essentially grappling with the same problem: how to acknowledge the importance of groups in people’s conceptions of themselves and others, while at the same time recognizing that other people may have very different ideas not only about who is in a group and what distinguishes that group from others, but

¹⁰⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 136.

whether that group even exists. Theorists of globalization are also grappling with a history of colonialism and racism supported by academic formulations of ethnicity and culture, and it is no surprise that the most insightful writers on this subject include Hall, Appiah, Trouillot, and Lila Abu-Llugod, non-Europeans from colonized regions who understand both the dangers of being filed in a subordinate group and the power of filing oneself together with potential comrades. All of these writers are critics of essentialism, the idea that certain people are inherently and inescapably members of certain groups. While they recognize that essentialist arguments have been used not only to subordinate people but also by people fighting to free themselves from subordination, they are trying to step outside that process, which they find both intellectually unsatisfying and politically troubling.

To take an example from my own life, many people believe it is important to claim Jewish identity not only for themselves but for me, because Jews have so often been subordinated, exiled, and massacred that we need to stand together. While recognizing their logic, I have also been affected by the logic of my mother, who argued that Judaism is a religion and Jewishness a culture but neither is racial or genetic, so I am only Jewish if I choose to identify as Jewish. When I say this, it often infuriates people who point out that if I had been living in central Europe in the Nazi era I would have had to flee, hide, or be murdered, and who regard my waffling about Jewishness as a betrayal of the people who suffered and died, and a denial of that reality. But my mother based her argument in her personal experience as a refugee from Nazi Vienna: Hitler destroyed her world and she is adamant that his essentialist and genocidal racial fantasies should not be used as a basis for definitions of Jewishness.

Given this background, I regard any group definition based on oppression or

discrimination with both sympathy and wariness. I understand the importance of people banding together to defend themselves, and thus the temptation of what Gayatri Spivak called “strategic essentialism,” the contextual adoption of essentialist ethnic definitions in the interest of group solidarity.¹⁰⁸ But if I accept that I am a Jew because Hitler would have killed me or that someone is black or Latino because they are filed that way by American racists, I am granting power to people I do not like or agree with. I am also granting a more general right to define other people—and here I again relate my views to my Jewish experience, in which I find people not only defining themselves and others as ethnic Jews according to the standard of the Nazi holocaust, but also claiming that they have more rights to a region of the Middle East than people who lack that ethnic heritage. This, to me, suggests a double dose of the Nazi logic—Jews are a race, and particular races have unique rights to particular geographic regions.

Thus I am twitchy about ethnic definitions and by extension dubious of other group definitions, especially those that separate groups into “us” and “them.” And yet, once again, there is no way to think about the world without generalizing, and although one can strive to understand people as individuals they also form groups and imagine themselves in groups and classify other people as members of groups. As Hall writes, all concepts of groups or communities are necessarily reactionary: “The notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the Other.”¹⁰⁹ It is meaningless to describe anyone as Mexican, white, Jewish, Spanish-speaking,

¹⁰⁸ Spivak proposed the concept of strategic essentialism in various frequently-cited writings from the 1980s, but later renounced the term, arguing that it was being used as an all-purpose defense of essentialist tactics (Sara Danus, Stefan Jonsson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *Boundary 2*, 20(2), 1993, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, “Old and New Identities,” 49.

tall, dark, cheerful, stupid, or a good dancer except by contrast with other people who are non-Mexican, non-white, Gentile, non-hispanophone, short, pale, dour, clever, or clumsy, at least in relative terms. Any concept of “us” necessarily implies an alternative “them” or range of them.

Hall suggests two basic formulations of “cultural identity.” The first is to think of cultural identity as a conglomeration of “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes” that have created “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ ...which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning.” For example, Spanish-speaking people have been in the Southwest for over four hundred years and that history and experience continues to have resonance in the lives of modern southwesterners and is felt by many to be a central, unifying force in their lives.

By contrast, Hall’s second formulation of cultural identity “recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are.’”

[L]ike everything which is historical, [cultural identities] undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the

past.¹¹⁰

Since every “us” is defined in relation to “them,” every new concept of them changes us as well, and in terms of cultural or personal identity, a particularly significant group of “them” tends to be the people we recognize as our ancestors.¹¹¹ Trouillot suggests that the modern idea of Europe dates from 1492, when Spain’s Hapsburg rulers expelled the region’s Islamic rulers and Muslim and Jewish populations and simultaneously became aware of a new continent to be called America. This was not only a shift from colonized to colonizer, but a redefinition of Europe as a place separate from Africa and linked to the Americas. Since the days of ancient Greece the Iberian Peninsula had been part of a world centered on the Mediterranean—literally the “middle of the earth”—geographically and culturally linked to Carthage and Alexandria rather than to the Germanic tribes in the faraway north. Nor were those older connections immediately forgotten. While it is now common to think of Spanish, French, and English immigrants to the Americas as Europeans, Anglo-American writers in the nineteenth century often stressed the non-European aspects of Spanish heritage. After a trip to the Southwest in the 1830s, Josiah Gregg wrote that the dark skin of the region’s Spanish settlers “resulted partly from their original Moorish blood, [though] more from intermarriages with the aborigines,”¹¹² and toward the end of that century Charles Lummis took this logic to the point of minstrel show caricature, writing that the ranchers he met on the Colorado-New Mexico border were “twice as dark as an Indian, with heavy lips

¹¹⁰ Hall, Stuart, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 223, 225.

¹¹¹ In some contexts we may speak of our ancestors as us, but we recognize that we are in a different time, perhaps carrying on their traditions, their heritage, but for better or worse somewhat different from them.

¹¹² Gregg, Josiah. *Commerce of the Prairies*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1954, 153.

and noses.”¹¹³

Definitions of “us” often include not only definitions but disparagement of “them,” and any discussion of ethnicity and culture in the United States inevitably involves a history of racism, discrimination, and caricature. That history can be placed in Hall’s first category as an underlying and inescapable truth, but its particulars often fit better in his second category, since conceptions of race and the ways those conceptions play out in people’s lives have varied dramatically by period, region, and context. Nostrand notes that in the 1900 census under “color or race,” Latino southwesterners were typically marked “W” for white, but sometimes “M” for Mexican.¹¹⁴ This discrepancy does not seem to have depended on how a particular individual looked or acted, but rather on whether the census taker was thinking in terms of a white-black dichotomy or allowed a third option. By now the census categories have been standardized and respondents are allowed to choose their own answers, but little else seems to have changed: 94 percent of the people who identified as “Hispanic” in the 2010 census described themselves as belonging to only one race, and over half identified that race as “white” with most of the remainder writing in an “other” race such as “Mexican,” “Chicano,” or “Latino.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Padget, Martin. 1995. “Travel, Exoticism, and the Writing of Region: Charles Fletcher Lummis and the ‘Creation’ of the Southwest.” *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 421-449, 427. Lummis later decried such descriptions, appealing for Anglos to “rid[] ourselves of the silly inborn race prejudice,” but his view of Hispanic New Mexicans remained patronizing: “They are a simple, kindly people, ignorant of books, but better taught than our average in all the social virtues—in hospitality, courtesy, and respect for age” (Padget, 428).

¹¹⁴ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 22.

¹¹⁵ Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert, “The Hispanic Population: 2010.” Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 14. Despite an instruction that “For this census, Hispanic origins are not races,” 36.7 percent of the people who identified themselves as Hispanic said they were of “one race” but not white, black, American Indian, Asian, or Pacific Islander—and many wrote in “Mexican” or “Latino” as their “other” race. The numbers for people whose national origin was Mexican are only slightly different: as with Latinos in general, 94 percent said they were of “one race,” 52.8 percent identifying as “white” and 39.5 as “other.” There is no break-down of the “other” category, but many people of Mexican origin who checked it presumably thought of their race as Mexican. Although it is common to describe Latinos in

People's choices of how to identify in a government census do not necessarily reflect deep or consistent views, but this nonetheless suggests the slippery interplay between race, nationality, and ethnicity. In my experience many people do not find it easy to decide how (or whether) to identify themselves in terms of race or ethnicity, and identify differently depending on the situation. Like linguistic or musical choices, these are not absolute self-definitions, but rather affiliations with various sorts of us in contrast to various sorts of them, in particular contexts. It is always at least a bit misleading to say that a person "identifies as Chicano" or "identifies as Mexican" without providing a sense of the situation in which they identified that way, since even dedicated proponents of a particular ethnic term will at times use alternate terms. In an interview from 1985, the New Mexico writer Rudolfo Anaya was asked about Chicano literature as distinct from the general field of Hispanic literature and responded, "Well, let me begin by defining some of the terms that you use. I don't use the word 'Hispanic' to characterize me or my writing. I use the word 'Chicano.'" He then explained that this is because he believes in "understanding ourselves not only as Hispanics—as people of Spanish and Mexican origins—but as people who also share in the Native American origin and the Native American heritage." But when asked about his linguistic background earlier in the same interview, Anaya responded with a reference to local "Hispanic communities," and a bit before that referred to those communities as "rural villages of New Mexico in which a

general and Mexicans in particular as *mestizo*, (racially mixed) and many would undoubtedly check that category if it were provided, only six percent of Hispanic respondents and five percent of Mexicans identified as being of "two or more races." Many Chicano activists and academics identify themselves as indigenous, but only 1.4 percent of Latinos or Mexicans identified their race as American Indian. The category "of Mexican origin" was clearly not limited to recent immigrants, since almost two thirds of the 32 million people who identified that way were born in the United States and some had ancestors who were in the Southwest before the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (data from Yesenia D. Acosta and G. Patricia de la Cruz, "The Foreign Born From Latin America and the Caribbean: 2010," Washington: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Mexican population lived.”¹¹⁶ My point is not that Anaya is being unsure or unclear, but that subtle shifts of context apparently affected his taxonomy: While he identifies himself as Chicano, Hispanic is a logical term to use in reference to Spanish speech and *mexicano* was what older people called themselves in those villages.

In an interview with Mary Jane Walker, Rob Martínez of Los Reyes de Albuquerque provided a nuanced sense of shifting ethnic affiliations. Although Martínez’s father firmly told me he was Chicano and Rob’s sister Debbie performed as La Chicanita, Martínez said “the Chicano movement [grew] out of a legitimate need to acknowledge the reality of *mestizaje*” but “went too far” in denying Spanish or European roots. He had been doing genealogical research and “argued for distinction between Nuevomexicanos and Mexicans... [since he] represented his family heritage and his own identity as much more Hispanic or Hispano than Native American and Mexican.” However, he said he had been confused about this as a teenager and although his parents traced their family histories only to rural New Mexico he told his friends that his mother was Spanish and his father Mexican, because although both were light-skinned, his father had an accent: “I was like ‘Well, I’m just going to cover all my bases because I really don’t have an answer.’” He then worked in a restaurant where the busboys were undocumented Mexicans and identified himself to them as a fellow Mexican, but they laughed and responded, “‘No. *Eres gachupín*’...a derogatory Mexican word for a Spanish person.”¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, he looked and talked like an Anglo, so his Anglo friends in high school treated him as one of them even though they knew his parents were Hispanic, and that also became part of his experience.

¹¹⁶ González, César A. “An Interview with Rudolfo A. Anaya,” in Bruce Dick and Silvio Sirias, *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998, 94, 95, 98-9.

Most people define ethnicity as more than simple physiognomy, but how people look or sound often affects how other people react to them and hence how they think about themselves. Discussions about Mexican and Latino immigrants in the United States often include questions about why those groups have remained more distinct from the “white” population than Italian, Greek, or Jewish immigrants. In many cases the simple answer is that they haven’t—European-featured Mexicanas and Latinos like Rita Hayworth, Raquel Welch, and Anthony Quinn have assimilated like other European-featured immigrants. (Many Afro-Caribbean immigrants have similarly assimilated to African American communities.) But many Latinos are obviously non-European, and the continued influx of Latino immigrants to the United States has provided an ongoing source of connection to their previous homelands and also meant that a lot of people tend to group them with the new immigrants whether they like it or not.

A corollary to that last observation is that there is an ongoing pattern of recent Latino immigrants interacting with previous immigrants and with people who trace their ancestry back to early Spanish settlers or Native Americans, and some of those people do not enjoy being grouped with or mistaken for recent immigrants—nor do the recent immigrants necessarily enjoy being mistaken for them. James Vigil and Carmen Fought have written about tensions between settled and recent Mexican immigrants in Southern California. Discussing the popularity of *cholo* style among young Angelenos, Vigil writes that it allows “youths to assert a Chicano identity (and pride in it) and to deny being *engabacheado* (Anglicized). Yet these youths also seek to avoid affiliation with a Mexican heritage and, in fact, hold somewhat disparaging attitudes toward

¹¹⁷ Walker, “Family music,” 61-4.

‘chúntaros’ and ‘wetbacks,’ as they call Mexican nationals or immigrants.”¹¹⁸

Fought quotes a Chicano-identified high school student referring to immigrant classmates as “border brothers” and *vanamachos*, and differentiating them from his group in an analogy to local racial divisions, saying, “my homeboys be jacking [robbing] them or whatever you know. It’s like...the way that they feel about niggers.”¹¹⁹

Fought glosses *vanamachos* or *banamachos* as “a Spanish term that I was unfamiliar with”—unsurprisingly, since there is no other use of it in print or on the internet—but it is a perfect example of a soundtrack representing a social script: She did her research in 1994, at the height of the technobanda craze, and Banda Machos was the signature group of the most popular radio station in Los Angeles, specifically associated with *indio* identity from its hits “Sangre de indio” (Indian Blood) and “Un indio quiere llorar” (An Indian Wants to Cry). As with the use of Piporro’s name to signify rural Mexicans, it makes sense that a teenager who associated immigrant teenagers with quebradita dancing and *indio* culture would call them *bandamachos*.¹²⁰

Fought’s student also made conciliatory comments about immigrants while maintaining the same racial analogy: “Sometimes you’re cool with them...just like the blacks.” That equation has particular relevance to discussions of southwestern music, since young Chicanos (like young Americans of all ethnicities) have often embraced black styles, in part as a way of differentiating themselves from less street-savvy immigrants. I note this not to suggest that

¹¹⁸ Vigil, James Diego. 1988. *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*. Austin: University of Texas, 42.

¹¹⁹ Fought, *Chicano English*, 40.

¹²⁰ I derived this etymology by chance—Google searches for *banamachos* kept coming up with Banda Machos, and eventually it occurred to me that this was not a mistake but a clue—and Fought and Helena Simonett agree that it makes sense (personal communications). I have found a

Chicanos are in some ways as different from recent Mexican arrivals as they are from blacks, or that they feel that way—though some, in some situations, may. Rather, my point is that people constantly group and regroup in ways that are not only baffling to outsiders but are dauntingly intricate even for insiders, and music and language can provide ways of sorting out who is who, while at the same time revealing cracks in the taxonomy. Fought describes strong tendencies toward linguistic stereotyping both from outsiders and among the people she studied. For example, she could detect no difference between the English spoken by Chicano monolinguals and Chicanos who were fluently bilingual in Spanish, but writes that her students remained “extremely reluctant to give up on the notion that they can pick out the bilingual speakers in a crowd.” Specifically, when she played a tape that included bilingual and monolingual Chicanos speaking English, students tended to equate middle class English with monolingualism and barrio English with bilingualism—but her main point was that it was important to the students to feel that they could make a distinction.¹²¹

Mendoza-Denton noted that such linguistic stereotypes are not only applied to other people but are adopted as part of people’s personal scripts and their understanding of their own groups. Working in a high school near San Francisco, she found that girls with virtually identical language skills identified themselves as Spanish-speakers or English-speakers depending on their social groups, and everyone (including ESL teachers) tended to assume that middle class, light-skinned students not only spoke better English but had less comprehension of Spanish, even when those students were recent immigrants from urban Mexico whose schooling had equipped them with academically advanced Spanish

couple of related examples, such as woman tweeting a photo of herself in a gaudy silver jacket with the comment: “this is some #bandamachos shieett!”

¹²¹ Fought, *Chicano English*, 5.

skills.¹²²

Mendoza-Denton constantly notes that her generalizations about groups and speech patterns were contradicted by individual exceptions, and emphasizes the complex and shifting nature of the social networks she was studying. Her main focus was on a division that is not even visible in most studies of ethnic or class identity: her “homegirls” were all from the same neighborhoods and identified as barrio Mexicans or *cholas* affiliated with local gangs, and yet this relatively small subsection of students at a single school divided themselves into *norteña* and *sureña* (northern and southern) and framed that division nationally and in some instances globally. She described students pointing out the positions of El Salvador, Vietnam, and the Indian Subcontinent on a world map as evidence that immigrants from those regions were *sureños*, and coined the term “hemispheric localism” for “the projection of neighborhood-based, spatialized discourses of ‘turf’ onto broader domains that play out debates over race, immigration, modernity, and globalization.”¹²³ This taxonomy seems to be specific to the San Francisco area, and the *norte/sur* distinction more commonly separates northern from southern California, with Chicano gangsta rappers from the Bay Area or the Northern Valley “representing” *norte*, and those from Los Angeles or San Diego repping *sur*.¹²⁴ By contrast, Mendoza-Denton’s homegirls’ basic division was between Mexican-identified (*sur*) and US or Chicano-identified (*norte*), each affiliated with an appropriate language (Spanish vs. English) and music (banda vs.

¹²² Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 20.

¹²³ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 104.

¹²⁴ Reynaldo Berrios (*Cholo Style*, 97) quotes a San Francisco parole worker on the danger of this local taxonomy: “A lot of [people] were born and raised in the norte but for some reason they claim sur and have never set foot in East Los or San Diego. I feel sorry for those vatos if they get locked up in the pinta [jail] because being from San Fran in any pinto’s eyes [they] are viewed as Norteños and expected to run with Norteños. If they claim Sur and live in the Norte, the real Sureños are not going to accept them and they are caught in limbo.”

R&B “oldies”).¹²⁵

Some of the local north/south signifiers in this study seem logical and obvious, but others are more confusing: most agricultural workers are recent immigrants and thus logically *sureño*—a student noted, “you never see the father of a Norteño working in the fields”—but the United Farm Workers’ eagle logo is an identifier of *norte*, since the union is iconically Chicano and associated with California’s Northern Valley. Even the more obvious distinctions are far from simple: Mendoza-Denton describes a norteño man snubbing her because she pronounced her first name with a Spanish inflection, but some of her hardest-core norteña friends spoke fluent Spanish and routinely used Spanish words and phrases in English-language conversations. She writes, “students (and teachers!) at this school repeatedly produce ideologies of North and South as being indexed by language...that in the very next moment were repeatedly, messily, turned inside out by displays of complex competencies in the language they had disavowed.” She also quotes one student distinguishing between “Chicano Norteños and Mexican Norteños,” saying: “There are a lot of Norteños that are Mexican. And indios! They bring the *nopal* here in their head” [i.e., they look as indigenous as a Mexican cactus], and adding that there were likewise both pocho and Mexican *sureños*.¹²⁶

Mendoza-Denton never claimed to have sorted out these interweaving affiliations or developed a reliable sense of who was who, both because the

¹²⁵ Mendoza-Denton (*Homegirls*, 59) has a chart of symbols: Norteñas dress red or burgundy; speak English; represent themselves with 14, 4, or XIV; listen to oldies; wear feathered hair and deep red lipstick. Sureñas dress blue or navy; speak Spanish; represent themselves with 13, 3, or XIII; listen to banda; wear vertical ponytails and brown lipstick. In an odd linguistic twist, norteño music is, along with banda, a marker of *sureño* affiliation.

¹²⁶ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 113, 109, 115-16 (translated by Mendoza-Denton). The reference to the nopal cactus as symbolic of indio phenotype is proverbial: a guide on Olvera street lamented to me that many dark-skinned young people don’t speak Spanish with the phrase, “Cara de nopal y no hablan español.”

categories were so subtle and complicated and because “group boundaries were neither stolid nor stable, and people moved in and out of groups with relative ease.” Nor did the students themselves have uniform views. She describes sitting with three girls, two of them local *sureñas* and the third a recent immigrant who had no *norteña* friends and spoke little English but argued that she was *norteña* because she had been born in Los Angeles, liked oldies, didn’t like recent immigrants, and “felt more American than Mexican.” Mendoza-Denton writes that the girl’s *sureña* friends “paid no attention to her protest and shook their heads as she itemized her evidence.”¹²⁷

I have devoted so much space to this study because it provides a unique sense of the complexity of ethnic divisions or categories within what might be considered small, local, cohesive groups, while simultaneously emphasizing the impossibility of separating personal, transitory affiliations from abstract identities or scripts. We all understand ourselves and are understood by other people as belonging to multiple overlapping social groups, and although we often think of those groups as fixed, solid entities, we can never be sure that we and others have the same list of groups, define those groups in the same way, or agree about whom they include.

Like descriptions of linguistic abilities, descriptions of musical tastes and repertoire are often shorthand for social groupings, and often indicate those groupings more accurately than they indicate what language was spoken or what music was played. Talking with New Mexicans, I was several times told that particular bands in the 1940s played only Mexican or Hispanic music. When I followed up by asking if the band in question played any Anglo songs, I was often

¹²⁷ Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls*, 29, 50-1. As in many transnational cultures, it is fairly common for children to be born in the United States, raised in Mexico, and return to the United States when they are old enough to work.

told no, and likewise when I asked if it played any swing tunes—but when I asked if it played “In the Mood,” the answer was always yes, that was a big favorite. This discrepancy had nothing to do with ignorance—everyone knew “In the Mood” was an Anglo swing hit—but simply seemed to indicate that when they associated a band exclusively with Hispanic social settings they thought of its repertoire as exclusively Hispanic or Mexican. Such responses present a problem for researchers who want to know the breadth of music played in a region or time: after I figured out that all the bands played “In the Mood,” I used that information to tease out more nuanced recollections of repertoire, but without that clue I might not have elicited memories of any swing or Anglo selections and I still don’t have a clear idea of the standard, shared repertoire in post-war New Mexico, much less how one band’s repertoire may have differed from another’s. Such concerns bedevil all self-reporting: we define ourselves as fitting into certain social groups, talking in certain ways, and listening to certain kinds of music, and those definitions play a part both in our tastes and experiences and in how we recollect, describe, and file our tastes and experiences.

By the same token, when people refer to a Mexican accent, Mexican music, Mexican food, or Mexican culture, that does not necessarily mean that one could easily find that particular accent, music, food, or culture within the borders of the Mexican republic. People often talk of immigrants “assimilating” to their new home as if that automatically meant assimilating to people who are unlike them, but they also assimilate to one another. The linguistic term *koine* designates a dialect formed when people speaking various varieties of a language move to a new place and, as they interact, develop their own new variety of that language. In Mexico, there is no such thing as “Mexican” Spanish—there are local accents in every region, as well as class and professional differences and differences related

to contact with indigenous languages. As people with different Mexican speech styles associate with one other in the United States, they form new koines that differ from any dialect spoken in Mexico but are felt by their speakers to be Mexican and to symbolize personal *mexicanidad*.¹²⁸ Likewise, in Char Ullman's words, "Mexican migrants build 'Mexican' style houses and cook 'Mexican' food, all barely resembling anything they lived in or ate in Mexico."¹²⁹

Roxy Harris quoted E.P. Thompson's description of "class," suggesting that "ethnicity" could easily be substituted, and I would add "culture" or "identity" as equally viable alternatives:

Class [culture, ethnicity, identity] is not this or that part of the machine, but *the way the machine works* once it is set in motion—not this and that interest, but the *friction* of interests...which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes [cultures/ethnicities/identities]; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of *time*.... [It] is not a thing, it is a happening.¹³⁰

This is true not only of the aspects of our identities that we think of in the present, but also those we think of as part of our unchanging and unchangeable past. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes describe a man saying that when he hears his dialect, no matter where he is, it's the sound of home, but add:

In relating his dialect to 'home,' this speaker was not so much referring to physical location or region *per se*, though that

¹²⁸ There are also immigrants who speak indigenous Mexican languages and have minimal knowledge of Spanish, whose children learn English, and thus whose familial connection with Spanish is largely hypothetical.

¹²⁹ Ullman, "English matters?", 241.

¹³⁰ Thompson [1968], quoted in Harris, *New Ethnicities*, 80.

was part of it, but to local cultural ‘place.’ In marking local identity through dialect, the precise regional distribution of dialect forms may not be nearly as important as how strongly particular features figure in people’s social construction of community.¹³¹

“Home” in this context is analogous to what other people might call heritage, ethnicity, or culture. It suggests a fixed place or concept, something that we retain from our past and carry with us, often inescapably, wherever we go. But like all the other aspects of our identity, those supposedly stable homes take on new characters as we travel and change.

¹³¹ Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling-Estes, *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006, 164.

5. Southwestern Traditions

The standard repertoire of the New Mexico music scene consists almost entirely of songs that became popular in the region since the 1960s, and most of the people who play or listen to the music are aware of that fact. They are also aware that the standard New Mexico band line-up—electric guitar, electric bass, rock drum kit, and sometimes keyboards or saxophones—was uncommon or nonexistent in rural New Mexico until the second half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, everyone I interviewed routinely referred to this music as “traditional.” I found this puzzling, since as an outsider I heard the music as a modern hybrid of Mexican ranchera and rock ’n’ roll. Other researchers have felt similarly puzzled by the local characterization of car customization—which dates back to roughly the same period—as a tradition. Española, twenty-five miles north of Santa Fe, was at one time hailed as the “low rider capital of the world,” and in 1990 the anthropologist Brenda Bright quoted a car owner from nearby Chimayó saying, “It’s my culture, man. It’s like my inheritance. My family all lowride, so I just keep lowriding myself. It’s something that’s traditional.”¹³²

The formulation of something as a tradition is a way of anchoring the present in the past. The New Mexico anthropologist Sylvia Rodriguez has written at length about the region’s shifting and disputed cultural iconography, and one of her richest examples is the annual Taos fiesta. Describing a fiesta parade at the turn of the twenty-first century, she writes that marchers evoked “an expanded spectrum of Hispanic ethnoracial identities, ranging from *Genizaros* (Hispanicized, detribalized Indians of the colonial period) and Aztec dancers through Mexicans (folk dancers, *mariachis*, equestrian *charros*, etc.) and Chicano

lowriders, to Spanish rulers, explorers, and flamenco dancers.”¹³³

Rodriguez’s list suggests the broad range of music and dance that can potentially be linked to local conceptions of Hispanic identity. One of the most powerful ways people define themselves and others is in terms of their heritage, and music evokes memories and connects us to personal and shared ancestors. Chicano rappers frequently sample favorite “oldies,” banda rap links modern street styles to nostalgic ranchera, and New Mexico musicians frame their music as traditional to their families and region. At the same time, music is constantly changing and none of those styles existed in its current form even twenty or thirty years ago. In this sense music is no different from other means of evoking the past and grounding ourselves in history. As Hall writes, “The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented.”¹³⁴ This has become one of the fundamental tropes of academic discussions of heritage, most famously in Eric Hobsbawm’s essay “Inventing Traditions.” Hobsbawm, like Benedict Anderson, was looking at the formation of modern national identities, the ways people came to think of themselves not only as being ruled by governments in Madrid or Mexico City but as personally Spanish or Mexican. His invented traditions were the rituals by which modern societies “use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion,” and he warned readers not to be “misled by a curious, but understandable, paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so ‘natural’ as to require no definition

¹³² Bright, Brenda. “‘Heart like a Car’: Hispano/Chicano Culture in Northern New Mexico,” *American Ethnologist*, 25(4), 1998, 583.

¹³³ Rodríguez, “Tourism, Whiteness, and the Vanishing Anglo,” 202-3.

¹³⁴ Hall, “Old and New Identities,” 58.

other than self-assertion.”¹³⁵

There is an inherent problem with formulations like “invented traditions,” Anderson’s “imagined communities,” and Appadurai’s reworking of Hobsbawm’s concept as “constructed primordialism.”¹³⁶ Although these writers were careful to note that imagining, invention, or construction can use completely genuine materials, the terms are easily misunderstood as accusations of fakery or delusion—fictions believed by less enlightened people, while we look at the past with more honesty or clarity. A better metaphor might be the less academic “roots,” as when Hobsbawm writes of national identities “rooted in the remotest antiquity.” Roots are not the oldest part of a plant, and they are not static: they emerge from the same seed, growing down as stems and branches grow up. In the same way, people’s history, heritage, and sense of tradition are active processes by which they grow down into a past that stabilizes and nourishes them, while simultaneously through other processes they are growing toward the future. Our roots did not start in the past; they are growing toward the past from the present.

In Mexico, emigrants to the United States have often been characterized as *desarraigados*, literally “uprooted,” the idea being that they left their roots in Mexico and are adrift in the north. But when a plant is moved its roots move with it and, although some may be broken or twisted, if it remains alive they continue to grow. Roger Hewitt writes that when people move to a new environment they not only adopt new customs but also adapt their old ones in “a kind of cultural hermeneutic: a re-reading of old texts in new ways and a consequent generation of new meanings within the recognizable culture of the group. Here flexibility and

¹³⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric. “Inventing Traditions.” In Hobsbawm and Ranger. *Invention*, 12, 14.

¹³⁶ Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 28. Appadurai argues that the advantage of “constructed primordialism” over “invented traditions” is that it does not suggest an opposition with (and hence the existence of) “genuine” traditions.

adaptation facilitate not the *abandonment* of a cultural mode but its transformation into newly active culture.”¹³⁷

No analogy is perfect, but “roots” has the advantage that it is a common way of signaling our connection to the past and also emphasizes that this process is organic—people do not normally invent or construct their heritage or traditions the way someone invents a gadget or constructs a bridge. It also suggests a complex, multidirectional, expanding system rather than a discrete creation—our roots continue to grow and change, like our branches, leaves, and fruits. If we try to trace a particular root it keeps dividing until we are looking at dozens or hundreds of smaller roots, none of which is objectively more important than others: our two parents had four parents who had eight parents who had sixteen parents, and so on exponentially.

The element of invention comes in when one or a few of those distant ancestors are singled out as forebears or a particular variety of music, speech, or habit is singled out as their tradition. We have all ceased to do many things our ancestors did and continue to do many things our ancestors did, but we only think of a small fraction of those as traditional, and our choices are rarely if ever accidental. As Greg Dimitriadis writes, “tradition is a ‘strategic process’ by which agents animate particular voices in specific ways, linking the present to the past in a way that has implications for the future.”¹³⁸ Many people in the Southwest refer to Spanish as their traditional language, and that has meaning because it links them to a larger world of Spanish speakers. The connection is in the present, and is real and meaningful no matter how many or few of their ancestors spoke

¹³⁷ Hewitt, Roger. “Language, Youth and the Destabilisation of Ethnicity” [1992], in Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton, *The Language, Ethnicity and Race Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003, 191.

¹³⁸ Greg Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009, 49.

Spanish, and whether or not they speak Spanish themselves. Likewise some people refer to Nahuatl as their traditional language because it symbolizes a shared indigenous heritage, even though they may speak Spanish or English and their ancestors may have spoken Zapotec, Purepecha, or Navaho.

The celebration of anything as traditional indicates not only its enduring presence but the consciousness of its potential absence. Hobsbawm distinguished invented traditions from enduring customs, but noted that customs are often reinvented as traditions. "The very appearance of movements for the defence or revival of traditions...indicates such a break," he wrote. "Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented."¹³⁹ Kobena Mercer writes, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty."¹⁴⁰ Many people in the Southwest refer to Spanish or Nahuatl as their traditional language, but I have never heard a southwestern Anglo refer to English as his traditional language, presumably because Anglos take their use of English for granted. I have often heard Anglos refer to English as the traditional language of the United States, but always in the context of suggesting that its status as a national language is threatened by the increasing use of Spanish or other languages. As Bourdieu wrote, describing French fears of language contamination, "morale and belief are an awareness, which one hides from oneself, of one's own interests. If the crisis of the French language provokes such dramatic personal crises...it's because...a certain number of people, with their backs to the wall, are defending their own value, their own capital."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Hobsbawm, Eric. "Inventing Traditions." In Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁰ Kobena Mercer, "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 43.

¹⁴¹ Bourdieu, "What Talking Means," 65.

Rodriguez not only describes the range of Hispanic identities on display in the Taos fiesta parade, but also notes the lack of Anglo identities. She writes that early parades included marchers costumed as United States cavalry soldiers, Anglo pioneers, “mountain men,” and Bohemian artists, but the cavalry were gone by 1940 and the other Anglo icons had disappeared by the 1970s. Trouillot writes, “Celebrations straddle the two sides of historicity. They impose a silence upon the events that they ignore, and they fill that silence with narratives of power about the event[s] they celebrate.”¹⁴² The idea of “narratives of power” does not assume people who are celebrating those events are particularly powerful: people who have few other sources of power can be particularly insistent about defining their own past and controlling their own narratives. The point is that any celebration or formulation of tradition involves choices in which some things are highlighted and vested with meaning, while others are ignored or obscured.

Rodriguez’s description of the fiesta parade provides an apt frame for this chapter because of its particularly broad mix of “Hispanic ethnoracial identities.” When I first read her article I had not spent much time in New Mexico and was struck by the presence of Spanish conquistadors and flamenco dancers. Many Mexicans and Chicanos think of themselves as mestizo, but I had not come across any who described themselves as proud descendants of Cortes and was used to a formulation of history in which Spaniards are viewed as invaders rather than ancestors—the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago goes so far as to use the term *pre-Cuauhtemoc* for its early exhibits rather than *pre-Colombian* or *pre-Hispanic*, to emphasize the continuity of indigenous history rather than its

¹⁴² Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 118.

interruption by invading Spaniards.¹⁴³ But I was aware that some people whose families have been in the Southwest for centuries think of themselves as Spanish or Spanish American rather than as Mexican, and the celebration of conquistador heritage confirmed what I had heard about the particular popularity of this formulation in northern New Mexico.

Many writers suggest this conception of local heritage is delusional—that very few New Mexicans are genetically descended from conquistadors and even those few have far more ancestors who were not conquistadors and in many instances were indigenous to Mexico or the Southwest. The celebration of Spanish heritage is also often criticized as a claim to European, hence white status in a nation where race has been viewed in simplistic black-and-white terms. The problem with these criticisms is that genetics is always a simplistic way of defining ancestry, which takes many forms. The existence of the Spanish language and European settlement in the Southwest, as in the rest of Latin America, began with the arrival of the first Spanish explorers and, whatever their genetic backgrounds, all New Mexicans who consider themselves Hispanic have an undeniable connection to that history. Ethnicity is a social construct, so the issue is not what people really are by some objective determination, but how their heritage is defined, and why, and by whom. As the New Mexican ethnomusicologist Peter García writes, to dismiss claims of Spanish descent as “a fantasy heritage, a legend or a myth...overlooks a unique opportunity to investigate the relations between folklore and culture.”¹⁴⁴

The presence of flamenco dancers in the Taos parade is a notably quirky

¹⁴³ The museum’s founder, Carlos Tortolero coined this term “to de-emphasize the Eurocentric view of Mexican history” (www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/content/pre-cuauht%C3%A9moc, accessed 2/2/2013).

example of those relations, since although it is now widely recognized as a symbol of Spanish culture, virtually no one thought of flamenco in those terms before the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and as a Gypsy style it would certainly not have been classed as a claim to European purity. The use of this style to represent Spanish heritage in Taos is an interesting anachronism and a gesture of affiliation with a generalized Spanish culture—much as the New Mexico state flag mimics the colors of the Spanish flag, although that flag had not yet been adopted as a national symbol when Mexico gained its independence from Spain.

Music is arguably a deeper and more intimate symbol than a flag, and Spanish music inarguably has more meaning for Hispanic southwesterners than the Spanish flag. The modern importation and diffusion of Spanish music and dance goes back at least to the early 1900s. Lalo Guerrero, born in Tucson in 1916, recalled that his mother, an immigrant from Sonora, “loved to dance, especially the Spanish dance *La Jota Aragonesa*. She’d wind up the Victrola and she’d dance through the house laughing, clicking her castanets and kicking her heels way up.”¹⁴⁵ More recently the New Mexico guitarist David García told me that when he was in high school in Española in the early 2000s, the only guitar style taught there was flamenco. Many Latinos in the Southwest have grown up hearing flamenco and thinking of it as part of their heritage, and therefore it is reasonable for them to respond to it not only in the ways an Anglo aficionado might, but as a strand of their familial roots.

Rodriguez frames the parading conquistadors and flamenco dancers as representing a claim to European roots and thus to “white” status in the United

¹⁴⁴ García, Peter J., “The New Mexican Early Ballad Tradition: Reconsidering the New Mexican Folklorists’ Contribution to Songs of Intercultural Conflict,” *Latin American Music Review*, 17(2), 1996, 151.

States, and places Aztec dancers alongside “Hispanicized, detribalized Indians” from local pueblos at the opposite ethnoracial extreme. This makes some sense, but in other ways parading as Aztec is closer to parading as a conquistador than to parading as one of the indigenous locals who formed part of the peasant and servant class of the colonial era. In 1897, Albuquerque’s *Nuevo Mundo* newspaper published an editorial castigating Anglo newcomers who criticized the “limited culture” of local Hispanics, writing that the earlier settlers could be “proud of carrying in their veins the blood of two illustrious as well as heroic races; since the Aztecs as much as the Spaniards, for their prowess, valor and lineage, have become justly worthy of the bronze of immortality of the imperishable crown of glory.”¹⁴⁶ For twenty-first century Taoseños, small-town inhabitants of one of the poorest of the United States, the choice to parade as noble sixteenth century warriors may in some ways have more significance than which variety of warrior they choose.

There is obviously a difference between claiming conquistador and Aztec heritage, but Mexican scholars have noted that the modern tradition of Aztec dancing was a late development in the nationalist embrace of indigenous symbols that began under the governments of Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz and reached a peak during the wave of populist national reinvention following the Mexican Revolution.¹⁴⁷ In the 1930s Aztec costumes and percussion instruments (largely based on imaginative nationalist paintings rather than archeological evidence) were grafted onto *conchero* dances, which had previously been performed by men

¹⁴⁵ Guerrero and Montes. *Lalo*, 8. Campa describes the Jota Aragonesa as “one of the best known Spanish dances” in New Mexico in the 1940s, and also in Santa Barbara, California. (*Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 189).

¹⁴⁶ Meyer, Doris L. 1978. “Early Mexican-American Responses to Negative Stereotyping.” *New Mexico Historical Review*, 53:1, 80.

¹⁴⁷ De la Torre, “Estética azteca de las danzas concheras,” 147-186; De la Torre, “Tensiones.”

wearing long skirts and robes in ceremonies honoring Catholic saints. The most influential proponent of the style was Manuel Pineda, a dancer who served as choreographer and advisor to dance, theater, and film companies. One of Pineda's dances, a ballet-like melodrama evoking the legend of human sacrifice, inspired Jesús Helguera's iconic painting *Grandeza Azteca* (Aztec grandeur), which shows a muscular Aztec warrior carrying a swooning Aztec maiden in his arms (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Manuel Pineda's Aztec dance and Jesús Helguera's iconic painting.

This painting has become a symbol of Chicano pride, refigured in murals, tattoos, and CD covers to evoke indigenous heritage, but the sources of the imagery complicate this reading. The pose is reminiscent of Michelangelo's *pietà*, the model for the maiden was Helguera's Spanish wife, and Pineda's ethnic affiliation was recalled by his son as a choice rather than a birthright: "Although my father didn't look Aztec, because he was white and not indigenous, he

identified as Aztec.”¹⁴⁸

To identify as Aztec in post-revolutionary Mexico was not so much a claim of indigenous ancestry as a gesture of pride in being Mexican rather than Spanish. As such it was part of a broader discourse of *mestizo* nationalism that was not necessarily empowering to indigenous peoples. Ana Maria Alonso points out that the statue of Cuauhtémoc erected by Porfirio Díaz on Mexico City’s Paseo Reforma “included the depiction of his features as white while the Greek details on his costume indexed the affinity of the Aztecs with the European ancestors of the West.”¹⁴⁹ Even without such nods to European iconography, Renée de la Torre notes that the “*aztequización*” of older customs like the conchero dances was part of a process in which a wide variety of indigenous peoples and customs were “condensed into the imaginary of the Aztec Empire...which rather than paying homage to living indigenous groups reinforced the mythification of a glorious past.”¹⁵⁰

New Mexicans laid their own claim to Aztec glories in the late nineteenth century, though at first the main proponents of this claim seem to have been Anglo tourist boosters, who described the picturesque ruins of ancient cliff dwellings as stopping places on Montezuma’s journey south from the legendary Aztec homeland of Aztlán, which they located in northern New Mexico or Arizona.¹⁵¹ For obvious reasons Mexican nationalists do not care to trace their

¹⁴⁸ De la Torre, “Estética azteca de las danzas concheras,” 171-175. A photo he reproduces from the journal *Reforma* in 1953 shows Pineda carrying Milagros Inda in the culminating moment of a performance and perfectly matches Helguera’s painting (figure 2). The painting was made in 1943 and it is not clear when the photo was taken, so although Pineda was doing his dance before that date, his pictured pose and costume could have been influenced in turn by Helguera. Contrary to Pineda’s son’s description, the photo suggests some indigenous ancestry.

¹⁴⁹ Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity,” 462.

¹⁵⁰ De la Torre, “Tensiones” (my translation).

¹⁵¹ The Spanish chronicler José de Acosta described the rulers of central Mexico coming “from another remote land to the north, where now a Kingdom has been discovered, which is called New Mexico. There are two provinces there: one is called Aztlan, which means place of

Aztec roots to what is now the United States, but this narrative had deep meaning for the artists and activists of the Chicano movement, and in the 1960s they reclaimed Aztlán as a name for the Southwest.¹⁵² This discrepancy is a good example of how roots are traced according to current situation and ideology: In Mexico, Aztec symbols represent national pride, and Mexican immigrants in the United States display paintings of Aztec warriors alongside pictures of their home villages and landscapes as a symbol of their continued devotion to the land they left. By contrast, Chicanos use Aztec symbols to represent a primordial claim to the Southwest as their original homeland, countering the idea that they are immigrants from elsewhere.

Aside from the Aztec dancers Rodriguez mentions, I have found few examples of this iconography in New Mexico, but I have met many Chicanos in Los Angeles who refer to the Southwest in general and California in particular as Aztlán and describe themselves as descendants of the Aztecs and indigenous to the region. As with the Mexican nationalist formulations, the Chicano nationalist formulations have their share of critics. Rafael Pérez-Torres notes that Anglo newcomers in the nineteenth century characterized the earlier Spanish-speaking

herons.” (*Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*. Madrid: Pantaleon Aznar, 1762 [reprint of original edition, Sevilla 1590], 150.) Susan E. Wallace wrote in *The Land of the Pueblos* (New York: John B. Alden, 1888, 234) that a New Mexico cliff town and Zuni Pueblo were “the stopping places of Montezuma on his southward march to Anahuac...from fabled Azatlan,” adding, “all Pueblos love to call themselves sons of Montezuma.” William G. Ritch, in *Aztlan: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co, 1885, 5-6) relates a legend that “Montezuma was born at the pueblo of Teguayo (Santa Fe, according to Shea), of a young virgin, to whom was given three piñones... From the one which she ate, this great monarch was conceived and brought forth.” And Nostrand (*Hispano Homeland*, 15) writes that during the brief period when New Mexico was part of the Mexican republic an official in Santa Fe condemned earlier Spanish settlers for “oppressing” and “exterminating” the “Ancient Mexicans,” meaning the Pueblo Indians.

¹⁵² Vicki Lynn Ruiz writes that the poet Alurista “was the first to adopt the concept of Aztlán as a Chicano trope, inspired by a 1967 *Life* magazine story about the discovery of the altar of the Aztecs’ high temple in Mexico City, which described the Aztecs as coming south from Aztlán, an area in Northern Mexico or the southwestern U.S. The term became current following the publication of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, the manifesto of the Chicano Youth Liberation

settlers of the region as Indians rather than Europeans as an excuse to dispossess them of their land, and now descendants of those Spanish-speaking settlers are fighting to reclaim the land in part by arguing that they are the original, indigenous inhabitants of the region. He adds that this is particularly ironic because “many of the mestizos who, beginning in the seventeenth century, moved north into what would become New Mexico, California, Texas, and other states were actively involved in genocidal campaigns against Native populations. The unproblematic claim by Chicanos to indigenous ancestry thus helps erase a troubling part of the Chicano past in relation to Native peoples.”¹⁵³

I quote that not to equate Anglo and Chicano claims of ancestral rights or deny the validity of anyone’s pride in indigenous roots, but to highlight the ways formulations of roots are dependent on current formulations of identity. A Chicano in Los Angeles may never meet anyone non-Latino who traces indigenous roots in that region, while Hispanics in Taos are constantly interacting with people from local pueblos who speak locally indigenous languages. As a result, to learn Nahuatl or Aztec dancing in Los Angeles is typically framed as an assertion of local indigenous heritage, while in Taos its meaning is linked to a generalized conception of Mexican or Chicano pride. As in Mexico, such discrepancies have prompted critiques of Chicano *aztequización*. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo suggests that the Chicano embrace of Aztec heritage echoes official Mexican efforts to indigenize mestizo nationalism, “to resuscitate...this particular, defunct Mexican Indian culture and history to the exclusion of dozens

Conference organized in Denver in March 1969 by Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales.” (*Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 72-3.)

¹⁵³ Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Mestizaje: critical uses of race in Chicano culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006, 14.

of living indigenous cultures.”¹⁵⁴ Ana María Alonso notes the irony of Southwesterners seeking roots in “the language and culture of the ‘civilized’ Indians” of Central Mexico rather than “the so-called *indios bárbaros*” of the Southwest, a parallel to Díaz’s Grecianized statue of Cuauhtémoc that suggests a covert acceptance of European cultural standards.¹⁵⁵

Claims of Aztec roots are typically metaphoric: many people in the Southwest can provide intricate genealogies of Spanish forebears and I have never met anyone who traces a specific Aztec lineage. But both are important because they have meaning in the present and both have been criticized by people troubled by those meanings. All of us have complicated ancestries, however far back we can trace them, so the choice to accentuate one strand of our families’ histories is necessarily a simplification; but we also tend to have complicated reasons for making those choices, which are in turn simplified by people who disagree with us. It is true that some Chicanos who talk fervently about Aztlán have little interest in “living indigenous cultures,” but others have worked hard to forge links with people from those cultures. Likewise, some people undoubtedly trace Spanish roots as a way of positioning themselves as white, but I was struck by how often New Mexicans who looked European and spoke of their Spanish ancestry used the term “white” routinely and specifically for Anglos. Nor does everyone trace one or the other ancestry exclusively, and it would not be surprising if some Taoseños have paraded as flamenco dancers one year and Aztec dancers the next.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Saldaña-Portillo, Josefina. “Who’s the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from Lacandón,” in Ileana Rodríguez, *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*. Durham: Duke University, 2001, 416, 413.

¹⁵⁵ Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity,” 481.

¹⁵⁶ Some activists have firmly seized this middle ground: Reies López Tijerina, whose raid on the courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, was a defining act of the early Chicano movement, identifies as *Indo-Hispano*.

As for those who parade as Mexican folk dancers, mariachis, and charros, they are in a broad mainstream of Mexican tradition invented, reshaped, and homogenized in the interests of modern nationalism and to a great extent for export. The anthropologist Jesús Jáuregui begins his monumental study of mariachi by quoting Hobsbawm and asking, “Why have we Mexicans accepted as a supposedly centuries-old tradition a type of band and musical style that have hardly existed for half a century?”¹⁵⁷ Reaching back to the nationalist iconography of the mid-1800s, he answers that just as Aztec imagery represented a Mexican heritage on a par with Europe’s Greco-Roman past, folk-dancing troupes were sent abroad as evidence that three and a half centuries of interchange had created a rich national culture that seamlessly blended Spanish and Indian roots, producing colorful peasants who not incidentally bore a striking resemblance to the happy shepherds of European pastoral fantasies. (He adds that this formulation notably excluded the African slaves who also played a formative role in many of Mexico’s regional musics.)

The history of mariachi is particularly relevant to a study of ranchera because it shaped the core repertoire and continues to be the most universally recognized ranchera style. New Mexico musicians do not wear charro suits to play New Mexico music, but many have donned the costume to perform with mariachi accompaniment, and a nostalgic affection for the iconic mariachi singers of the mid-twentieth century unites virtually all ranchera fans across musical and geographic divides. That unity is directly connected to Mexico’s commercial entertainment industry and in particular to the dissemination of Mexican music throughout the Spanish-speaking world during the *época de oro* of Mexican cinema, a period normally dated from the mid-1930s and *Allá en el Rancho*

¹⁵⁷ Jáuregui, *Mariachi*, 17 (my translation).

Grande through the early 1950s, but that extended somewhat later for fans in the United States and rural areas of Northern Mexico. Moreno Rivas writes that “The youth [in Mexico] identified less and less with the commercial ranchera style and this [style] recruited its most numerous public in the provinces, in the *zonas chicanas* of the United States, and abroad, where it enjoyed the virtue of novelty and the representation of an autochthonous Mexico.”¹⁵⁸

In the Southwest, the spread of Mexican music was intimately connected with the popularity of Mexican films—Lalo Guerrero writes that when he toured with a mariachi in 1949, many of the listeners “had only seen mariachis in the movies.”¹⁵⁹ The most influential film star of the 1960s and 1970s was Antonio Aguilar, “El charro de México,” who made annual tours of the Southwest with a full Mexican rodeo. Aguilar was admired for his horsemanship as well as his singing, a badge of authenticity that distinguished him from most cinematic charros, and he is consistently the ranchera star remembered with greatest fondness by southwesterners who came of age in that period. (While presenting himself as *cien por ciento mexicano*, Aguilar astutely allied himself with cross-border musical trends, giving featured roles in 1974’s *La Muerte de Pancho Villa* to the tejano stars Sunny Ozuna and Freddie Martinez.)

Considering his commitment to rural authenticity, it is interesting that Aguilar was originally billed as Tony Aguilar and continued to use the English nickname among friends, though appearing professionally as Antonio.¹⁶⁰ This suggests how problematic it is to chart ranchera’s evolution as from rural Mexico

¹⁵⁸ Moreno Rivas, *Historia*, 199 (my translation).

¹⁵⁹ Guerrero and Meece Montes, *Lalo*, 106.

¹⁶⁰ Lobby cards for Mexican films consistently use the name Tony Aguilar until 1957, when he was briefly billed as Antonio (Tony) Aguilar, then switched to the Spanish name. He continued occasionally to be billed as Tony, especially in the United States: *Billboard* magazine called him that through the 1970s and a Texas *conjunto* album issued in the 1960s (Suave LP 724) was titled *Rancheras y corridos de Tony Aguilar*.

to urban commercialization to international popularity. There was constant cross-fertilization across regions, genres, and borders, and although rural Mexico—and rural New Mexico—was consistently portrayed as a cradle of authentic, archaic styles, artists often started with more cosmopolitan images and Mexicanized or ruralized themselves to fit current fashions. In his early career Pedro Infante was advertised as a “crooner” and his original theme song was Hoagy Carmichael’s “Stardust.”¹⁶¹ Jorge Negrete trained as an opera singer and ranchera historians ritually note the oddity of his transformation from a highbrow concert artist into an icon of rural mexicanidad.¹⁶² These transformations were conscious, commercial choices. Jáuregui notes that one of Negrete’s classic paeans to ranchera nationalism, “Yo soy mexicano,” was written in intentionally colloquial dialect, with the “ado” endings of its rhyming adjectives slurred into “bragao,” “montao,” “enamorado” (boastful, mounted, in love): “Ernesto Cortázar, the author of the lyric, emphasized the chopped termination in these precise final words, making imaginary reference to the chopped speech of the mestizos of western Mexico. The same logic obliged Jorge Negrete to reproduce the chopped pronunciation punctiliously and at times even to exaggerate it.”¹⁶³ As it happens, the same chopped pronunciation is emphasized by literate flamenco aficionados, who call a singer a *cantaor* and the scene of performance a *tablao*: rather than being specific to rural Mexico, it is a cliché of theatrical peasant speech that crosses oceans and genres.

The invention of modern mariachi was not exclusively an urban exercise;

¹⁶¹ Infante Quintanilla, José Ernesto, *Pedro Infante el máximo ídolo de México*. Monterrey, NL: Castillo, 1992, 22. He writes (19) that Infante was “contratado como ‘crooner’ en el prestigiado centro nocturno ‘Waikiki’.” Piporro recalls Infante being billed on radio as “El nuevo crooner de México” (González, *Autobiogr...ajúa*, 51).

¹⁶² In other transformations, Moreno Rivas (*Historia*, 188-9) writes that Miguel Aceves Mejía sang “boleros and afrocubana” before becoming a ranchera artist, and Francisco “el Charro” Avitia started out as a tango singer.

Jáuregui devotes much of his book to the rural mariachi bands that gave the style its name. But he emphasizes the constant interchange between city and country and the degree to which urban and rural musicians adopted sounds, songs, and instruments from one another, and the city's role as a meeting place for musicians from various rural areas who influenced one another, developing musical *koines* that continued to be heard as generically rural or folkloric but no longer represented a particular region. Despite the recurring discovery and celebration of rural styles by urban audiences, the centralization of commercial culture ensures that influence far more frequently flows out from the cities to the countryside. This includes urban styles that are framed as rural styles—an urban style framed as country or ranchera often has special appeal for people living in the country or on a rancho, especially if it reciprocally draws on styles that are local and familiar.

Rural singers often perform songs they recall learning from their parents or grandparents, but which are demonstrably influenced by specific commercial recordings—and although some folklorists decry this as commercial “contamination,” it involves no contradiction. Blues singers in the Mississippi Delta perform songs that were common in oral tradition before the recording era but took a more static form after becoming popular records—some distinctive local traits may survive, but the variants converge toward a version that will satisfy requests for a Muddy Waters or John Lee Hooker hit. Jáuregui found the same circular process among mariachis in Nayarít: he writes of hearing a band of old men in an isolated area playing an unfamiliar version of a song he had heard a thousand times, and realizing that what he had previously taken to be local versions of this song had been homogenized to match an urban, commercial

¹⁶³ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 118 (my translation).

cousin:

I am of the generation of rural Mexicans that grew up with mariachi songs on the radio, on the record players, in the movies, in the *cantinas*...and in the corrals and the river, where they were sung by washerwomen. We demanded that the interpretations of flesh and bone mariachis—when we allowed ourselves the luxury of paying them—matched the hits disseminated by the media of mass communication.¹⁶⁴

That is, some old songs that survived in local tradition and folklore were also learned from records, and the “folk” versions familiar to his generation tended to mimic the recorded versions. Nor is this a new process: professional songwriters and musicians have presumably been influencing non-professionals for as long as they have existed, and any folklorist can tell stories of finding commercial confections reinvented as local tradition. Héctor Vega writes that mariachi is largely “a media product...imposed on local and regional cultures,” but that does not mean it can be separated from traditional styles, since it has become part of the fabric of Mexican life, played at “fiestas and ritual celebrations, from a baptism to a burial, and from a village festival to the birthday of the richest impresario in Mexico or the president of the country.” Thus, “This music that is imposed from above, and that permeates all social levels, is a very interesting example of the creation of popular or folk music, and why not, of traditional music.”¹⁶⁵

The history of mariachi is integral to broader conceptions of musical *mexicanidad*. Jáuregui suggests that two main strains are blended in the modern

¹⁶⁴ Jáuregui, *Mariachi*, 16 (my translation).

¹⁶⁵ Vega, “La música tradicional mexicana,” 150 (my translation; I have translated “música popular” as “folk or popular music,” since in Spanish it means both).

style: the rural bands or dances known as *mariachi* or *mariache* in the nineteenth century and the urban *orquestas típicas*.¹⁶⁶ The latter were generally staffed by conservatory musicians and played formal compositions based on folk melodies, part of an international trend that blended modern nationalism with romantic nostalgia for vanishing rural lifestyles. From a transnational perspective it is significant that the first musical group to adopt charro wear seems to have been an *orquesta típica* formed by musicians and teachers of the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Mexico City to represent Mexico at the 1884 Universal Exposition and World's Fair in New Orleans, and the first charro-garbed band from Jalisco was the Orquesta Típica Jalisciense, whose publicity photograph announces that it was “organized expressly to take part in the Chicago exposition” of 1893.¹⁶⁷

The country is an invention of the city—it is where the city is not—and is often evoked by urbanites as representing their past. In comparisons of Mexico and the United States, the national identities often fuse with rural and urban identities, and with nostalgia and modernity. The spoken introduction to the prototypical film of Mexican illegal immigration, Alejandro Galindo's *Espaldas Mojadas* (1955), describes the river between Juárez and El Paso as a dividing line between “Mexico, where people still speak Spanish and sing to the Virgin with guitars” and, “on the other side, the skyscrapers, architectonic symbol of the most powerful country in the world, where all its inhabitants own a car, radio, and television.” In the background a guitar plays a simple waltz that evolves into a lilting bolero and then a jazzy blues, mimicking the simultaneous journeys from one nation to another, country to city, and past to future.

¹⁶⁶ Jáuregui (*El Mariachi*, 87) writes, “the assimilation of the mariachi with the *orquestas típicas* “reducidas”—with a maximum of twelve musicians—which began with the porfirian fiesta of 1907 in Chapultepec, continued [into the 1930s],” and notes that the caption to a photograph from 1936 of the Mariachi Coculense de Cirilo Marmolejo, the first major mariachi recording group, describes it as an *orquesta típica*.

The Mexican films of the *época de oro* had three main locations: the pastoral countryside of the *comedias rancheras*; the urban metropolis of Mexico City, where wealthy socialites danced to orchestras playing foxtrots and boleros; and the dangerous border cities where morality was sacrificed to the almighty dollar and young women inevitably went astray. All three were popular within Mexico, but the ranchera image was by far the most popular export—in large part because filmgoers who wanted to see evocations of wealth or sin were getting plenty of both from Hollywood. This competition made ranchera the most successful Mexican cinematic export while simultaneously pushing Mexican ranchera performers towards an international style that evoked a unique rural past but matched Hollywood production values.

Mariachi thus has deep roots in both rural music and urban romanticism, and by the time the style gelled in its modern form it had evolved considerably in its functions, repertoire, and instrumentation. In 1895 Ramos i Duarte's *Diccionario de mejicanismos* defined *mariache* as “Fandango, dance of village people,” and three years later his second edition changed the spelling to *mariachi* and added, “Amusement in which one dances and sings to the sound of an orchestra composed of two or three violins, a snare and a bass drum.”¹⁶⁸ Other instruments associated with the style included various relatives of the guitar (notably the *vihuela*, a four-stringed instrument similar to a ukulele, and the five-stringed *guitarra quinta de golpe*) and the large harp (*arpa grande*) that provided bass notes and was also played as a percussion instrument by a second musician beating on it with sticks. Drums became less common as the function of mariachis shifted from dance music to other forms of entertainment, and harps gradually fell

¹⁶⁷ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 52-3.

out of favor during the 1930s—though as usual this is largely a matter of terminology: rural bands in Michoacán still use *arpa grande* as their main instrument, but are not called mariachis. (Mariachi Vargas has also continued to use a harp, as have a few other mariachi orchestras.)

One can trace the commercial evolution of mariachi by following the most famous group in the genre, the Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, which originated in rural Jalisco in the late nineteenth century. When it made its first trip north in 1931 to play in Tijuana's Prohibition-era tourist venues, it was a quintet of three violins, harp, and *guitarra de golpe*, and Silvestre Vargas recalled that they could not afford the "elegant charro suits" of the orquestas típicas, so settled for the generic peasant garb favored by Mexican folk dancers: straw hats, loose white shirts and pants, and brightly colored sashes and bandanas.¹⁶⁹ He became the group's leader the following year, taking over from his father, and expanded it to eight musicians by adding vihuela, a fourth violin, and the bass *guitarrón*.¹⁷⁰ The band also acquired some simple charro costumes, bought with a loan from the municipal government of Tecalitlán. Stories of mariachis in this period are often intertwined with progressive politics and official sponsorship, and Mariachi Vargas was hired by the populist presidential candidate Lázaro Cardenas to play at campaign events in Michoacan, and then at his inauguration in Mexico City. There it appeared opposite the capital's premier orquesta típica, attracting the attention of that group's director, the composer Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, who brought the Vargas to XEW, Mexico's most popular radio station, which was

¹⁶⁸ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 48. This source cites numerous nineteenth century mentions of mariachis playing for dances, including one from 1888 saying, "tambora is heard for 400 yards in every direction" (41).

¹⁶⁹ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 87, 332.

¹⁷⁰ This instrumentation seems to have varied a bit. Jáuregui describes it on page 332 as including a *guitarra séptima* (a small guitar that has thirteen strings in seven courses) rather than a vihuela.

partnered with RCA-Victor records and evolved into the transnational media giant Televisa.

In the later 1930s the capital's mariachis profited from a combination of the Cárdenas government's populist sponsorship and the growing ranchera film industry. In the process they took on a less regional and more national character, adapting folk melodies from eastern Mexico and recent compositions by urban songwriters. The standard line-up of modern mariachi was developed in this period with the addition of trumpet—Mariachi Vargas initially resisted this trend, but by 1940 was forced to go along on orders from XEW's owner, Emilio Azcárraga.¹⁷¹ In essence the more successful urban mariachis were adopting the look and style of the older orquestas típicas: in a photograph of the Mariachi Vargas performing with Lerdo de Tejada's sixty-member Orquesta Típica de Policía de México in 1935, the orquesta musicians wear the elegant charro costumes later associated with mariachis, while the mariachi musicians wear plain white shirts, simple straw sombreros, and serapes draped over their shoulders (see figure 3).¹⁷² Within another decade most people seeing this picture would have described the huge group as a mariachi orchestra and wondered why the guys in front were dressing down.

¹⁷¹ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 334, quoting the group's original trumpeter, Miguel Martínez, who added that many listeners complained that trumpet did not fit in a mariachi, but they eventually got used to the sound.

¹⁷² Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 330-1.



Figure 3: Mariachi Vargas with the Orquesta Típica Lerdo de Tejada, 1935 (detail).

Mariachi Vargas was at the center of this evolution thanks to Rubén Fuentes, a classically trained violinist and pianist who joined the group in 1944 and shortly became its musical director. Fuentes rearranged the group's older repertoire and encouraged the musicians to learn to read music, making them more adaptable to the shifts of the radio, record, and film industries. He stopped performing with them in 1954 when he became artistic director for RCA-Victor's Mexican operations, but continued to guide the group, and by the 1970s they had recorded everything from boleros and polkas to orchestral overtures and pop tunes from South America and the United States.¹⁷³

Mariachi's history is thus a circular saga of reinventions and reappropriations, and an anecdote of a mariachero in Tucson, Arizona, suggests how the process continued to evolve north of the border: with a cassette of

¹⁷³ Jáuregui (*El Mariachi*, 347) provides a chart of the evolution of Mariachi Vargas, including an "approximate calculation" of the proportion of traditional *sones* in their repertoire, declining from 80% in the period before 1930 to 60% in 1930-1954, 40% in 1954-1975, and 10% since the 1970s.

Mariachi Vargas playing melodies from the opera *Carmen* in the background, a young trumpeter named Anthony Sanchez explained to an interviewer that he got into mariachi because his parents loved the music: “You are influenced by your parents at that age, and I wanted to sound like Herb Alpert... He was my idol. But then I heard...Mariachi Vargas and I said that sounds good too.”¹⁷⁴ Alpert’s Tijuana Brass had no Mexican or Latino members and no academic scholar would describe it as a mariachi, but it emulated mariachi iconography and steered new fans to the style, including some Mexican American fans—and its success in the early 1960s is likely what prompted the Mariachi Vargas to record songs like “Hello Dolly” and “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head.”

While the history of Mariachi Vargas is normally traced as I have done above, from village band to international stardom, a contrarian could start with those last two songs and trace the current band backwards via the Tijuana Brass and the world of international pop, connecting Fuentes, artistic director for RCA-Victor, with Alpert, president of A&M records, and observing how both managed to fuse modern pop styles with cinematic mexicanidad. Many modern mariachi musicians are descendants of rural village players, and many mariachi bands are still small local groups working for tips in restaurants or playing for family events. But Jáuregui suggests that “today’s elite mariachis, with the Vargas as a prototype, are perhaps a new version of the orquesta típica: Their members are reading musicians, they wear charro costumes, they play vernacular music from different regions of Mexico, they present themselves as representatives of the national music, and they appear in concerts for an audience that has come specifically to hear them.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Taylor, Lawrence J., and Maeve Hickey, *The Road to Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 1997, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 350.

Tradition is a process not only of invention but of simplification, constructing a stable past in which to root an unstable present, but when one bothers to look closely one finds that older ranchera identities were as complexly and confusingly constructed as their modern counterparts. Moreno Rivas writes that ranchera movies came directly out of the urban theater productions of the 1920s and at that time “the genre known as ‘*canción ranchera*’ was very far from the style inseparable from mariachi that we now know. In general, it was sung accompanied by piano, or a woodwind or string orchestra.”¹⁷⁶ Jáuregui also notes differences between the older orquestas and mariachis, singling out the psaltery (a sort of plucked zither) as an instrument “associated in a sonic and iconic manner with the Porfirian era” and completely omitted from mariachi groups¹⁷⁷—but there are exceptions to every rule, and in Pedro Infante’s *Ahí viene Martín Corona* José Alfredo Jiménez sings the title song accompanied by a mariachi orchestra in which psaltery is the main solo instrument. This orchestra also differs from modern mariachis in that the musicians wear cowboy garb, complicating the usual identification of the musical style with a particular region—Mexican films invariably show mariachis in charro costume if they are playing in an urban environment or the hills of Jalisco, but when films were set in the north both the protagonists and the musicians dressed in northern ranch wear.

I have already discussed some differences between charro and cowboy iconography, and the two styles of costume remain clearly distinct, but they share an important commonality: both are read as Mexican and regional, but not as Indian. Returning to the context of the Taos fiesta, Rodríguez placed the parading mariachis in an ethnic middle ground between Aztec and Spanish, and many writers have highlighted the extent to which the style has come to symbolize

¹⁷⁶ Moreno Rivas, *Historia*, 185.

mestizo culture, something all Mexicans potentially can share. Enrique Serna notes that this is not simply a matter of ethnicity: “The singing charro was a symbol of the reconciliation between two classes that had been separated by the revolution and that met again in the idyllic Mexico fabricated by our cinema: the music of the common people dressed itself in finery and the arrogant boss of the past assumed the personality of a charming bandit.”¹⁷⁸ That process was already happening well before the revolution, as “arrogant bosses,” be they Spanish colonizers, a French emperor, or the proudly mestizo dictator Porfirio Díaz, dressed as charros and hired orchestras playing formal arrangements of regional folk tunes as a means of assuming and asserting Mexican identity.

This practice had reciprocal advantages, since patronage of peasant music by wealthy elites provided rural musicians with opportunities for upward mobility and charro costumes transformed mariachis into miniature orquestas típicas. The clothes really did make the men: other styles of regional music remain strong in Mexico, including *son jarocho*, *son huasteco*, *trova yucateca*, and the harp-led music of Michoacan (which would once have been called *mariache*), but the charro costumes made modern mariachi not only a symbol of regional and rural tradition but a symbol of elegance. Not everyone was happy about that association: Cristina Palomar Vereá writes of a respected charro who was so disgusted at the adoption of the costume by musicians that he gave away his entire wardrobe,¹⁷⁹ and the *mariachólogo* Francisco Sánchez Flores writes, “I do not accept that our musicians now disguise themselves in charro costumes, because that was precisely the costume of the people who oppressed mariachis in the past: the mariacheros wore blankets and sandals. That disguise began with Porfirio

¹⁷⁷ Jáuregui, *El Mariachi*, 350.

¹⁷⁸ Serna, Enrique, “El charro cantor,” in Enrique Florescano, ed., *Mitos mexicanos*. Santillana, México: Nuevo Siglo, 1995, 190 (my translation).

Díaz.”¹⁸⁰

Jáuregui suggests that charro costuming conveys a multivalent message:

In the context of a complex and international society, charro attire displays, first of all, the local, the Mexican, as opposed to the foreign (the cowboy, the gaucho, the llanero). It proclaims, at the same time, a rural origin, because it is clothing for ranch work, and a rootedness in that soil in contrast with the more recent urban-modern. It demonstrates relative wealth, because it is luxury wear, not accessible to poor people. Wearing it marks a separation from indigenous peoples, because this clothing is a new world transformation of an Andalusian/Salamancan style.¹⁸¹

Many writers have connected charro symbolism to mestizo symbolism, often in ways that stress the erasure of indigenous Mexicans. Although Palomar Verea’s book celebrates the depth and value of charro culture, it includes a chapter titled, “La charrería: invented tradition, imaginary community, national symbol,” in which she writes that the charro image has become synonymous with generic *mexicanidad*, “recognized throughout the world as authentically Mexican, suppressing the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country.”¹⁸²

Any understanding of tradition, history, or roots necessarily includes some facts, omits others, and invests those inclusions and omissions with different meanings depending on one’s point of view. When I trace a history of mariachi, I am growing my own roots, nourishing and anchoring myself in a tradition of

¹⁷⁹ Palomar Verea, *En cada charro*, 122.

¹⁸⁰ Jáuregui, *Mariachi*, 153 (my translation). In 1956 the Asociaciones de Charros mounted a campaign to prevent musicians from wearing charro costumes, though with no apparent success (Jáuregui, 152).

¹⁸¹ Jáuregui, *Mariachi*, 152. The Spanish roots of the Mexican tradition are tangled and disputed, but the word *charro* means a native of Salamanca and there is a local *vestido de charro* that resembles the Mexican costume.

previous scholarship to explain why I have a particular understanding of the present. My understanding is affected by the fact that I did my initial work on ranchera in Mexico and the meanings of broad cultural concepts like Spanish, Mexican, Aztec, or Mestizo in Mexico City or Ciudad Juárez tend to be quite different than in Taos or Los Angeles, and also different from what the same words meant in any of those places in 1850 or 1930. Those broad differences may in turn be relatively insignificant compared to the differences in how individuals understand their personal relationships to the various concepts: whether they claim one or another of them, or all of them, or none of them. Any tradition matters not because it is old but because it is shared, and only to the extent one cares about the people who share it.

¹⁸² Palomar Vereá, *En cada charro*, 21 (my translation).

6. Passing, Loss, and Power

If the story of ranchera in the Southwest is necessarily concerned with the preservation of traditions of music, language, and identity, it is equally concerned with their potential loss. It is a commonplace that immigrant and minority groups are faced with pressures to assert and preserve their identities, but also to assimilate to a dominant mainstream. In that dichotomy assimilation is often equated with betrayal, abandonment, or loss of shared roots and identity, but that negative formulation is inherently paradoxical: any group identity requires assimilation to a norm, so the pressure not to assimilate to “them” is always simultaneously a pressure to assimilate to “us.” This paradox is at the heart of Appiah’s formulation of identity scripts. When people face barriers or discrimination as a group, some will react by trying to separate themselves from the group while others react by trying to band together. Appiah understands the value of the latter choice, but also the pressure it puts on individuals to submerge or deny their individuality:

If one is to be Black in a society that is racist then one has to deal constantly with assaults on one’s dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require being treated with equal dignity despite being Black, for that will require a concession that being Black counts naturally or to some degree against one’s dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected *as a Black*....

It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between the world of the closet and the

world of gay liberation, or between the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Black power, I would, of course, choose in each case the latter. But I would like not to have to choose.... Between the politics of recognition and the politics of compulsion, there is no bright line.¹⁸³

The concept of identity scripts is particularly relevant for artists and performers who seek to represent or attract particular audiences. Not even the most fervent nationalist would suggest that Mexican Americans should walk around in charro costumes or wear sombreros as a symbol of ethnic pride, but Mexican American musicians are frequently asked or required to don such attire. The symbolism of traditional costumes can be even more important on alien turf than at home, which is presumably why the first bands to dress as charros were representing Mexican culture in the United States and high school or college mariachi bands in full regalia are common in the Southwest but virtually nonexistent in Mexico. But along with the obvious costuming discussed in the previous chapter—Aztecs, conquistadors, and mariachis—efforts to display or fit homogenized ethnic identities are exercised at very intimate levels and can be confoundingly multivalent. A look at the early history of one of the most internationally influential ranchera groups, the Trio Los Panchos, suggests some of the choices performers have to make and the difficulty of judging when assimilation is a matter of cultural loss or passing and when it is a matter of pride and personal expression.

The original members of Los Panchos met in New York in the early 1940s. Hernando Avilés, a Puerto Rican, was singing with a partner as the Dueto Azteca—a name that suggests it was good business for Latino singers in that time

¹⁸³ Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival," in Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism:*

and place to assimilate to an iconic *mexicanidad* whatever their personal backgrounds. Meanwhile, Jesus “Chucho” Navarro and Alfredo “Güero” Gil were singing with a group led by Gil’s brother, El Charro Gil y los Caporales—a name recalling *Alla en el Rancho Grande*, in which the prototypic singing charro was rewarded for his virtues by becoming foreman (*caporal*) of a ranch. When the three decided to form a trio, Gil and Navarro began by drilling Avilés in Mexican phonetics, “to unify their accents and idioms, since they presented themselves as charros.”¹⁸⁴

The group’s name was a pastiche of symbols and stereotypes: originally known as Los Tres Panchos, they recalled naming themselves for the Revolutionary heroes Pancho Villa and Francisco (Pancho) Madero, but also for Pancho Pistolas, the charro-garbed rooster who led a guided tour of Mexico in Walt Disney’s then-current cartoon feature, *The Three Caballeros* (which used an English-language adaptation of Jorge Negrete’s “Jalisco no te rajes,” as a theme song). The film was a wartime evocation of Pan-American unity, portraying Mexico as a tourist-friendly blend of tradition and modernity, folk dancers and singing charros alternating with bikinied bathing beauties and sophisticated urbanites. Like the cartoon rooster, Los Panchos were trading on ranchera stereotypes, including a name that was already a stereotype in itself, though in retrospect they tried to put a positive spin on this: “‘Pancho’ was a derogatory term that the *estadounidenses* used for Mexicans and they wanted to use it positively and reverse its significance.”¹⁸⁵

The formation of Los Panchos thus involved assimilation to various notions

Examining the Politics of Recognition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1994, 161, 163.

¹⁸⁴ Fernández, *Los Panchos*, 28 (my translation).

¹⁸⁵ Fernández, *Los Panchos*, 29 (my translation). The rooster is named Panchito in the English language film credits, but was Pancho Pistolas in Mexico, where his image is still used as a symbol of the Mexican Air Force.

of *mexicanidad*, and Avilés was not the only member for whom this process was somewhat difficult. Gil was of Lebanese descent and “had a prominent nose that gave him a terrible complex, for which reason, seeing that the trio was succeeding, he underwent a first round of cosmetic surgery.”¹⁸⁶ Juan Flores has argued that the “growing-together” of Latinos in the United States is not a form of assimilation, since it is “not directed toward incorporation into the dominant culture,”¹⁸⁷ but Gil’s nose job exemplifies the problem with this formulation. Any complex society has multiple layers of dominant cultures, and while Gil presumably wanted to look like a cinematic charro rather than an Anglo, this involved an operation that any Jewish American will recognize as a cliché of assimilation. He was trying to lose his Middle Eastern phenotype and although one could argue that the norm he was assimilating to should be called *mestizo* rather than European, in the Mexican context that is often a distinction without a difference. Gil’s nickname, Güero, means blonde, and his partners recalled that one of the difficulties of working with him was “the bad disposition that Alfredo had toward people with brown skin, even occasionally calling Chucho ‘el negro,’ and going so far as to publicly protest: ‘What do you make of it that I, a white man, have to work for a negro...’ Although he said it jokingly, it was what he felt.”¹⁸⁸

As that quotation suggests, there were stresses within the group, and in 1951 Avilés quit during a South American tour and was replaced by a Bolivian named Raúl Shaw Boutier—except that Gil and Navarro insisted that he adopt the name Moreno because Boutier “sounded too French”—Navarro adding that Moreno, which was his own maternal surname, also fitted Shaw’s dark skin

¹⁸⁶ Fernández, *Los Panchos*, 30 (my translation).

¹⁸⁷ Flores, Juan, “‘Que Assimilated, Brother, Yo Soy Asimilao’: The Structuring of Puerto Rican Identity in the U.S.,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 13:3, 1985, 11.

color.¹⁸⁹

While the “growing-together” of Latinos in the United States is obviously different from the assimilation of immigrants to an Anglo norm, it does not follow that one kind of assimilation necessarily requires more effort or sacrifice than the other. In linguistic terms, the two options are analogous to adopting a new language versus forming an immigrant koine. When the children of Mexican immigrants replace their parents’ Spanish with English they are clearly doing something different than when they replace their parents’ Spanish with a north-of-the-border Spanish koine. But when the children of Zapotec-speaking Oaxaqueños assimilate to a Mexican American norm by learning the street Spanish of East Los Angeles, they are arguably closer to the former model than the latter. And where on that spectrum would one place children of Spanish-speaking New Mexicans who travel to Mexico to learn “proper” Spanish rather than the *mocho* or archaic varieties spoken by their grandparents?

Such complexities are often obscured by value-weighted terms like *assimilation*, *passing* or *loss*, and such terms are particularly treacherous when they purport to be value-neutral. When people speak of the “loss” of a tradition, language, or musical style, they are not only describing a change but also making a judgment about what a person or community should maintain or possess. Whenever I give a talk on blues history, some member of my typically white audience can be relied on to ask, “Why don’t young African Americans listen to blues?” There are many possible answers to that question, but the questioners are

¹⁸⁸ Fernández, *Los Panchos*, 50 (my translation).

¹⁸⁹ Fernández, *Los Panchos*, 50 (my translation). According to a Wikipedia biography (http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ra%C3%BA1_Shaw_Moreno, accessed 2/20/13), the other group members wanted him to change his name to Raúl Moreno, but he refused and as a compromise called himself Raúl Shaw “Moreno,” only later removing the quotation marks. The name Shaw was from his father, who was half Irish, and Boutier from his mother Clotilde, a surname that suggests her family was proud of its French heritage.

never similarly puzzled by their own lack of interest in the music of their own ancestors. We do not tend to think of the ways in which we differ from our parents as what we have lost, nor do we tend to think of the ways in which we fit into our communities as passing or assimilation. When we do think in those terms it reflects not the fact of change or fellowship, but our perceptions of group membership—one “grows together” with us, but “assimilates” to them. That in turn reflects our perception of broader power relationships: we choose to come together despite the forces trying to separate us, which are also the forces that pressure us to assimilate to a dominant culture.

One can try to be conscious of the power relationships that inform people’s choices of language, music, and identities, but inevitably will misunderstand those relationships in some situations. I started this project with a much simpler understanding of the word Chicano than I have now, having always thought of it as a positive term as well as an oppositional one—a term of pride in a situation of struggle—but I kept being struck by shadings of the word that suggested other understandings. Yvette Doss, writing of Chicano rockers in Los Angeles, noted that for some people the term “conjures up unpleasant connotations,” before adding:

[T]he Chicano that the Los Angeles underground music scene participants use to describe themselves is not *that* Chicano...not the Chicano of the lowrider-cruising, tear drop tattoo-bearing, oldies-loving, urban warriors of the 1960s and 1970s. Not the loud talking, big haired, raccoon-eyed, comb-in-back-pocket Chicanas with the *pinto* boyfriends who made their

Mexican mothers wring their hands with worry.”¹⁹⁰

I was surprised by that description and interpreted it as a class judgment: middle class rockers claiming the intellectual activist Chicano identity while rejecting an identity they perceived as a lower class stereotype. But I was startled yet again to read Pablo Vila writing of a man who had worked his way out of the El Paso barrio into a comfortable suburban life and dismissed the politically active “Chicano movement and ideology” as a cover for personal irresponsibility: “He perceives Chicanos as...the sort of people who build a whole political argument simply to hide their true nature—laggards and drunks who are unwilling to work hard (as he did) to succeed.”¹⁹¹

I heard an interpretation somewhere between those two extremes from Louie Pérez, the manager of M.E.L. Music store in Albuquerque’s Barelás neighborhood, the traditional heart of the city’s barrio. When I asked him how he identified himself ethnically, Pérez laughed and said, “New Mexican. But when you asked me as a teenager, I would have said Chicano.” He still had an obvious affection for the barrio culture Doss decried, complete with bandanas and lowriders, but also felt he had outgrown it.

Those formulations are each quite different, and I do not mean to suggest that Doss, Pérez, and Vila’s businessman are in the same cultural or ideological camp, but all include a similar sense of “*that* Chicano” as a lower class stereotype, and to that extent reflect the standards of Flores’s dominant culture. Does that mean they are “assimilating,” in the sense of distancing themselves from their culture and accepting the standards of another? Vila’s businessman and Pérez both grew up with friends and family members who became “*that* Chicano” and

¹⁹⁰ Doss, Yvette. “Choosing Chicano in the 1990s: The Underground Music Scene of Los(t) Angeles,” *Aztlán* 23 (2), Fall 1998, 194.

¹⁹¹ Vila, “Polysemy,” 120-1.

presumably see themselves as having chosen not to take the same path, both have pursued paths that are respected within what Flores would call “the dominant culture,” and Vila specifically writes that his businessman “refers to himself as ‘Hispanic,’ having embraced the acculturation-assimilation discourse.” But Pérez has chosen to spend his life in Barelás managing a store that sells Mexican, Tejano, and New Mexico music. And Doss rejects a particular Chicano stereotype, but firmly embraces identities she variously labels Latina, Chicana, or half-Mexican.

By contrast, in a study of language and identity among undocumented Mexican immigrants, Char Ullman writes of Juan Ramírez, an immigrant from Jalisco who personally identifies as a *vaquero* and likes to dress in fancy cowboy gear (“cream colored straw cowboy hat, rattlesnake-skin boots, jeans, and belt buckle decorated with the Virgin of Guadalupe”), but says it would be too dangerous to dress that way in his daily life because it would mark him as Mexican. Instead, he dresses in a way he labels *cholo* and Ullman labels Chicano or more specifically “Chicano gang member,” sporting “a shaved head, baggy pants, and a T-shirt that shouts ‘Chicago Bulls,’” and he speaks English with the slang and inflections of Tucson’s cholo culture. Ullman writes that Ramírez does not think of himself as cholo or Chicano and indeed regards Chicanos as prejudiced against Mexicans, but has adopted this “counterfeit identity” as a means of self-preservation:

Impersonating a White person...is a performance that is not yet available to him. While phenotypically Juan could pass as white, he knows few White men, so the power/knowledge needed to pass as White is not yet within his reach....The discourse of the Chicano citizen is an excluded discourse in the larger world, but it

is within Juan's purview. He uses it strategically, to position himself more safely in the global arena.¹⁹²

The situation Ullman describes is by no means unique. Already in the era of 78 recordings (before the 1950s) the Conjunto Hermanos Rojo recorded a song in Los Angeles called "El pocho" about a Mexican immigrant who is passing for that era's equivalent of Chicano:

"Allí viene el pocho," me grita la gente,
 Cuando en mi moto me miran pasar.
 Pues nadie sabe que yo ando de alambre,
 Porque español no me oyen hablar.¹⁹³

("There comes the pocho," the people yell at me/ When they see me passing on my motorbike./ Nobody knows that I'm an undocumented immigrant [*andar de alambre* (to go by wire fencing), like the more common *andar de mojado*, is a reference to slipping across the border]/ Because they don't hear me speaking Spanish.)

Like the character in this song, Ramírez was not assimilating to what is normally regarded as a dominant culture, nor did he express admiration for the culture whose aspects he assumed. He was passing for cholo, a modern version of "that Chicano," for purely practical purposes. As Ullman frames his choice, an identity the dominant culture regards as the most disreputable variety of Latino—the gangbanger—is nonetheless an advantageous identity for him because it includes citizenship and is within reach, and she quotes Foucault: "We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a

¹⁹² Ullman, "English matters," 242, 244-6.

multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.”¹⁹⁴

One of Vila’s central themes is the ways people formulate and reformulate their relationships to social categories, and in particular the categories of Mexican and non-Mexican. Analyzing conversations among residents of El Paso, he writes that the meaning of “Mexican” constantly shifted depending on the situation, the subject being discussed, and whether the speakers were describing “us” or “them.” He recorded negative comments about Mexicans from both Anglos and Mexican Americans, but in the former case “Mexican” was typically an ethnic stereotype independent of current nationality while in the latter it referred specifically to people in or recently arrived from Mexico. Likewise both Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans made comments like “Mexicans care more deeply about their families,” but for the former this was often a national rather than ethnic affiliation distinguishing them from Chicanos, while Mexican Americans were distinguishing themselves and Mexican nationals from Anglos.¹⁹⁵

Vila noted that in situations where Mexican Americans did not associate themselves with recent immigrants or “the Mexico they see every day across the border,” they tended to “displace geography by history and link their pride in Mexico and its culture to a Mexico and culture that no longer exist, a Mexico and Mexican culture of the past.”¹⁹⁶ The past is proverbially a foreign country and there is no inherent contradiction in maintaining one’s allegiance to that country while denying one’s allegiance to a modern nation that happens to occupy the same geographical location. Just as New Mexicans who trace their ancestry to

¹⁹³ Quoted in Gurza et al., *Arhoolie Foundation*, 108.

¹⁹⁴ Ullman, “English matters,” 246.

¹⁹⁵ Vila, “Polysemy,” 111.

Juan de Oñate can legitimately argue that although he was born in Zacatecas he was not Mexican—in 1550 there was no nation called Mexico, nor was he of indigenous *Mexica* ancestry—people can legitimately take pride in their heritage as Aztecs, conquistadors, or mariachis and yet feel no kinship with Juan Ramírez’s land of young cowboys dancing to banda, tecno, or *música duranguense*.

The sociolinguist David Block refers to “the metaphor of loss,” pointing out that when one describes people as having lost their language it implies that “their language” is something that “exists as a freestanding entity,” separate from the way they talk.¹⁹⁷ The metaphor suggests that people have ceased to be themselves, or at least became less themselves as they changed, and such formulations are particularly common when change is generational and complicated by migration. However, it obscures the fact that people cannot help but be themselves—though they can easily resemble or differ from other people in ways that they regret or that the other people resent. Whether someone who listens to tecno rather than mariachi has lost his connection to Mexican culture or kept up with Mexican culture is a matter of how one defines Mexican culture. The feeling that one has lost touch with one’s roots, or that one’s children or peers have lost touch with their roots, is common and often painful, but it requires a degree of amnesia, since we are all guilty of having lost an infinite range of ancestral customs and languages. Many people of Mexican ancestry in the United States do not speak Spanish and very few speak Nahuatl or any other indigenous language, but by the

¹⁹⁶ Vila, “Polysemy,” 133.

¹⁹⁷ Block, David. “On the Appropriateness of the Metaphor of Loss,” in Peter K. W. Tan and Rani Bubdy, *Language as Commodity: Global Structures, Local Marketplaces*. New York: Continuum, 2008. Mendoza-Denton and Zentella have similarly argued that approaches to linguistics that highlight loss or language shift potentially “disparage” the agency of individual speakers (Mendoza-Denton, Norma, “Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology of US Latinos,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28, 1999, 386).

same token very few people of British ancestry speak Saxon, Gaelic, Welsh, or Norman French.

That analogy is arguably somewhat simplistic in that it ignores the exercise of power. The evolution of a language that remains dominant in a society is different from the experience of being forced to adopt a new language when one enters a new society or is conquered by it. But it is equally simplistic to assume children are losing rather than asserting an identity when they differ from their parents. José Limón quotes a report from 1931 of a Mexican immigrant to El Paso who was upset that his children listened only to “American jazz,” and frames this as part of a process of cultural colonialism by which not only the immigrant’s descendants but “eventually Mexico itself, [would] come to know both baseball and boxing, as well as Barbie and rock-and-roll.”¹⁹⁸ As a historian of American pop music I was struck by this example, since many Anglo parents in the United States were equally upset by their children’s musical choices in both the jazz age and the era of rock ’n’ roll. It is not unusual for Mexican Americans to equate modernity with the United States and tradition with Mexico, and indeed there are many Mexicans who make the same equation. But although commercial culture flows disproportionately from the United States, older regional styles all over the world are being wiped out by the products of Los Angeles and New York, and the hegemony of American mass culture is supported by the power of the dollar and the US military, all of that does not negate the evolution of youth styles both within and outside that framework.

When one speaks of someone losing a language or tradition, the implication is that a change happened through carelessness rather than choice. But as Janet Carsten has written, people create their identities, their kinship groups, their

communities, and their histories through a combination of remembering and forgetting, and both are active processes. To join new groups, people have to erase or blur the boundaries and attributes of old groups, and although some aspects of that process are always more conscious than others, Carsten argues that “rather than seeing forgetting in negative terms as a loss,...it is a crucial part of the way identity is actively acquired.”¹⁹⁹ Part of the process by which mariachi music became a shared Mexican tradition was people forgetting what their ancestors played before mariachi, and New Mexico music fans think of the current styles as traditional because they chose to forget about the local fiddle tunes.

Framing change as loss and blaming that loss on the influence of a dominant culture suggests inexorable movement in one direction. Folklorists who collected and treasured the old New Mexico fiddle repertoire see the shift to electric bands playing pop songs as a musical equivalent to the loss of local Spanish. But the New Mexico guitarist Henry Ortíz, remembering the rural fiddle repertoire of his youth in the 1930s, described it as “just like the old [Anglo] western music from the old days, almost the same kind of music.”²⁰⁰ That makes sense not only because local Spanish styles were undoubtedly influenced by Anglo music heard on radio, records, and from live bands, but also because the “western” half of Anglo country and western was to a great extent adapted from Mexican or Hispanic styles. George Lipsitz writes:

Traditional arguments about immigration, assimilation, and acculturation assume that immigrants choose between two equally

¹⁹⁸ Limón, José E. *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1998, 55-6.

¹⁹⁹ Carsten, Janet (1995). “The Politics of Forgetting: Migration, Kinship and Memory on the Periphery of the Southeast Asian State,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1:2, 318.

accessible cultures that are clearly differentiated and distinct from one another. But what if immigrants leave a country that has been shaped by its colonizers and enter one that has been shaped by those it colonized?...Which culture do the immigrants carry with them? Into which culture do they assimilate?²⁰¹

Is a New Mexican recovering, asserting, or abandoning his own culture when he chooses to play mariachi music—which arrived in the area through the commercial power of the Mexican film and entertainment industry in the mid-twentieth century—rather than country and western styles that evolved through more than a century of interactions between Anglos and Hispanics in the Southwest? When Al Hurricane switched from singing Hank Williams songs or playing “Hideaway” to performing the latest Spanish-language hits from Texas or Mexico City, was he asserting or losing touch with his musical roots? Does he return to his roots when he sings Italian songs, recalling the Italian great-uncles he heard in his childhood but imitating the inflections of a record by Luciano Pavarotti? Where on the continuum of cultural colonialism and cultural preservation do we place people who claim a heritage as “theirs” that arrived from elsewhere backed by international capital, yet differs significantly from that of the dominant Anglo society, yet is displacing the music or language of their parents and grandparents? For New Mexico musicians or Mexican immigrant rappers in Los Angeles, is the “dominant culture” represented by MTV or Televisa, Nashville or Miami?

When I first heard New Mexico music, I tended to file the ranchera songs as more local or at least more Hispanic than the rock ’n’ roll covers, especially

²⁰⁰ Henry Ortíz interview, Santa Fe, NM, 25 Oct 2012.

²⁰¹ Lipsitz, George. *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*. New York: Verso, 1994, 126.

considering the latter's note-for-note imitations of familiar guitar solos. But as I became more familiar with the repertoire I noted that the one rock song played by virtually every group was "Brown-Eyed Girl," and although no one could explain why that song was unique, a friend suggested a likely answer when he asked, "Do you think it would be equally popular if it was called 'Blue-Eyed Girl?'" As with Chuck Berry's veiled assertion of black pride, "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," the song is part of a broader discourse of "brown is beautiful" and was a national hit in 1972 for El Chicano, one of the most successful Los Angeles bands associated with the Brown Pride movement—though New Mexico musicians consistently play Van Morrison's arrangement rather than El Chicano's.²⁰² Seen this way, "Brown Eyed Girl" becomes a perfect example of Fernando Ortíz's *transculturation*, reshaping the product of a dominant culture to express the feelings of a subordinated culture.²⁰³

Even without making that case, one can argue that as a Chicano oldie "Brown-Eyed Girl" is an example of cultural retention rather than cultural loss. The song presumably arrived in Northern New Mexico at roughly the same moment as Al Hurricane's revival of "La múcura," and its languages, both lyrical and musical, were no more foreign—even for older Hispanos who speak Spanish as their first language, the words "brown," "eye," and "girl" are as familiar as "múcura," and rock 'n' roll became common in the region a generation before cumbia or other tropical rhythms. Nor is it necessarily easier to distinguish loss

²⁰² Cuarenta y Cinco plays the Van Morrison arrangement, but like El Chicano sings "sha-la-la, ay querida" in place of Morrison's "sha-la-la-la-la-tee-dah." All the other bands I heard in New Mexico used the Morrison lyric. Tiny Morrie recorded the song with his own Spanish lyric as "Mi primer amor," using the "ay querida" tag, and this rather than El Chicano's record may have been Cuarenta y Cinco's source for the single word of Spanish.

²⁰³ Ortíz, Fernando, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2002, 254. One could also argue that "Brown-Eyed Girl" was originally the product not of a dominant international pop culture but of a 1960s counter-culture that included both Van Morrison and El Chicano.

from retention among more recent immigrants. Helena Simonett argues that Mexican newcomers are not “immigrants in the traditional sense,” but rather “transmigrants who remain attached to and empowered by a ‘home’ culture and tradition...[and] have not only retained a strong sense of cultural identity, [but] also fashion their new place so as to feel at home.”²⁰⁴ However, being “empowered by a home culture” is often very different from fashioning a place where one “feels at home.” Simonett is best known for her work on Los Angeles banda music and *quebradita* dancing, which were unquestionably embraced by immigrant youths as symbols of their Mexican roots, but the music, dance, and fashions that swept Los Angeles were quite different from anything their parents had known in Mexico.

A further complication is that definitions of Mexican, Hispanic, and Chicano in the Southwest are by no means the sole province of Latinos, whether newly arrived or long-established. One of the paradoxes of cultural colonialism and dominance is that colonists or dominators, rather than wanting to impose their own culture on everyone, often are the most eager preservationists of the cultures whose power they have displaced. Rodriguez writes that in the early twentieth century the Anglo arts community in Taos fought to prevent the construction of non-adobe houses or the paving of local streets, often in opposition to Hispano community leaders,²⁰⁵ and Sarah Deutsch writes that during the New Deal the Anglo community “channel[ed] relief funds for Hispanic areas into such projects as Spanish colonial crafts training.” According to Deutsch, this attempt to turn modern Hispanos into at best curators and at worst exhibits in a sort of living museum was intended as both “the economic salvation of the Hispanic villages,

²⁰⁴ Simonett, “Quest for the Local,” 121-2.

²⁰⁵ Rodríguez, Sylvia. “Art, Tourism, and Race Relations in Taos: Toward a Sociology of the Art Colony.” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 45(1), 1989, 88.

and the spiritual salvation of modern America,” but ignored the fact that many of the people being “helped” were eager to pave their streets and replace their needlework and adobe ovens with sewing machines and stoves: “those very Anglos most convinced of the benefits of cultural pluralism...labeled Hispanic choices ‘naïve.’ They lamented the disappearance of the picturesque black shawls and the appearance of cars... [and] feared that if left to themselves, villagers would become ‘average installment plan sub-Rotarian middle-class Americans.’”²⁰⁶

While researching this book, I was often urged by folklorists to study New Mexico fiddle tunes and corridos instead of (or at least along with) the music that is currently popular at local dances. Such traditionalist or preservationist views are not unique to Anglos, by any means. But there is often a correspondence between anti-assimilationist ardor and access to power—which, seen from another perspective, may be considered its own sort of assimilation. The less one is limited by one’s cultural background, the easier it is to see it as one’s cultural background. When the children of Spanish-speaking migrants or Hispanic farmers go to college and try to get in touch with their roots by learning Nahuatl or joining a mariachi orchestra, those choices are part of an expansion of their self-conception that might not have been available if they had been less skilled in negotiating the dominant Anglo system. The symbiosis of distancing and reclamation is one of the paradoxes of tradition: it was in Mexico City rather than the countryside that sombreros became symbols of *mexicanidad*—although sombreros were not worn there—and that is normal, because sombreros had to be unusual before they could be symbolic.

Sombreros also became symbolic because an urban Mexican elite had

²⁰⁶ Deutsch, Sarah. *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic*

become proud of not being Spanish. Previous writers have noted the irony that in the same period when “New Mexicans were cultivating their Spanishness, Mexicans in Mexico were cultivating their Mexicanness, so by the 1920s it was no less insulting to call a Mexican ‘Spanish’ than it was to call a Spanish-American ‘Mexican.’”²⁰⁷ This can be thought of in terms of identity and heritage, but also in terms of language: the words “Spanish” and “Mexican” had acquired different meanings—at least for some people—in Mexico than in New Mexico. This is part of the process by which we define shared languages, distinguishing Pocho Spanish or Chicano English from Mexico City Spanish or Boston English. It is also a frequent source of confusion when someone who understands one meaning of a word does not realize, or will not accept, that it means something different to someone else.

A corollary to that observation is that identities are simply ways of talking about groups of people, and thus are as mutable as their names. No one is Mexican or Spanish except to the extent we agree on what those words mean, and as the meanings of the words change, identities change with them. Spaniards did not become Mexican when they arrived in Mexico, nor did their children necessarily become Mexican when they were born in what we now call Mexico, even if their mother was indigenous. They became Mexican when they began to think of themselves as Mexican or when other people thought of them as Mexican, and only to that extent. This is not to deny the power of naming, but on the contrary is a way of emphasizing it. When Clifford Geertz wrote that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,”²⁰⁸ Sidney Mintz responded, “if humanity gives meaning to the objective world, with

Frontier in the American Southwest 1880-1940. New York: Oxford, 1987, 208, 189.

²⁰⁷ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 16, citing Ruth Laughlin Baker.

²⁰⁸ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, 5.

different sets of meaning for different human groups, one must still ask how this is done and by whom.” Mintz added that even when people seem to share a common terminological web, “agreeing on what something *is* is not the same as their agreeing on what it *means*.... the assumption of a homogeneous web may mask, instead of reveal, how meanings are generated and transmitted. This is perhaps the point where meaning and power touch most clearly.”²⁰⁹

Any formulation of identity is an assertion of power, and if it includes other people it is an assertion of power over them. That is why people fight so fiercely over ethnic terminology, over whether they (or others) are to be called Chicano, Hispanic, Mexican, Spanish, Latino, American, or Aztec. None of those words has a single, universally accepted meaning, and no one claiming legitimacy for one of them would accept all the meanings associated with it. Concepts like loss, passing, and assimilation assume a degree of stability for terminological categories: someone can only lose their language if “their language” exists as something stable and separate from their speech; someone can only pass for white or Anglo if being white or Anglo is a stable category to which they do not in fact belong; someone can only assimilate to a group if the group is stable at least to the point of not previously including them. But no word is stable: *Chicano* means very different things to southwesterners who claim it as a badge of pride, to their neighbors who consider it an ethnic slur directed at an immigrant underclass, and to Mexicans who use it to mean people who have assimilated to the culture of the United States.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Mintz, Sidney W., *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking, 1985, 157-8.

²¹⁰ José Limón writes that when activist college students in Texas began using the term *Chicano* it was intended as a gesture of solidarity with the Mexican underclass, but alienated many of the people the students were trying to represent, who considered the word an ethnic slur that, like “nigger,” could only be used positively within an intimate in-group. (Limón, José E. “The Folk Performance of “*Chicano*” and the Cultural Limits of Political Ideology,” in Richard Bauman

We cannot escape the power of naming by renaming, nor can we escape it by the rhetorical sleight of denying that words have meaning. But we can at least mitigate it by accepting the realities of multilingualism and translation. All conversations require assimilation: we adapt our mode of communication to the people with whom we are attempting to communicate, or at least to our conception of those people, even if our only intention is to tell them to leave us alone. By the same token, any conversation involves recognition of difference: even if we do not end every sentence with “you know what I mean?” we are aware of the possibility that someone may not. At the most basic level, this is why all formulations of language, of ethnicity, of culture, or of musical style are inherently flawed. There are always commonalities and divergences, even in the most intimate or most painful interchanges, and always the possibility of recognizing or asserting unity or difference.

7. Borders, Bilingualism, and Third Spaces

“Geographically the Southwest U.S. is one with the northern portions of Mexico and wars do not alter the facts of geography.”

--Carey McWilliams²¹¹

“Bilingualism is not only between English and Spanish; it’s a universal situation.”

--Tato Laviera²¹²

A cowboy rides down the main street of a dusty frontier town, pushes through the swinging doors of a saloon, and orders a bottle of liquor. Three toughs at a side table try to start trouble, but he dazzles them with his fast draw and they back down. He has come to see the saloon singer he loves, but a rival appears and challenges him to a duel. Our hero walks out to the dusty main street, honorably ready to kill or die, but his enemy treacherously shoots him in the back.

Thus begins *El terror de la frontera*, a western from 1963 starring Eulalio González, “El Piporro.” It is a Mexican western and the singer is a mariachi star, Lucha Villa, but if one were watching with the sound off it could easily be mistaken for one of the thousands of Hollywood westerns set in Texas, New Mexico, or Arizona. Most of the actors look European American—the heroine is blonde—and the few who are dark-skinned or Indian-featured tend to be treated as comic stereotypes, like the lazy Mexicans in Anglo westerns.

Piporro was born in northern Mexico and appeared in several movies about

²¹¹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 208.

²¹² Hernández, Carmen Dolores. *Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997, 81.

border issues including *Espaldas mojadas* (Wetbacks, 1955), *El bracero del año* (Bracero of the Year, 1964), and *El pocho* (1970). So it is not surprising that some writers have translated the title of *El terror de la frontera* into English as *The Terror of the Border*.²¹³ However, the plot does not include any references to the border, but is set on the mythic frontier where heroic cowboys traded bullets with ferocious desperados and dusky Indians. It is clearly influenced by Hollywood westerns, which were so popular in Mexico that some songs from the mid-twentieth century refer to the southwestern United States as “el west.”²¹⁴ Since the mythic Wild West is associated all over the world with Anglo cowboy novels, songs, and movies, it is easy to frame it as an Anglo invention and to see Spanish-speaking southwesterners as victims or bystanders in a story of Anglo exploration, pioneering, or conquest. Rosa Linda Fregoso writes:

If we translate the Spanish word for border, *frontera*, literally into the English “frontier,” we open up its ... usage in the Anglo-American imaginary. A central trope of Anglo-American desire for conquest and westward expansion, “frontier” metaphorically signifies “no-man’s-land” (better yet, “no-white-man’s-land,” as in the Western genre), namely territories outside of white men’s jurisdiction and, therefore, land available for private appropriation.²¹⁵

Fregoso goes on to argue that the dual readings of *frontera* as “border” and “frontier” mutually reinforce a history of Anglo expropriation and domination,

²¹³ This translation is used in Ragland, *Música Norteña*, 104, and in the New York State Archives listing for the film script, at http://iarchives.nysed.gov/MPD/rr_other_film_details2.htm?selected_casefile=71436.

²¹⁴ McNeil, Norman Laird, “Corridos de Asuntos Vulgares Corresponding to the Romances Vulgares of the Spanish.” MA thesis, University of Texas, 1944, 319.

²¹⁵ Rosa Linda Fregoso (1993). *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 65-6.

exercised from north to south, and that even the apparently sympathetic *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* silences Mexican voices by turning Cortez into a noble but inarticulate savage. But equating the concepts of border and frontier with the exercise of Anglo power erases the history of Spanish conquest and her critique of the silencing of Indian or brown-skinned characters in Anglo film would apply equally well to Mexican *cine fronterizo*. Without downplaying the power differential between the US and Mexico one can still note that the *frontera* was where representatives of colonial and capitalist states carved out new lives from land regarded in Madrid and Mexico City, as well as in Washington, as effectively uninhabited and “available for private appropriation.”

It would be absurd to equate the experiences, history, or viewpoints of Mexicans in the Southwest with those of their Anglo counterparts, but it is no less absurd to suggest a simple duality. The Mexican poster for *El terror de la frontera* showed a tall, light-skinned Piporro brandishing a Colt .45 as he sheltered his blonde leading lady, María Eugenia San Martín, who held her own rifle at the ready. The poster for the film’s release in Spain showed roughly the same figures, but Piporro’s likeness was replaced with that of a blond and darkly-tanned cowboy. Since he was not a star in Spain, Piporro’s image had no value there, and once the hero was undoubtedly European a dark tan bespoke his rugged outdoor lifestyle rather than implying he might be Indian, the archetypal opposite of cowboy.

Cathy Ragland writes, “In the Mexican imagination, the Norteño resembles the North American cowboy...a colorful image of Mexico’s wild and untamed frontier,”²¹⁶ and I have already quoted Norma Iglesias making a similar point. But Iglesias also provides alternate Mexican readings of the mythic *frontera*: as a

²¹⁶ Ragland, *Música Norteña*, 27.

haven of vice, where sex and drugs are cheap; as a touristic site of “the folklore of ‘olé’”; and as “the land of those considered by many to be *agringado* or *pochos* who, to Mexico’s shame, have assimilated to the ‘American way of life,’ converting themselves into probable traitors to their homeland.”²¹⁷

If *nortebños* are viewed with suspicion by some Mexicans, they have at times reciprocated by asserting their separate identity. Limón writes of the shifting meanings of *mexicanidad* on both sides of the border, as well as further north and south. Growing up in Laredo, Texas, in the 1950s, he and his friends played with children from the Mexican side of the river, “in an almost common culture and society,” but he emphasizes “*Almost* common, for we also knew the difference: they were clearly *mexicanos*...we also called ourselves *mexicanos*, but, as we and they would say, we were *mexicanos de este lado*.... And even though most of us *de este lado* were working-class kids in one of the poorest cities in the United States, they, *los mexicanos del otro lado*, were clearly worse off, the recipients of our cast-off blue jeans.” He quotes a popular ranchera hit, Pepe Guízar’s “El corrido del norte,” which begins:

Nací en la frontera de acá de este lado,

De acá de este lado, puro mexicano.

Por más que la gente me juzgue tejano,

Yo les aseguro que soy mexicano,

De acá de este lado.

(I was born on the frontera, here on this side, pure Mexican.

Although people think I am Texan, I assure them that I am
Mexican, from here on this side.)

Limón writes that this lyric could be sung with equal passion and pride on

²¹⁷ Iglesias, *Entre yerba*, 18 (my translation).

both sides of the border, but with diametrically opposite meanings: In Mexico the point was that the singer was a real Mexican, from “this side,” not a tejano. In Texas the point was that although born and raised on “this side” and called *tejanos*, singer and audience were nonetheless *puro mexicano*. He adds that plenty of racist Anglos shared the latter interpretation and moving north into central Texas he saw signs reading “No Mexicans allowed,” directed at him as well as the kids across the river. But he also notes that the situation was somewhat similar in Mexico, where travelers moving south entered “an even more complicated zone of hostility and exclusion” where, although “there were no actual signs to this effect...the cultural signals clearly said, ‘No Dark Lower-Class Mexicans Allowed.’” Those complexities also existed on his side, where “border Mexicans *de este lado*...of fair skin, whose eyes were not necessarily brown” tended to live in Laredo’s wealthier neighborhoods, unlike their darker compatriots in the barrio.²¹⁸

The southwestern musical styles I am highlighting in this book are often positioned by performers and audiences as neither Anglo nor Mexican, and at times the separation from Mexico is accentuated in ways that closely match Anglo stereotypes. The video for Arrested Development’s “Tres Delinquentes,” the first Chicano rap hit to explicitly deal with Mexico, portrayed that country as a cinematically stereotyped mix of tourist destination and spaghetti western setting, with a pseudo-mariachi soundtrack sampled from Herb Alpert’s Tijuana Brass. Similarly, the New Mexico singer Tobias Rene helped attract a new generation of fans to Spanish-language music, but his most popular original song is an English-language blend of mariachi trumpets and steel guitar titled “Mexico” about a

²¹⁸ Limón, José E. *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1998, 2-3, 102. Limón slightly misquotes the song lyric, which I have corrected from Guizar’s recording.

drunken trip across the border where a tryst with a “señorita” leaves him “waking up wondering what you did there in that foreign land.” Rene performs this song in a television documentary alongside “Valentín de la Sierra,” a patriotic corrido of the Mexican *cristero* rebellion,²¹⁹ and one could argue that this implies or asserts a binational persona, but when he describes his style he keeps all its component elements north of the border: “I characterize it as tejano and country all mixed together with our own little indigenous flavors...a lot of old folksongs brought back with a rocking twist.”²²⁰

Writers on the Southwest often quote Gloria Anzaldúa’s characterization of the border as “*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds...the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”²²¹ There is certainly a world of shared culture along the US-Mexico border, and for much of its history the region was barely interrupted by the national boundary. Towns bridged the divide, thrived on transnational trade, and developed common styles of music and language. By the second half of the twentieth century the border’s accessible crossing points were being more carefully policed by the United States, and Mexican films like *Espaldas mojadas* portrayed them as frightening and often deadly, lending weight to Anzaldúa’s description of the dividing line as an open wound, but many people have continued to describe the border as a sort of magical middle ground, neither Mexican nor American, but in her terms, a third country.

²¹⁹ The *cristero* rebellion was an uprising by Catholic conservatives against the anti-clerical reforms of the post-revolutionary Mexican government in the late 1920s.

²²⁰ “Tobias Rene - Mexico / Valentín de la Sierra (Santa Fe, Albuquerque, New Mexico),” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDdXu_f1Hok, uploaded 17 Jul 2007, accessed 3/21/13. None of the viewer comments on this video suggest that anyone noticed a contradiction between the Mexican corrido about “un amigo de mi tierra” (to quote the first verse of “Valentín de la Sierra”) and the tourist viewpoint of “Mexico.”

²²¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987, 3.

Others have criticized this characterization as simplistic and also as a viewpoint specific to the United States. As Limón's description suggests, there are gradations of power on both sides of the border and it is easy to find places in Mexico that feel like the "first world" and places in the US that feel like the "Third." Vila points out that the idea of a permeable border where two worlds merge "has little resemblance to the border [Mexicans] experience from the other side of the (literal) fence" which they are prevented from passing by armed guards. In his analysis, Anzaldúa's third country is "a metaphorical culture narrated from the vantage point of the First World"—and this "First World" might be framed either as the United States or as a non-geographical grouping that includes those Mexican businesspeople, tourists, and academics who have the money and connections to travel in first-world style. A friend from Guadalajara told me of flying to Chicago to attend university and signing up for an ESL class at a local immigrant community center, but quitting in embarrassment after a couple of days: "Everybody's first question was '*¿Como pasaste?*' [How did you get across?], and what was I going to say? That I took a four-hour flight and showed my passport to the nice man at the airport?"

I heard a complementary story from another friend, a Spaniard from Barcelona, who likewise attended university in Chicago and had trouble renting an apartment because landlords assumed from her accent that she was a member of the city's large Mexican underclass. I could frame those two stories as "Mexican enjoys First World privilege" and "Spaniard suffers Third World limitations," or use them to suggest that Anzaldúa's "third country" can be found in Chicago as well as south Texas. But what such stories primarily demonstrate is that individual experiences often belie broad generalizations. I understand and at times share the temptation to think of environments in which people from

divergent cultures meet as “third spaces” of one kind or another, and I certainly understand why many Mexican Americans feel like they are “neither from here nor from there.” As David Gutiérrez writes:

Having been juridically divorced from Mexico and yet blocked in virtually every venue from achieving meaningful integration into the social, political, and economic structures being transplanted and developed by white American settlers, ethnic Mexicans were forced into...an intermediate, “third” social space that was located in the interstices between the dominant national and cultural systems of both the United States and Mexico.”²²²

Deborah Vargas characterizes that third space as “a geopolitical as well as discursive space symbolized by the socially constructed ‘in-between’ territory north of the Rio Bravo [called the Rio Grande in the United States],” and Margarita Hidalgo expands this to include an “extended border or third space” that may be in New York or Chicago.²²³ Having spent the last few years moving between Boston, Los Angeles, and Albuquerque, I am intensely aware that the latter two cities have a pervasive Mexican presence the first lacks, and anyone traveling to those cities from Guadalajara is equally aware that they nonetheless are not Mexican. Likewise, at a local level, a neighborhood like Chicago’s Pilsen is Mexican in a way that nearby Oak Park is not, though still very different from any neighborhood in Mexico.

The problem with “third space” formulations is that they encourage us to

²²² Gutiérrez, David G. “Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the ‘Third Space’: The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico,” *Journal of American History*, 86(2), 1999, 487-8.

²²³ Vargas, Deborah R. “Cruzando Fronteras: Remapping Selena’s Tejano Music ‘Crossover,’” in Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, ed., *The Chicana/o cultural studies reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 315; Hidalgo, Margarita. “Spanish Language Shift Reversal on the US-

complicate our analysis, but only by fifty percent, and in the process reinforce the core flaw of the nation-state imaginary. To imagine a third space, as Gutiérrez does, “in the interstices between the dominant national and cultural systems of both the United States and Mexico,” one first has to accept that there are two cohesive national and cultural systems, one dominant throughout the United States and the other throughout Mexico, and second that people living in the interstices of those systems share a common experience. I would argue that, on the contrary, all of us can be said to live in the interstices between an infinite range of social, cultural, political, linguistic, musical, and other systems—but most of those systems are abstract constructs and saying we are in their interstices is just another way of saying that reality is more complicated than our categories.

Geographical areas with clearly marked borders have a solid, demonstrable reality, but no one is claiming that people live in the middle of the Rio Grande or perched on the fences separating the US and Mexico. Even the people who travel back and forth every day are acutely conscious of crossing a border between two places rather than living in a single place balanced between two worlds.

Furthermore, it is a very different experience to cross between San Antonio, Texas, and Monterrey, Mexico; between Nogales, Mexico and Nogales, Arizona; and between Tijuana and the San Diego-Los Angeles megalopolis, and the cultural disparities between east and west or urban and rural are in some ways as dramatic as those between the two nations.

Homi Bhabha originally coined the term “third space” not as a comment on or analogy to geographical borders, but rather in the context of language and communication, and far from proposing that some communication is ternary rather than binary, he argued that all is ternary:

Mexico Border and the Extended Third Space,” *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 1(1),

The production of meaning requires that...[the I and the You who are communicating] be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot “in itself” be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation.²²⁴

If one extrapolates Bhabha’s formulation to interchange between Mexico and the US, it implies that what we mean by “Mexico” and “the United States” in any particular situation is defined by the relationship we are referencing in that situation, its own unique, transitory space with its own meanings and valences, which are simultaneously complex and specific and may have little to do with what those national signifiers mean to others or to us in a different situation. At one level, this is exactly the position I am moving toward: that knowledge is always partial and conditional and the ways in which it is claimed and defined are always to some extent tactical. This embrace of fuzziness is inevitably inconsistent—I keep writing the words “Spanish,” “English,” “Mexican,” and “American.” But it is appropriate to my aims: if one is trying to argue for the value of music, speech, or other forms of culture that are not widely respected outside their core communities, and if one believes this lack of respect reflects broader disrespect for those communities, then it is counterproductive to reinforce the dominant academic or media discourses by fighting for a place within them rather than questioning the value and validity of their approaches and terminology.

Many writers try to escape the traps of dominant societal or academic

discourses by coining new terms, but terms tend to shift to fit discourses more easily than vice-versa. Although Bhaba's "third space" was originally meant to destabilize familiar binaries rather than to establish a ternary orthodoxy, as it gained acceptance it lost much of that ambiguity. He situated all communication in his third space, but it was a tempting next step to claim that some communication and some communicators were more ternary than others, or at least more comfortable in that space. When one honors a marginal position by naming it, one may intend to upset the dominant taxonomies, but frequently—perhaps inevitably—one reinforces the essential taxonomic system. The concept of a third space requires the existence of two prior spaces, and likewise when one argues that something or someone is hybrid or exists in the interstices between two cultures, that reinforces the conceptual stereotypes of those cultures and the conceptual divisions between them. For bilingual people to exist, there must first be monolingual people who speak discrete languages. For musical fusions to be possible, there must first be discrete styles of music that one can fuse.

Bhaba's linguistic "third space" simply added a name to Bakhtin's earlier observation that all language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other," but that is an essential difference. Bakhtin was describing an active process, not a separate space:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the

²²⁴ Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 53.

speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.²²⁵

Bakhtin's parenthetical insertion is something many people both within and outside academia seem to have trouble accepting: no word is inherently English or Spanish, just as no sound is inherently rock or ranchera and no human is inherently Mexican, Indian, African, European, or Anglo. All of those concepts exist only in relationship to other concepts and are reinvented as they are appropriated and understood differently by different people. The same Stetson hat can define someone as western rather than eastern, *norteño* rather than ranchera, cowboy rather than Indian, Mexican rather than Chicano, ranchera rather than pop, country rather than rock, or wealthy enough to own a felt rather than a straw hat. In New Mexico, singers of Mexican *norteño* or Anglo country music both use that hat to signal their genre affinities, but singers of New Mexico music typically do not, and the exceptions prove the rule: Ernie Montoya wears one as a symbol of his ranching lifestyle, but his band members do not. El Gringo wears one because he presents himself as a lone Anglo cowboy on the New Mexico music scene, and his accordion and bajo sexto players likewise wear them, in keeping with their role as the *norteño* elements of his sound—but his drummer and electric bassist do not.²²⁶

Some words, clothes, and sounds are shared with little or no awareness of

²²⁵ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 293-4.

²²⁶ "El Gringo Singing I've Got Mexico,"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h5yRY6bJqM>, Oct 27, 2009, accessed 3/15/13. These sartorial choices may not be consistent, and I am not suggesting that El Gringo and his bandmembers intended to make the identity statements I ascribe to them, just that the hats align with their performed musical and ethnic affiliations. Ernie Montoya's brother John wore a

sharing, others are more firmly linked to particular cultures and contexts. An Anglophone saying “adiós” is more likely to be aware of using a Spanish word than an Anglophone saying “canyon,” though both words are common in southwestern Anglo speech. The cultural affinities one signals by using a guitar—which is common to virtually all folk and pop styles in Mexico and the United States—are less specific than those signaled by a button accordion, which in turn has less specific associations than a vihuela or guitarrón. As Bakhtin put it:

Not all words...submit equally easily to this appropriation...many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth...it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.²²⁷

Ernie Montoya insists that his electric guitar is just an electrified version of the old Spanish guitar, but I continue to hear some of his band's licks in quotation marks, recognizing the accent of the Ventures. New Mexico singers sometimes use accordions and insist that this does not make their music less New Mexican, but I have heard fans condemn this practice as an attempt to appeal to outsiders who like *norteño* and *tejano*. Of course people often put foreign words, sounds, and symbols in quotation marks intentionally. Banda rappers take advantage of the stubbornness with which their ranchera samples continue to sound foreign to

cowboy hat on their first two album covers, but no other band member has done so, nor does John wear one in on-line photos of his current family band, Deseo.

²²⁷ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 294.

hip-hop fans, and this is particularly notable because Anglo and Afro-American artists from Compton to the Bronx have routinely managed the “difficult and complicated process” of making African, Latin, and Asian samples submit to their local intentions and accents.

Juan Bruce-Novoa coined the term *interlingual* for poetry that blends Spanish and English without acknowledging a clear linguistic binary, arguing that such efforts “are not bilingual in that, in the best examples, they do not attempt to maintain two language codes separate but exploit and create the potential junctures of interconnection. This results in a different code, one in which neither monolingual code can stand alone and relate the same meaning. Translation becomes impossible...”²²⁸ That is, such mixtures convey not only a meaning that might be translated, but also the message that a speaker is comfortably blending aspects of English and Spanish, which would be lost if the translatable meanings were conveyed in a single language or a different combination of languages. Other writers have noted that in any case such poems normally partake of more than two systems. Salvador Rodríguez del Pino writes that Chicano poetry cannot be considered simply bilingual, since it demands a degree of familiarity not only with standard literary Spanish and English, but also with Black English, urban caló, American slang, and pachuco speech, so “one has to know the range of Chicano dialects and expressions to understand these poems in their totality.”²²⁹

The variety of caló spoken in the Southwest is a particularly interesting example because it signals regional and cultural affiliations that are often

²²⁸ Quoted by Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “Boricua (Between) Borders: On the Possibility of Translating Bilingual Narratives,” in Ilan Stavans, *Spanglish*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008, 76. This coinage is problematic because the word *interlingual* is also used by translators to distinguish translation between two languages, as distinct from *intralingual* for translations within one recognized language.

independent of the broader language system being used. Lalo Guerrero recalled that when he started using *caló* his mother would get upset and tell him, “Don’t come in here talking like that! In this house, you speak English or Spanish”—except that she would have said this in Spanish, the only language she spoke.²³⁰ Parents in Mexico and the United States, whichever languages they speak or prefer, have been equally upset about their children using underworld slang, and today someone who identifies as *cholo* will use the same words of *caló* to signal his identity whether he is from Tijuana or San Diego, and irrespective of whether the rest of his speech would be identified in binary terms as Spanish or English. Some elements of *caló* can be traced to Spanish roots, some to English roots, some to Romany, some are unique to the border region, and many are equally unfamiliar and confusing to speakers of other varieties of Spanish and of English. It is typically categorized by linguists as Spanish-language slang and people using *caló* in their English are often described as switching into Spanish, but that just reflects the north-of-the-border perspective of the people doing the categorizing. In the 1940s, writers in Mexico City criticized many of the same words and expressions as borrowings and contamination from English or *pocho* speech.

Suzanne Romaine writes, “In situations of intense language contact it is possible for a third system to emerge which shows properties not found in either of the input languages. Thus, through the merger or convergence of two systems, a new one can be created.”²³¹ It is tempting to describe *caló* as such a “third system,” but I find it more useful simply to think of it as an aspect of some people’s speech. Not everyone who uses words or phrases I recognize as *caló*

²²⁹ Salvador Rodríguez del Pino, “La poesía chicana: una nueva trayectoria,” in Francisco Jiménez, *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*. New York: Bilingual Press, 1979, 75 (my translation).

²³⁰ Guerrero and Montes, *Lalo*, 98. Lalo’s son Mark Guerrero reports that his grandmother never spoke English at home (personal communication).

shares my taxonomy and if a speaker considers them Spanish, English, or Pachuco, that is as reasonable as the idea that “canyon” is English or that the word “ride” (as in “¿Puedes darme un ride al Market Basket?”) is standard Mexican or southwestern Spanish. As Bakhtin argued, “languages do not *exclude* one another but rather intersect with each other in many different ways... it might even seem that the very word ‘language’ loses all meaning in this process—for there is no single plane on which all these ‘languages’ might be juxtaposed to one another.”²³²

The term “bilingual” is often used to describe Latino individuals and populations in the United States without any substantial effort to explore how they use language or to determine whether they typically use one, two, or multiple systems. Numerous studies cite census figures for Spanish and English use, which currently show that 38 percent of Hispanics born in the United States speak only English at home and 62 percent speak Spanish. That might suggest that Hispanics are more likely to speak Spanish than English, and it is easy to find articles that draw this conclusion.²³³ But another way to look at the numbers is that less than one percent speak only Spanish, and 79 percent of the Spanish-speakers speak English “very well,” with another 14 percent speaking it “well.” The census-takers do not ask how well people speak Spanish, but only whether Spanish is spoken in their home.²³⁴ In a population that is 38 percent monolingual in English

²³¹ Romaine, Suzanne. 1989. *Bilingualism*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 4.

²³² Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 291.

²³³ E.g. Goldfarb, Charles B., “Spanish Language Media After the Univision-Hispanic Broadcasting Merger: Issues for Congress,” CRS Report for Congress, 2003, at <http://congressionalresearch.com/RL32116/document.php?study=Spanish+Language+Media+After+the+Univision-Hispanic+Broadcasting+Merger+Issues+for+Congress>, accessed 9/26/13.

²³⁴ These percentages are drawn from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey Selected Population Table B16005, “Nativity by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over,” at http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_SF4_B16005&prodType=table, accessed 9/26/13.

and less than one percent monolingual in Spanish, and in which 93 percent of the people in Spanish-speaking homes describe themselves as fluent in English, it seems fair to assume that most of the “bilinguals” answering this survey speak English better than Spanish, and indeed that many have only rudimentary Spanish skills—for example, understanding enough to be helpful or polite to older relatives.

Roxy Harris coined the term “romantic bilingualism” for “the widespread practice, in British schools and other educational contexts, based on little or no analysis or enquiry, of attributing to pupils drawn from visible ethnic minority groups an expertise in and allegiance to any community languages with which they have some acquaintance.”²³⁵ As I mentioned in chapter 4, both Mendoza-Denton and Fought found that teachers and students at the schools where they did their research often assumed that people who looked indigenously Mexican or had an obvious Chicano accent spoke Spanish, and as a graduate student I have found professors making similar assumptions about writers and researchers with Latino ancestry or Spanish names. Such assumptions, mistaken though they may be, are basic to any broad construction of ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups: all of us have at times been surprised to find that someone who spoke “our language” did not understand a word or phrase we considered common, that someone we thought was part of “our group” did not think of themselves that way, or that someone we assumed must share our taste in food or movies in fact did not.

The problem with the romantic bilingualism Harris describes is not simply that it is often erroneous, but that it is part of a broader pattern of marking certain people as “other.” In this respect it often goes along with what I might call “unromantic monolingualism,” the assumption that people considered part of a

dominant culture are less colorful and multilingual than the romantic others. This tendency is sometimes displayed openly: Lummis wrote of the three “typical races” in New Mexico: “the nine thousand Pueblo Indians—peaceful, fixed, house-dwelling and home-loving tillers of the soil...; the ten thousand Navajo Indians...sullen, nomad, horse-loving, horse-stealing, horse-living vagrants of the saddle...; and the Mexicans; inbred and isolation-shrunken descendants of the Castilian world-finders...ignorant as slaves, and more courteous than kings.” He did not include the “Americans” who had become a large and growing part of the territory’s population as a regional type, declaring them “potential, but not picturesque.”²³⁶

Few modern writers would state this point of view so openly, but it is not hard to find modern characterizations of Anglo culture as bland and uniform compared to the colorful diversity of Latino culture. As with the romanticizing of bilingualism or the border region, the problem with this is that it suggests cohesive, opposing groups where none in fact exist, and in the process obscures potentially troubling (and interesting) complications. Vila decries “the tendency to construct the border crosser or the hybrid...into a new ‘privileged subject of history,’” and in the process to “demonize” other people, particularly Anglos, “for not being hybrid enough or for not taking full advantage of their hybridity.”²³⁷

Racism and xenophobia have been central to much of the history of the United States and remain pervasive, and there are many Euro-Americans who see themselves as members of a cohesive group and seek to maintain cultural and political dominance over people whom they do not include in that group. As in

²³⁵ Harris, “Romantic Bilingualism: Time for a Change?” in Leung, C. & Cable, C. (eds.), *English as an Additional Language: Changing Perspectives*. Watford: NALDIC, 1997, 14.

²³⁶ Lummis, Charles F. *The Land of Poco Tiempo* [1893]. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1952, 3.

Latin America, though, there is also a familiar discourse of ethnic mixing, typically phrased in terms of a “melting pot.” In the nineteenth century, Mark Twain laid claim to European, Indian, and African heritage, describing himself as “a mixed breed, an infinitely shaded and exquisite mongrel.”²³⁸ The history of this discourse is fraught with contradictions and hypocrisy: an apt example is the melting pot scene in Paul Whiteman’s 1930 movie *King of Jazz*, which shows jazz emerging from a cauldron in which the world’s races have been mixed, but notably includes no Africans in that mixture. But Latin America’s history of colonialism, racism, and dominance by elites of mostly European ancestry is hardly less fraught or hypocritical—though each region’s history has been differently fraught and hypocritical.

Mexican theorists have developed several terminological parallels to the melting pot: a particularly obvious example is the central metaphor of anthropologist Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando patria* from 1916: “In the great forge of America, on the giant anvil of the Andes, the bronze and iron of virile races have been beaten out across the centuries.” More famously, José Vasconcelos, who attended elementary school in Eagle Pass, Texas, contrasted the “homogenous racial stock” of the Anglos with the “cosmic race” forming in Latin America from the mixed heritage of Africa, Europe, and the Americas.²³⁹ These writings helped shape the Mexican concept of *mestizaje*, which has at times been attacked on much the same grounds as the melting pot: as a rhetorical tool of the ruling class, purporting to celebrate diversity but in reality obscuring continued power imbalances and discrimination.

²³⁷ Pablo Vila, “The Limits of American Border Theory,” in Vila, ed., *Ethnography at the Border*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002, 307, 312, 315.

²³⁸ Twain, Mark. “Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims,” 1891, archived at <http://www.online-literature.com/twain/2834/>.

²³⁹ Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity,” 463, 466.

In the United States *mestizaje* tends to be used without reference to this Mexican history, as an alternative to hegemonic Anglo formulations of melting or mixing. Along with *hybridity*, it is put forward as part of an argument that Latino culture maintains “a vivid awareness of mixture, both racial and cultural,” in the words of Rafael Pérez-Torres, who calls this “a dominant trope in Chicano critical discourse.” As an example, he quotes Alfred Arteaga’s description of the language of Chicano poetry as “the site of confluence in the way the Chicano body is mestizo and the homeland is international. And like the body and home, the language is hybrid and thus more than merely a sum of its parts...Chicano speech is like the mestizo body and the borderlands home: it simultaneously reflects multiple forces at play and asserts its hybridity.”²⁴⁰

There are two problems with this sort of writing. One is that, as Marcia Farr points out, any discourse of mixing “perpetuates the assumption that separate races exist and that they have ‘mixed.’”²⁴¹ Another is the inevitable slippage between process and result. Bhabha equated hybridity with the “third space,” arguing that it is conceptually valuable not because it allows one “to trace two original moments from which the third emerges,” but rather because it “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.”²⁴² This is the process whereby the United States and Mexico evolved from the dominance of British and Spanish colonial governments to the dominance of melted or mestizo elites drawn from many nations and cultures, and whereby modern academics displace the formulations of their predecessors, but as

²⁴⁰ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, xi, 48.

²⁴¹ Farr, Marcia, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán: Language and Identity in a Transnational Community*. Austin: University of Texas, 2006, 132.

²⁴² Homi Bhabha interview, “The Third Space,” in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 211.

Bhabha suggests its end result is to set up “new structures of authority.”

Terms like hybrid and mestizo may momentarily destabilize old categories, but to the extent they are claimed by or attached to particular people or groups they are also new categories—which is to say they do not destabilize the process, only the particulars. Emma Perez writes that the trope of mestizaje provides a way of getting past a nationalist Chicano stance that “negates, dismisses, and occludes feminists, queers..., and anyone who is not of ‘pure’ Chicano blood and lineage.”²⁴³ But those quotation marks around “pure” suggest the contradiction in this argument: they imply that Chicanos are by definition a heterogeneous group, that the word *Chicano* implies mestizaje, and yet they acknowledge that many people see homogeneity in the term. A shared name implies a degree of cohesion and it is no more absurd or inaccurate to speak of pure Chicano lineage than of pure Spanish lineage or pure African or Native American lineage—all are social constructs with historical bases and are real or false to the extent they are shared or recognized. Pérez-Torres writes that mestizaje functions “to foreground the condition of multiple identities...but does not negate an identification with a community or a strategic use of authenticity in order to name identity.”²⁴⁴ I would go further and say mestizo and hybrid are often used as names for identities, by way of contrasting those identities with others that are seen as not (or at least as less) mestizo and hybrid—and while they may be intended “to foreground the condition of multiple identities” within the former group, they simultaneously imply the group’s cohesiveness and obscure the multiplicity of identities within the latter group.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 25.

²⁴⁴ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 37.

²⁴⁵ I have had several conversations with Latin Americans who with a straight face argue that their presidents, though uniformly of European ancestry, represent mestizo and hybrid

Some scholars argue that although Latino culture is not more hybrid than Anglo culture in an abstract, objective sense, it is more hybrid in the sense that Latinos are more willing or eager to acknowledge their hybridity. This is a distinction without a difference, since it still requires a belief that “Latino culture” and “Anglo culture” are internally cohesive, at least relative to each other and in this particular respect, which means ignoring a lot of messy facts about both cultures. I am dubious about this contention even as a broad generalization and am not aware of any research that backs it up, but even if it were demonstrated to be accurate in general terms, that would tell us nothing about particular communities, much less particular individuals. Nor does any reasonable person suggest it would; the point of the argument is to define and juxtapose two groups, not to help us understand either of them.²⁴⁶

The artists whose work I explore in this book have combined English and Spanish in their performances and blended styles of music from the US with styles from Mexico, and the fact that one can trace those separate sources to different countries and cultures makes it tempting to think of the results as hybrid or mestizo in a way the source styles and languages were not. But the blend of Central European polkas, waltzes, accordions, and brass bands that makes up northern Mexican ranchera is just as hybrid as New Mexico music, and if banda

cultures, unlike the United States. When I have brought up Barack Obama, they have tended to argue that he is exceptional and not relevant to the discussion.

²⁴⁶ Pérez-Torres (*Mestizaje*, 2009) is one of many scholars who contrast a Latino embrace of mestizaje with “the typically binary notions of identity within a U.S. racial paradigm (choose black or white).” There is truth to these stereotypes, but according to the 2000 US census, 94 percent of Latinos described themselves as belonging to only one race, as compared to 98 percent of non-Latinos. When asked what race they belonged to, 42 percent of Latinos said “other” rather than choosing white, black, or American Indian, which suggests they considered “Latino” their race, but does not necessarily mean they embraced mestizaje—many Jews likewise check “other” not because they think they are a mix but because “Jewish” is not an option. In any case the US racial binary has never been more than a legal fiction, as Latinos should be particularly aware since both individually and as a group they have often been listed in official documents as “white” but rarely treated as such. As in Latin America, there has always been a broad spectrum of

rap is differently hybrid than other forms of hip-hop, hybridity has been basic to the hip-hop aesthetic since the music's emergence on the New York streets. It is always tempting to think of familiar styles as set entities and new fusions of those styles as hybrids, and such formulations can be helpful as a way of foregrounding particular interactive processes. However, that foregrounding is also what makes them problematic: banda rap was explicitly created and marketed as a transnational, bimusical fusion, and in that sense was clearly a hybrid of Mexican and US styles, but that description inevitably implies that it is more hybrid than hip-hop or ranchera, though both of those styles—to the extent they can even be defined as discrete styles—draw on innumerable sources from at least four continents.

Héctor Vega made a similar point in his discussion of Mexican musical traditions, arguing that some common ways of framing modern trends are ahistorical:

Currently people are talking a lot about the term globalization, and it is undeniable that the reach of new technologies of communication has marked an era without precedent for the circulation of cultural content throughout the world. Nonetheless...the current globalization is not the first moment of interchange and flow of sociocultural elements at a world level. The characteristics of our contemporary societies are based in social transformation and are products of more than five hundred years of international migrations.²⁴⁷ [I would say far more: migration and trade, often between very distant regions, has been

prejudice in the US, with Latinos, Jews, Italians, Irish, and Slavs treated as other than white, and light-skinned “Negroes” treated differently from dark-skinned “Negroes.”

²⁴⁷ Vega, “La música tradicional mexicana,” 150 (my translation).

constant throughout human history and musicians have been particularly prone to travel and to adopt and blend styles from multiple regions.]

In the particular cases of the various branches of ranchera and the various branches of country, rock, and hip-hop with which ranchera has been mixed in the Southwest, all were international styles at their inception, both in terms of their sources and their distribution. Even the extent to which they were associated with particular countries and places was affected by international tastes and markets: the cinematic *mexicanidad* of ranchera, the cinematic wild west of cowboy music, and the cinematic urban jungles of rock and hip-hop were inextricably intertwined with each music's reach and appeal. Ranchera did not become emblematic of Mexico simply because Mexicans loved it; on the contrary, from the charro costumes to the blend of operatic singing and rural-sounding guitars it was largely developed for export.

The border region between the United States and Mexico has similarly been romanticized and vested with its iconography in large part for export to other regions. "Border studies" is currently a sexy discipline, in part because the chafing of immigration against xenophobia has placed borders in general and that border in particular increasingly in the news, and in part because writing about borders implies one's ability to cross them, a romantic and adventurous act that is also professionally advantageous in a world in which "global" and "interdisciplinary" are marketable buzz-words. As a field of study, borders in general and the US-Mexico border in particular have acquired advocates, people for whom there is a vested interest in "the border" being a unique field of inquiry. As with definitions of nations, languages, or musical styles, the border, the third space, or *mestizaje* are defined by individuals and groups as assertions of

difference and exercises of power for themselves and their group. This is not to deny that the US-Mexico border or any other region is unique and distinctive in many ways, or that borders are distinctive in part because they are seen as borders, but it is a reminder that boundaries do not draw themselves.

Whether conceptual or geographic, borders exist only as they are drawn and policed. They are exercises of power, whether wielded to prevent people from entering, to prevent them from leaving, or simply to keep them apart. The border between the United States and Mexico has been more stringently policed at some times than others and for some people than others, and since it is the policing that makes it a border, its imaginary grows and shrinks accordingly. A key period in the formation of that imaginary was Prohibition, when police prevented alcohol from crossing northward and millions of fun-seekers traveled from the United States to Mexican border towns—providing not only an Anglo touristic experience of those towns as wild, exciting, and dangerous, but a parallel framing of them as wild, exciting, dangerous, and modern in dozens of Mexican *rumbera* films. That parallel is a reminder both of the inequality of the border relationship—both groups in this period imagined the border as something legal tourists crossed from north to south and illegal migrants and smugglers crossed from south to north—and of shared myths: the rumbera movies showed the border towns as sites of sin, but typically the rich tourists drinking champagne, dancing to tropical rhythms, and buying women were not gringos, but Mexicans escaping the staid and civilized confines of Mexico City and Guadalajara.

That shared imaginary is one of the paradoxes of the border: in Mexican films the rural, old-fashioned Mexican culture was juxtaposed to the modern, immoral culture of the United States, but the modern border life was exemplified by the booming cities on the Mexican side, while the American side had sleepy

old frontier towns. In that sense Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona maintained some of the mythic characteristics of the old northern Mexico of which they once were part. While the Anglo pioneer myth frames the Southwest as a no-man's-land settled or conquered by brave Americans, the Mexican pioneer myth frames it as a no-man's-land settled or conquered by brave Mexicans or Spaniards, then stolen or extorted by the United States. Mexican cattle thieves at the turn of the twentieth century joked that they were going to Texas to reclaim *las vacas de tata*, grandpa's cows,²⁴⁸ and when the ranchera songwriter Manuel Castro Padilla was accused of plagiarizing melodies from American pop tunes in the 1930s, he replied, "Certainly that music belonged to the United States, but I was taking Texas into account. Given that, they still owe us plenty."²⁴⁹

Territorial disputes are a commonplace of border regions and a reminder that borders are only as solid as the power that defends them and only meaningful to the extent they serve to maintain that power. The act of drawing lines, of grouping families, cultures, languages, or musical styles, is a way of declaring allegiances, and we all at times feel the need of allies. Thus gestures of power are as tempting for the poor and oppressed as for the rich and mighty. But by the same token no grouping is ever value-neutral, or at least all inevitably cease to be value-neutral. It may seem like a simple statement of fact that someone who speaks two languages will have a broader view of the world—at least linguistically—than someone who speaks only one, and it is undoubtedly true that anyone who learns a new language is broadening her knowledge. But to say that bilinguals have a broader view of the world than monolinguals is a different order

²⁴⁸ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 110.

²⁴⁹ Jaramillo, Silvino. "Compositor," *El Porvenir*, 11 Dec. 2005, at http://www.elporvenir.com.mx/notas.asp?nota_id=42693, accessed 1/27/13 (my translation). As a linguistic aside, one of Castro's most popular songs was titled "Ansina son las mujeres," using the same variant of *así* that is often cited as a mark of New Mexico's archaic Spanish.

of statement, defining groups of people rather than describing individual talents or experiences. However one defines those terms, it is not hard to find individual closeminded bilinguals and broadminded monolinguals, but the statement is not meant to describe individuals—it is an assertion that there are two groups and one is better than the other.

Changes in language are changes in viewpoint and can force people to question ingrained habits, but replacing one grand abstraction (Mexico, the United States, English, Spanish, ranchera, hip-hop) with another (borderlands, bilingual, third space, hybrid, mestizo, fusion) does not change the fact that we are imposing our chosen unities on other people's diverse experiences. The fact that someone's father is Nigerian and her mother Uruguayan may mean less to a child than the fact that her father is a painter and her mother a computer programmer, which may mean less than that her father is a son-of-a-bitch and her mother a sweetheart, or that one of her parents left the other when she was seven. If we cannot avoid drawing borders every time we speak or type a sentence, we can still make the choice to defend our borders with more or less fervor. The insistence that it is important how we phrase our thoughts is, at its core, simply an insistence that we and our thoughts are important. Likewise, the insistence that certain ways of dividing the world are better than others is an insistence that one group is better than another. I am not suggesting that all thoughts or values are equal, or that it is wrong to defend some borders to the death, but it is always worth recognizing borders for what they are: justifiable or not, they are barriers to communication and understanding, and never more so than when they masquerade as attempts at communication and understanding.

8. Code Switching and Performance

“Uno! Dos! One, two, tres, cuatro...”

--Domingo “Sam the Sham” Samudio, “Wooly Bully,” 1965.

Domingo Samudio’s counted introduction to “Wooly Bully” was the most widely heard example of Southwestern bilingual humor in the 1960s, though he recalled, “The count-down part of the song was...not planned. I was just goofing around and counted off in Tex-Mex. It just blew everybody away, and actually, I wanted it taken off the record.”²⁵⁰ He did not say why he wanted to remove it, but a possible reason is that the song was coming out in the middle of the British Invasion, when US regional signifiers might be a drawback—a group of his Texas compatriots shortly named themselves the Sir Douglas Quintet and got a similar-sounding hit, “She’s About a Mover,” while passing as British invaders.

The language used in professional performances is different from informal speech, since, especially on recordings, it involves premeditated choices that can be revised and corrected.²⁵¹ As Samudio’s recollection suggests, a recording reflects not only previously composed lyrics and perhaps some additional words added on the spur of the moment, but also decisions about whether the result is something one wants to release to the public. Records are thus in some ways less revealing than casual speech, but also in some ways more, since they reflect a

²⁵⁰ “Sam the Sham and The Pharaohs,” at <http://www.classicbands.com/samsham.html>, accessed 5/12/13.

²⁵¹ Valdés-Fallis and Dorleijn and Nortier argue that the linguistic code-switching in, respectively, bilingual poetry and internet writing can be used as representative examples of bilingual conversational styles (Valdés Fallis, “Code-switching”; Dorleijn, Margreet, and Jacomine Nortier. “Code-switching and the internet,” in Barbara E. Bullock and Almeida Jaqueline Toribio, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009). This puzzles me, since they are writers and must know that their writing style does not accurately reflect how they talk in informal conversations.

decision by artists or their producers to present themselves in a particular way or to appeal to a particular audience. In the case of “Wooly Bully,” Samudio’s bilingual countdown was clearly related to his ethnic and cultural background and in an informal situation one could argue that it was ethnic code that affirmed his Mexican heritage or signaled his roots in the Southwest. But the decision to leave it on the record suggests that he and his producers felt it could also signal other messages—like that he was the kind of fun, goofy guy who would wear a turban, call himself a sham, and front a band called the Pharoahs.

It is easy to classify “one, two, tres, cuatro” as bilingual code-switching, since it clearly makes use of two separate linguistic systems. However, one can also argue that this kind of bilingual joking does not involve more than one linguistic code. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger’s “Hasta la vista, baby” or the use of French lit-crit jargon in English-language academic papers, it is a quirk of speech that may signal one’s membership in a single group rather than signaling an ability to switch between groups. The comical hipster exoticism of the “Wooly Bully” countdown is in keeping with the group’s name and the song’s lyric, which is a mix of nonsense phrases and slang expressions such as *L-seven*, meaning “square.”

Jo Nick Patoski writes, “The rest of the modern world may have perceived the bilingual enumeration as some kind of exotic confection, an unconventional beginning to a giddy rhythm ride of insane craziness. For Samudio, though, screaming ‘uno, dos, one, two, tres, cuatro’ was just doing what comes naturally to a teenager growing up in two cultures.”²⁵² Whether exotic confection or normal teen speech, neither of Patoski’s explanations implies a switch in code from “uno,

²⁵² Patoski, Joe Nick, “Uno, Dos, One, Two, Tres, Cuatro,” *Journal of Texas Music History*, 2001, at <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/2733>, accessed 5/13/13.

dos” to “one, two,” then back again for “tres, cuatro.”

Although sociolinguists tend to share broad areas of agreement about what code-switching involves, precise taxonomy remains a matter of choice. Penelope Gardner-Chloros writes, “C[ode] S[witching] is not an entity which exists out there in the objective world, but a construct which linguists have developed to help them describe their data. It is therefore pointless to argue about what CS *is*, because, to paraphrase Humpty Dumpty, the word CS can mean whatever we want it to mean.”²⁵³ One can choose to classify Samudio’s countdown as English-Spanish code-switching on the basis of the words themselves, but I prefer to compare it to in-group speech like the use of *copacetic* by African-American hipsters in the mid-twentieth century—an example that is particularly striking because it sounds like a switch from ordinary street language to more formal, erudite jargon, but in fact is a street coinage that is hip and funny because it sounds like erudite jargon. In both cases, the message heard by outsiders may be that there has been a shift or mix of styles, but the message heard by insiders is “we’re part of the group that talks this way”—the essence of a single, shared code.

In one of the defining papers on code-switching, Carol Myers-Scotton wrote, “all linguistic code choices are indexical of a set of rights and obligations holding between participants in the conversational exchange. That is, any code choice points to a particular interpersonal balance, and it is partly because of their indexical qualities that different languages, dialects, and styles are maintained in a community.” Rather than looking at language as a set of mechanical components—this phrase is English, that one is Spanish; this word is formal, that word is intimate—she sees it as a constantly evolving range of agreements among

²⁵³ Gardner-Chloros, *Code-switching*, 10.

and between people. Code-switching is thus defined by intent, conscious or not, to signal a change of relationship or context within an interchange, and an apparent mix of languages or styles that lacks such intent is not code-switching; it is just speech that draws on multiple linguistic sources, as all speech does. She adds that if a group is defined by bilingualism then switching back and forth between two language systems may be its code: "Each switch need have no special significance; rather it is the overall pattern of using two varieties which carries social meaning."²⁵⁴ Indeed, some social situations are defined by a multilingual code even though the people involved do not speak the languages being used: classical vocal recitals in Tokyo commonly include songs in German, Italian, or French without ever departing from the single code of concert art song shared by a group of people who converse only in Japanese. In a rock or jazz band, the leader can count down in a language every member speaks, a language some speak, or a language none speaks, including him. The message remains the same, because it is in the tempo rather than the words, and I know bandleaders who just count, "Umh. Umh. Umh, umh, umh, umh."

Communication is not simply a matter of which words are exchanged, or even primarily of which words are exchanged. Myers-Scotton's reference to the "rights and obligations holding between participants" in "a particular interpersonal balance" allows for situations in which one of the messages being conveyed may be that one person feels no obligation to the other and hence is using a language the other barely understands. For example, there is the common occurrence of American tourists in foreign countries chatting casually with one

²⁵⁴ Myers-Scotton, "Code-switching," 152, 162. Shana Poplack suggests that children raised in code-switching environments may at first learn the combination of languages as a single language, producing monolingual sentences that to the surrounding adults seem to be bilingual, and only later come to recognize that there are two systems involved. (Poplack, "Contrasting Patterns of Codeswitching," 217.)

another in English, then turning to a waiter and talking in the louder, simpler English they reserve for people who may not understand English. The rights and obligations of the first code require that everyone speak the same language with roughly equal facility; the rights and obligations of the second assume an imbalance of power in which the waiter is expected to do whatever is necessary to determine what the customer wants. These different interpersonal balances are conveyed by the use of different codes, though the words of both codes are drawn from the standard English lexicon.

I spent several afternoons in Discoteca Merlin, a record store in Española, New Mexico, recording the shifting language use of the store's owner, José Merlin Trujillo. Merlin grew up speaking Spanish in the small mountain village of Cordova, and says that in school most of his teachers spoke Spanish as well as English. Now in his seventies, he speaks both languages fluently but with a strong local accent, though he takes pride in the fact that he was able to pass as a Mexican artist when he recorded for Mexican record labels. With me and with his adult customers he spoke Spanglish, constantly mixing and shifting between English and Spanish. However, when a child or young person came into the store he spoke to them only in Spanish, though in most cases they replied in English. I am not sure he did this consciously, but he was completely consistent. He may intentionally have been forcing them to practice their Spanish—he certainly felt it was important that young Hispanics retain the language—or it may simply be that he had always experienced Spanish as part of the intimate way elders talked to children.

In any case, Merlin's exclusive use of Spanish in these interchanges was indexical of his grandfatherly relationship to the local kids, all of whom seemed to take it for granted and to understand his questions and comments, though many

could not respond in kind. The shared linguistic code, familiar and accepted by everyone involved, was that the elder spoke Spanish and the child spoke English. By contrast, with me Merlin used the standard code for a shopkeeper with an Anglo customer, speaking only English until I demonstrated fluency in Spanish and indicated that I enjoyed speaking it. And with local adult customers he spoke Spanglish: “Chimayo Boyzz tienen estos, this is the latest from the Chimayo Boyzz, eso dos. Pero Tomás salió con mariachi...solo, by himself. He’s the lead singer.”

My choice to discuss Merlin’s code-switching in terms of which codes he used with different sorts of people does not preclude a separate discussion of how he might shift codes within a single interchange, just as my choice to describe the English spoken by tourists among themselves and to a waiter as two different codes does not preclude a separate discussion in which their varied uses of English would be regarded as remaining within a single code. Rather than establishing a definition of code-switching, my aim is to suggest some of the ways shifts and mixes of language may reflect and influence people’s choices and relationships, which includes recognizing that a switch on one level may be accompanied by continuity on another.

In New Mexico music, the interplay of Spanish and English is to some extent matched by switches between musical styles. When a band segues from a ranchera into a cumbia and then into a rock ’n’ roll song, these are clear switches of rhythmic code and demand complementary switches in dancing style by the listeners. However, the recognition of this code-switching does not mean one has to think of a band as changing its musical code every time it changes its dance rhythm. Going by common ethnic categories one could file ranchera and cumbia within a single language called Latin music and describe the shift to rock as a

switch to Anglo music; a historian of southwestern styles could file ranchera and rock as older music native to the region and cumbia as a switch to a foreign style that arrived in the 1970s; and dancers in Española, who expect bands to play all three rhythms, describe the mix as a single style: New Mexico music.

In terms of spoken language, New Mexico bands typically sing cumbias and rancheras in Spanish and rock 'n' roll and country songs in English, with a few telling exceptions. "La Bamba" was introduced to the region as a 1950s rock 'n' roll song and is still played in rock 'n' roll rhythm, though its Spanish lyrics clearly influenced its popularity among Hispanic dancers. On the other hand, the 1950s rock song played most frequently at concerts I attended was "Come On, Let's Go," which is in English but likewise distinguished by being a hit for Richie Valens, the same artist who popularized "La Bamba" and the only major Mexican American rock 'n' roll star. (Anglo oldies bands, if they play two Valens songs, typically cover "La Bamba" and "Donna," but although the latter song was Valens's biggest national hit I never heard it played or mentioned in New Mexico, presumably because as a slow ballad it cannot fill the rock 'n' roll slot in the local dance mix.²⁵⁵) As for country songs, the most common choices were English-language songs recorded in the 1980s by George Strait ("Does Fort Worth Ever Cross Your Mind," "The Cowboy Rides Away") and some 1970s hits by the Texan Chicano country singer Freddy Fender, in particular the English-language "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" and his bilingual version of "Wild Side of Life," which includes one verse and chorus in Spanish. Fender's hits inspired other bilingual country covers, and New Mexico artists sometimes add Spanish

²⁵⁵ All three songs reached the US national pop charts in 1958, "Donna" spending two weeks at number two, while "Come On, Let's Go" and "La Bamba" respectively reached peaks of 42 and 22. "La Bamba" hit again in 1987 in a version by Los Lobos and is now Valens's most famous song, but although many people I met referred to it as a New Mexico standard, I never heard it performed, perhaps because it is regarded as overplayed.

verses to more recent country songs—in October 2012, Española’s KDCE had a bilingual version of Strait’s “Amarillo by Morning” by Dezi Cisneros in high rotation.

The choice to perform a song bilingually or to mix Spanish- and English-language songs on a single album or in a live set is a way for artists to signal their bilingualism or at least their appreciation of bilingualism—an important distinction, since some Latino artists in the United States have recorded and performed songs in Spanish as a cultural gesture but do not speak the language.²⁵⁶ It is likewise a way for audiences to show their appreciation of bilingualism or their affection for a heritage language that they may not use in their day-to-day lives. However, bilingual songs and albums seem to have been rare in the Southwest before Fender’s hits in the 1970s, and the earlier songs that mixed English and Spanish tended to be explicitly not bilingual, in the sense that they assumed language conflict rather than language overlap.

There were some popular Spanish-language songs current in the early and mid-twentieth century that included English words, but those words were highlighted as foreign and presented in the context of commenting on linguistic relationships. The two most common frames were songs about dealings with Anglos and songs about *pochos* or Americanized Mexicans. A particularly involved example of the first category is a song collected in the early 1940s in which a Mexican newly arrived in Texas describes his linguistic mishaps: Hearing a blonde girl say “Son of a gun,” he understands her to be saying a saint’s name, “San Abagán,” and he attempts to master English by studying a dictionary:

La casa se llama: *jaus*

The house is called: *house*

²⁵⁶ Jennifer Lopez is often mentioned by Latino pop fans as an artist who records Spanish-language hits without being able to speak the language—though I do not know how much Spanish

<i>Oh, may Gad</i> , es: oh, mi Dios, God.	<i>Oh, my God</i> , is: Oh, my God.
La boca le dicen: <i>maus</i> <i>mouth</i>	The mouth they say:
Y <i>tú</i> le dicen al dos	And <i>two</i> they say for two
<i>Jet</i> le dicen al sombrero	<i>Hat</i> they say for the hat
<i>Jeta</i> será la cachucha...	<i>Hata</i> will be cap...

Those last two lines were obscure to me, but the song's collector interviewed the singer and explained that they are an example of the problems a Spanish-speaker has with English's lack of gendered nouns: the masculine *sombrero* is "hat" in English, so the immigrant assumes the feminine *cachucha* must likewise take a feminine ending in English, and be "hata." By the end of the song, which has over 35 verses, the narrator laments that he cannot learn English, is forgetting his Spanish, and will soon be unfit for life on either side of the border.²⁵⁷

Such comic commentary was apparently quite popular. A record by Antonio Aguilar, "Uno mas de los mojados" (One more wetback), includes similarly simple words of English and a spoken interlude describing the immigrant writing home to "sus cuates acá del rancho" that he is forgetting Spanish and having trouble with English, to which they respond, "Regrésate, güey, antes de que te quedas mudo." ("Come home, you ass, before you're left mute.")

Far from celebrating bilingual skill, these songs suggest a monolingual singer and audience confronted by a foreign language, and can be enjoyed with

she in fact speaks or understands—and the Spanish language skills of New Mexico artists and Chicano rappers are extremely varied.

²⁵⁷ "Un pelado mexicano dice que no lo vacilen," in McNeil, Norman Laird, "Corridos de Asuntos Vulgares Corresponding to the Romances Vulgares of the Spanish," MA thesis, University of Texas, 1944, 241. Deborah Pacini provides a similar Puerto Rican example, "Un

little or no knowledge of that language. This remains the case even if large portions of the song are in the foreign language. When I was playing in bars catering to American servicemen in Germany, a popular song had the chorus:

Danke schoen, bitte schoen, wiedersehen,
 Nach ein bier, kommen Sie hier,
 Grosses und kleines und nicht verstehen,
 I wish I could sprechen Sie Deutsch.

Though all but four words of this chorus were German, the singers were Anglophones making the point that they did not speak German. Like the Mexican immigrants, the audiences that heartily sang along were demonstrating their familiarity with a few words of a foreign language and at the same time emphasizing that it was not theirs and they might not even understand the sounds they were making. Indeed, one of the most famous songs of American soldiers in the First World War, “Mademoiselle from Armentieres,” equates French with nonsense sounds in its repeated refrain: “Hinky, dinky, parlez-vous.”

Such songs serve not to encourage bilingualism but to highlight the normalcy of one’s own speech as compared to the strange, foreign, and often unpleasant sounds other people make. Of the Spanish-language songs in Mexico and the Southwest that include occasional English words, most seem to put those words in the mouths not of gringos but of *pochos*, and equate them with cultural betrayal. A fragment of verse collected in New Mexico in the mid-twentieth century shows a Spanish-speaking man trying to woo a Southwestern woman who denies her heritage and language while speaking poor English:

Le dije: —¿Serás mi amada y mi corazón también?
 Y me dijo la agringada: —Me no like Mexican men.

jíbaro en New York,” by the Conjunto Típico Ladi, with verses including “A la puerta dicen

(I said to her, “Will you be my beloved and my heart?”/And the gringofied woman said, “Me no like Mexican men.”)²⁵⁸

Such songs mock semi-assimilated Mexicans who attempt to *inglear*, a neologism used in the widespread “Corrido de Pennsylvania.”²⁵⁹ A more telling neologism is found in “El mojado desobligado”: a Mexican woman scolds a returned migrant with the retort, “a mi no me chinglés,” a pun inserting *inglés* (English) in a phrase meaning “don’t fuck with me.”²⁶⁰ A particularly popular song on this theme was collected by Américo Paredes in Texas under the title “Los mexicanos que hablan inglés,” and seems to have circulated in varying forms throughout the Southwest:

En Texas es terrible por la revoltura que hay,
No hay quién diga “hasta mañana,” nomás puro *goodbye*.
Y *jau-dididú mai fren, en ayl si yu tumora*,
Para decir “diez reales” dicen *dola yene cuora*.²⁶¹

(In Texas it’s incredible how upside-down everything is/ Nobody says “hasta mañana,” nothing but just “goodbye.”/ How-dee-do my friend, and I’ll see you tomorrow,/ To say “ten *reales*” they say “dollar and a quarter.”)

The “dola yene cuora” line was collected in the 1920s in another pocho satire, “Las pollas de California” (Chicks in California), which also has an explicit reference to code-switching: “Hablando en su propio idioma, y luego dicen *good bay*.” (Speaking their own language, and then they say “goodbye.”)²⁶² Though the point of this song is to be to make fun of *pochos*, a New Mexican variant

door/Al señor le dicen *sir*” (personal communication).

²⁵⁸ Espinosa, Aurelio M. *Romancero de Nuevo México*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953, 237.

²⁵⁹ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 95.

²⁶⁰ “El mojado desobligado,” quoted in López Castro, *El Río Bravo es charco*, 347.

²⁶¹ Paredes, *Texas-Mexican Cancionero*, 164.

²⁶² Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 105-6.

collected in the 1940s suggests that some *pochos* adopted it to make fun of themselves. It includes a version of the same phrase, “Ya no hablan castellano, todos dicen Goodbye,” but casts other lines in an approving first person, “pronto aprenderemos a hablar la idioma inglés” (soon we will learn to speak the English language).²⁶³

Along with the songs satirizing *pochos* speech, there are songs about the problem of understanding gringos and about gringos trying ineptly to speak Spanish. Lalo Guerrero’s “Que vuelvan los braceros” mocks Anglos faced with the task of picking their own vegetables after the elimination of the *bracero* program: “A mí no *like* pizca—me dijo un gabacho./—‘Nomach’ mi enderezo *and then* mi agacho.” (“I don’t like picking,” a gringo told me/ “I just straighten up and then I have to bend over.”)²⁶⁴ A song from the 1920s portrayed an Anglo cotton farmer trying to persuade reluctant workers to do a second picking by offering extra money: “El americano dice: ‘Mi no quiere tú te vas,/ Yo tener pizque segunda, yo te pague un poco más.’” (The American says: “Me no want you go away/ I having second pick, I’ll pay you a little more.”) This lyric includes no English words or phrases, which might tempt researchers to file it as a Mexican commentary on conditions in the United States rather than an example of intersecting cultural codes, but the collector who preserved it noted that all the variants he found were sung to the tune of a popular Anglo minstrel-show

²⁶³ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 214. That *idioma* is given a feminine article might suggest the speaker has limited Spanish skills, but it is not unusual for Mexicans without formal education to make *idioma* feminine. That *inglés* is not given the feminine ending could also be a mistake, especially since a later line refers to “la idioma americana.” However, it could also suggest *inglés* is a noun—the formal language—and *americana* an adjective.

²⁶⁴ López Castro, *El Río Bravo es charco*, 293. The orthography here and in the next quotation is interesting: in Spanish, one would say “me enderezo” and “me agacho,” so the substitution of “mi” presumably is meant to be the English “me,” which is pronounced like the Spanish *mi*. The choice not to put these words in English orthography and italics—“*and then me agacho*”—suggests the difficulty of sorting words into language systems.

number, “It Ain’t Gonna Rain No More.”²⁶⁵

As with the New Mexico song quoted above, the use of a minstrel melody finds mockery rubbing shoulders with assimilation. There is no contradiction in mocking pocho speech while also recognizing that one speaks it, or resenting Anglo bosses while appreciating Anglo music or other aspects of Anglo culture. Along with the satiric “Los Mexicanos que hablan inglés,” Paredes collected a fragment in the voice of a Mexican or Mexican American who sings that he likes his girlfriend *nomás porque me habla inglés*—just because she speaks English with him:

Anoche le preguntaba que si me amaba,

Y me dice: “*Yes*.”

“*Oh, my little darling, please dime que sí,*”

Mamacita linda, *she belong to me*.²⁶⁶

Considering how common it is for southwesterners to be familiar with both Spanish and English, it is interesting that there are so many songs that comment on the difficulties of mixing languages and so few that treat bilingualism or biculturalism as normal. One reason for this discrepancy may be that there was little demand for casually bilingual lyrics and always a possibility that some listeners would be alienated by the mix. Songs about cultural conflict are topical and amusing, but songs that reflect in-group or regional habits may have trouble reaching a broad audience. One of the few casually bilingual lyrics I have found was a song about a picnic trip, collected in New Mexico in the late 1930s or early 1940s, which is mainly in Spanish but includes scattered borrowings from English: *bill, dime, troca* (truck), and the noun and verb *un flate* and *flatió*,

²⁶⁵ *El vacilón*, also known as *Las pelonas*, in Dickey, Dan William, “Corridos y Canciones de las Pizcas: Ballads and Songs of the 1920s Cotton Harvests,” *Western Folklore* 65(1/2), 2006, 127-8.

referring to a flat tire. The most telling indication of a bilingual culture, though, is in the names of the picnickers: Ambrosio Sánchez, Lore Carabajal, and Estella Gómez are accompanied by Jennie Torres, Mary Tracy, Rosa Hill, Isabel Diddier, and Florence King—and while the names suggest a mix of Hispanic and Anglo ancestry, the song implies that all speak Spanish and they are on their way to see a baseball game.²⁶⁷

Another New Mexico lyric tells of the experience of a local soldier in World War I, and although most of it is in Spanish it includes references to “un hike a pie” (a hike on foot), as well as a verse about being stuck in quarantine in Waco, Texas, because of the “influencia”—a malapropism conflating the Spanish word for “influence” with the “Spanish influenza,” which swept the United States in 1918. Apparently the singer was offended by the name of this disease and protests the terminology by singing:

Contando desde el <i>number one</i> <i>one</i>	Counting from <i>number</i>
Contando hasta el <i>number two</i>	Counting to <i>number two</i>
No era el <i>Spanish Influencia</i> <i>Influencia</i>	It wasn't the <i>Spanish</i>
Era el <i>American Flu</i> . ²⁶⁸	It was the <i>American Flu</i> .

This verse is categorically different from the language-mixing in the previously quoted lyrics, because it cannot be understood without a working knowledge of both Spanish and English. In that sense I would be more likely to categorize it as code-switching, because it demands that listeners recognize two language systems as different, while also expecting them to understand both. Such

²⁶⁶ Paredes, *Texas-Mexican Cancionero*, 167.

²⁶⁷ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 109-110.

²⁶⁸ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 107.

code-switching is often read as a display of pride in bridging two cultures, but can have varied valences. While the picnic song seems to celebrate mixing and biculturalism, the “*influencia*” verse seems to indicate a command of two languages but also a consciousness of ethnic division: “I know you and speak your language, and that disease is yours, not ours.”

By contrast, the New Mexico singer Baby Gaby had a hit in the 1970s with a bilingual variant of the Mexican song “*Tipi Tipi Tin*,” in which switches into English added piquancy to his courtship of an Anglo girl, but without suggesting any cultural conflict, since she switched with equal facility:

Andándome yo paseando, me encontré una gringuita
 Me dice, “I’m going dancing to my banda favorita.”
 Me dice la coquetona, “Do you want to go conmigo?”
 Yo como no era tonto, “Come on, baby, yo te sigo...”
 Cuando llegamos al baile, me dice, “Dance with me, baby.”
 Le dije, “OK, gringuita, by the way, I’m Baby Gaby.”
 Bailamos toda la noche, no misstemos ni una song
 Me dijo, “Como te avientas, you can really get it on.”²⁶⁹

(I was walking around and met a gringa/ She says to me, “*I’m going dancing to my favorite band.*”/ The coquette says to me, “*Do you want to go with me?*”/ I, since I wasn’t stupid, “*Come on, baby, I’m right behind you...*”/ When we got to the dance, she says to me, “*Dance with me, baby.*”/ I said to her, “*OK, little gringo girl, by the way, I’m Baby Gaby.*”/ We danced all night, we didn’t miss a single song/ She said to me, “*Way to shake it, you can really get it on.*”)

The switching here is indicative of shared fun, emphasized by the comical neologism, *misstemos*, which subjects the word “missed” to Spanish grammatical

²⁶⁹ Baby Gaby, “*Tipi Tipi Tin*,” on *Canta Cumbias*, Hurricane LP 10021.

rules—and the fact that this word is used in the narration rather than the spoken dialogue suggests Spanglish is the singer's normal language and not just a quirk of conversation with an Anglo. A paper by Rosan Jordan explores various ways Mexican Americans use bilingual speech play to assert or question bicultural identities, and includes several examples of this sort of comfortable bilingual joking, such as “knock-knock” jokes requiring skills in both languages:

“Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?”

“Kelly.”

“Kelly who?”

“Kelly importa.” (“¿Qué le importa?”: “What does it matter to you?”)²⁷⁰

This kind of play indicates comfort with the ability to switch between two languages, but not necessarily a broadminded appreciation of people who speak only one or the other. Gaby's “Tipi Tipi Tin” implies an equal social and linguistic relationship with Anglo neighbors, but his other bilingual hit was a version of Lalo Guerrero's “El Bracero,” originally recorded by Guerrero with the Trio Imperial in the late 1940s, and it makes fun of a Mexican worker's inability to communicate with an Anglo. Unlike most songs on this theme it involves bilingual punning that would be incomprehensible to a listener who did not command both languages, and in this respect it echoes the earlier bilingual comedy of artists like Netty y Jesús Rodríguez, a San Antonio duo who recorded dozens of comic dialogues in the 1930s. Some of their routines were clearly intended for a bilingual public, and like Guerrero's satires they at times mocked insiders and outsiders alike, Mexicans, Anglos, and *pochos*. Much of this humor

²⁷⁰ Jordan, Rosan A. “Tension and Speech Play in Mexican-American Folklore,” in Richard Baumann and Roger D. Abrahams, eds., *“And Other Neighborly Names”: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*. Austin: University of Texas, 1981, 258.

would have played quite differently with different audiences, depending on their sympathies and allegiances. “El Bracero” clearly struck a chord with New Mexicans—Al Hurricane recalled amusing his high school friends by singing it in the 1950s and Baby Gaby’s version remains a favorite—and part of its appeal may be that the bilingual singer and listeners, who understand both speakers, are thus positioned as linguistically superior to both the Mexican bracero and his Anglo interlocutor. The song’s key interchange begins when the bracero attempts to ask the Anglo for a light:

Yo le dije, “Give me match,” y me dijo “What you say?”

Y le dije, “Juan José no me llamo yo, señor.”²⁷¹

Y luego me dijo aquel, “Why do you bother me for?”

Y le dije “No señor, a mí no me gusta el Ford,

Y aunque yo no tengo carro, a mí me gusta el Chevrolet.”

Y me dijo “Get away,” y le dije, “No, señor, a mí no me diga ‘güey,’

Porque soy hombre casado y aunque no soy hombre rudo,

Yo le saco a usted el menudo p’a quitarle lo hablador.”²⁷²

(I said to him “*Give me match*,” and he said to me “*What you say?*”/And I said to him, “Juan José is not my name, sir.”/And then the guy said to me, “*Why do you bother me for?*”/And I said to him, “No sir, I don’t like a Ford/ And although I don’t have a car, what I like is a Chevrolet.”/ And he said to me, “*Get away*,” and I said to him, “No sir, you don’t call me güey [steer/cuckold],/ Because I’m a married man and although I am not a rough man,/ I’ll rip out your

²⁷¹ Netty y Jesús Rodríguez used exactly the same joke in their dialogue “Una mula de tantas” (Bluebird B-2333-A, 1935: Netty: “What you say?” Jesús: “¿Juan José? No vino...” Quoted in Haney, “Carpa y Teatro,” 322.

²⁷² Guerrero, Lalo, “El Bracero,” recorded by Trio Imperial, Discos Imperial 438, c. 1949. The way/güey pun is common in border humor, with Piporro providing a particularly nice example: “por andar en el hai-wei, free-wei, express-wei...entre tanto wei ¡me hallaron a mí!” (González, *Autobiogr...ajúa*, 262.)

guts to shut your big mouth.)

The song ends with the bracero getting arrested for assaulting the Anglo, spending ninety days in jail, and returning to Mexico with the lament, “no me quedaron ganas de volver a hablar inglés” (I had no further desire to ever again speak English). Baby Gaby’s performance mocks both the bracero and the gringo, and he makes the latter particularly ridiculous by saying his lines in a high, squeaky voice, but the bracero is also played for laughs and in other situations Gaby has not shied away from Mexican stereotypes. He is known for comic songs and along with the codes of Mexican Spanish and Southwestern English also employed the Hollywood Mexican accent of Speedy González—one of his biggest hits, “Pepito,” is a reworking of a Trinidadian calypso about cheating and illegitimacy, “Shame and Scandal in the Family,” sung in English with an exaggerated Mexican accent, while wearing a comically large sombrero. (Gaby’s version of the song is Trinidadian in two senses, since it was adapted from a record by Trinidad “Trini” Lopez.)

Lalo Guerrero’s most successful compositions for the Spanish market were mainstream rancheras, “Canción mexicana” and “Nunca jamás,” but these were hits for Mexican singers and as a performer he was best known for comic material. His most popular recordings north of the border were a series of songs that parodied English-language hits in Mexican-accented Spanish, starting with “Pancho López,” a rewrite of “The Ballad of Davy Crockett.” Guerrero’s first reworking of this song was in Spanish and became a hit in Mexico and throughout Latin America. Like the hero of the English original, who “kilt him a b’ar when he was only three,” the Mexican Pancho was a comic superman who outdid his model by becoming a killer, womanizer, fathering a son, and eventually dying as a soldier in the Revolution, all by the age of nine. But when Guerrero followed

this song with an English-language version, Pancho became a familiar Hollywood stereotype—“when there’s work to do, Pancho he run/ He go out a-grinning to sleep in the sun”—who ends up owning a taco stand on Los Angeles’s touristic Olvera Street and boasting, “old Chihuahua was nehvayr like thees.”

Comical Mexican English is a familiar linguistic code in the Southwest, and the fact that it goes along with a racist ethnic stereotype has not kept it from being used by Chicanos and Mexican immigrants among themselves and in some situations with Anglos and other outsiders. Guerrero stopped singing “Pancho López” in the 1970s after the song was criticized as degrading and offensive, but he continued to defend it, at least up to a point: “I wrote it in Spanish and I was singing for our own people. Comical, silly songs are a Mexican tradition, so people just laughed and enjoyed it.” There is nothing unusual about this: African Americans have repeated blackface minstrel jokes, Jews have amused each other with variations of “Cohen on the Telephone,” and Italians have imitated Chico Marx. However, Guerrero recognized that the joke might be heard differently by outsiders: “It’s okay to laugh about things like that in the family, so to speak, but in English maybe it does come out racist.”²⁷³

The sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann write: “Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society. Identity *types*, on the other hand, are social products *tout court*, relatively stable elements of objective social reality (the degree of stability being, of course, socially determined in its turn).”²⁷⁴ Aside from providing a nice example of how academics themselves use linguistic code-switching to signal their membership in

²⁷³ Guerrero and Meece Mentés, *Lalo*, 124. Guerrero said he was originally inspired to write “Pancho López” by hearing some kids singing, “Pancho, Pancho Villa...” to the “Davy Crockett” tune, and although in later years he recognized that the English translation was no longer acceptable, he characterized this shift as humorless “political correctness” rather than awakened ethnic pride.

an international intelligentsia (*tout court*), this formulation provides a useful way of thinking about professional performances of ethnic or linguistic identities.

Guerrero's identity was influenced by his youth in Tucson, his professional career in Los Angeles, his Mexican family background, his own consciousness of being pocho or Chicano, the intertwining pop cultures of Mexico and the United States, and multiple other forces and environments, shaped and reshaped in a dialectic with whatever society he was interacting with at a given moment. By contrast Pancho López is a pure identity type, or stereotype.

Berger and Luckmann were not primarily concerned with such extreme stereotypes. Their concept of types, like Appiah's of scripts, was a way of saying that we all shape our personal identities in relation to broader concepts of identity: someone who describes herself as Chicana or Latina is not only referring to her parentage, but also to a broader idea of what it means to be Chicana or Latina—and the same holds true when we describe ourselves or others as intelligent, pretty, musical, or fitting any other social category. This is likewise the basis of linguistic codes and code-switching: we have ideas about how various types of people talk and when we want to fit into a particular situation, give a particular impression, or attain a particular end, we adapt our speech to our conception of those norms. A classic example is "school talk" and "street talk," familiar codes that kids switch between according to their skills at adapting to their conceptions of each type.

Similarly, our reactions to other people often are affected by the degree to which their speech or behavior fits our preexisting formulations of types. Berger and Luckmann argued that in normal interactions we are always more conscious of what other people are than of what we are ourselves, because we see them in

²⁷⁴ Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 160.

front of us and are conscious of interacting with them:

“What I am” is *not* so available. To make it available requires that I stop, arrest the continuous spontaneity of my experience, and deliberately turn my attention back upon myself. What is more, such reflection about myself is typically occasioned by the attitude toward me that *the other* exhibits. It is typically a “mirror” response to attitudes of others.²⁷⁵

Analyses of linguistic code-switching often explore such mirror responses, looking for how one person’s speech triggers particular responses from another or how people subtly adapt their speech to what they think others expect of them. This typically unconscious process becomes more deliberate in the interaction of performers with audiences: performers constantly, consciously adapt their speech, music, and actions to what they perceive as the attributes, desires, or prejudices of their audiences, and reshape their performances to mirror the audiences’ reactions. In live performance this can be a largely intuitive process, dependent on how the performer senses the feel of the room shifting from song to song and moment to moment, but in recording, broadcasting, or writing there are no immediate responses to be mirrored so performers must make broad assumptions about audience tastes and beliefs. If a recording is popular with a broad audience, that both affirms the performer’s assumptions and affects the audience’s conceptions. As a result, performed speech—in this case, popular song lyrics—can provide particularly clear examples of how groups of people define themselves and others.

Philip Auslander writes, “What musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae.” Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, who described all human interactions as

²⁷⁵ Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 28.

performances, Auslander noted that this formulation includes some interactions that are explicitly framed as performances. He writes, “I choose to address musical performance using ideas [Goffman] developed for the analysis of interactions in everyday life rather than theories of acting because musicians usually appear as themselves, playing music.” People whose idea of a cool gangster is the protagonist of *Scarface* are modeling themselves on Tony Montana, not Al Pacino, but people whose idea of a cool gangster is the protagonist of Eazy-E’s rap songs model themselves on Eazy-E—not just the character in his songs, but what they know about his life and behavior offstage. Auslander notes that this is to some degree a romanticized perception, since any musical persona “is defined through social interaction and not necessarily a direct representation of the individual musician’s personality.” Direct or indirect, such personae are based not only on the particular musician’s traits, tastes, and skills, but also on her and her audiences’ experiences of previous performers. “In no case...is the musician in a position to construct a persona autonomously—personae are always negotiated between musicians and their audiences within the constraints of genre framing.”²⁷⁶

Auslander, Goffman, Berger, and Luckmann were all writing about subtler frames, personae, and performances than the cartoon stereotypes of Pepito and Pancho López, but just as professional performances of identity are an extension of the performances of identity in everyday life, stereotypes are an extension of the social types on which we base those day-to-day performances. Guerrero was a particularly adept performer of identity types, and his success in mirroring his listeners’ conceptions both of themselves and of others helps account for the unique affection and appreciation with which his songs and records are

²⁷⁶ Auslander, “Musical Personae,” 102-4.

remembered in the Southwest. He was by turns a ranchera and mariachi singer, a hip swing and R&B bandleader, an ethnic comedian, a bard of the Chicano pride movement, and a phenomenally successful children's entertainer.

Some of the varied identities Guerrero assumed over the course of his career were based on his personal self-image, some on types and stereotypes that had little or nothing to do with how he perceived himself, and some were in the infinite, indefinite territory between those extremes. Indeed, his first public performance provides a reminder that, despite Auslander's caveat, musical personae sometimes overlap actors' personae: at a school assembly when he was in the fifth grade he donned blackface make-up and sang, "I got a mammy in Alabamy."²⁷⁷

When Guerrero recalled this performance he did not describe it as a racist stereotype or an imitation of black people. On the contrary, he placed it in the context of his love of movies, which he described as "apart from my family...the biggest influence in my life when I was a child." Since he was born in 1916, the first movies he saw were silent, and like small boys all over the world he was particularly enamored of Westerns, recalling that he and his friends would "replay the whole show; we'd be Tom Mix or Ken Maynard or Tim McCoy."²⁷⁸ When he became a singer he regularly cited movie stars as models, for example recalling, "I wanted to sing real American songs like my heroes Rudy Vallee and Dick Powell."²⁷⁹ Given the importance of movies and music in his life, he was particularly excited by the appearance of *The Jazz Singer*, the first major sound movie, which went into national release in 1928, and recalled seeing it "about a dozen times." The film starred Al Jolson as Jakie Rabinowitz, a Jewish cantor's

²⁷⁷ Guerrero and Meece Mentos, *Lalo*, 38-9.

²⁷⁸ Guerrero and Meece Mentos, *Lalo*, 24.

²⁷⁹ Guerrero and Meece Mentos, *Lalo*, 92.

son who deserts his home and faith to sing pop music in blackface under the Anglicized name Jack Robin, returns to the family fold in an emergency and sings the Hebrew “Kol Nidre” in a synagogue, and finally manages to persuade his family that jazz is his true music and need not conflict with his ethnic loyalties. This theme could have had particular resonance for Guerrero, but his recollection frames the film in terms of Hollywood musicals rather than dueling ethnic loyalties and his assembly performance as an imitation of a favorite movie star, Al Jolson.

When Jolson sang about having a mammy in Alabamy he was undoubtedly perpetuating a racist stereotype—given the broad depiction of his Jewish family in the film, arguably two racist stereotypes. But it is less clear how to characterize Guerrero’s performance as a “little Mexican kid down on one knee in blackface” in Tucson, Arizona. He recalled loving and being influenced by black music, having black friends, and being disgusted that the local Mexican restaurant where he sang would not seat his black friends,²⁸⁰ and although those recollections are from a few years later, he probably knew African American children in earlier years as well. But there is no reason to assume he associated them with Jolson’s stage persona, since they would not have looked like blackface clowns or been likely to talk about having a “mammy in Alabamy.” Show-business ethnic stereotypes, though based on broader societal stereotypes, can take on a life of their own—everyone knows that Chico Marx was performing an Italian stereotype, but few are aware that Harpo Marx’s red wig was a survival of his beginnings as the Irish “Patsy” character in the same ethnic comedy routine. I assume Guerrero was aware that his Jolson imitation had some relationship to

²⁸⁰ Guerrero recalled, “You would have thought that we were in Memphis or Atlanta, but this was Tucson, Arizona! [My black friends would say hi, and] I’d smile at them but sometimes I

African Americans, but have no reason to doubt that he primarily associated the make-up and dialect with a favorite movie star: the African American performer Sammy Davis Jr. recalled his uncle helping him put on blackface makeup in roughly the same period and telling him, “Now you look like Al Jolson.”²⁸¹

In terms of language, the codes of popular culture overlap the codes of everyday life in an ongoing, reciprocal relationship, entertainers imitating what they hear offstage and audiences imitating favorite performers and performance styles. As with much other behavior, it is hard to make a clear separation between personality and performance, type and stereotype. Along with urban kids like Guerrero, real ranch hands also based aspects of their dress and talk on Hollywood cowboys, who in turn were imitating ranch hands. Indeed, some Hollywood cowboys were ranch hands—the fact that one is imitating a Mexican accent from a cartoon does not mean one is not also imitating the Mexican accent of a neighbor, which one thinks is funny because it sounds like Speedy Gonzalez, and the kid making that association can himself be Mexican. People remind us of movies, movies remind us of people, and the experiences that shape our ideas of the world and our conceptions of types include facts and fantasies, everyday life and commercial fiction. The Los Angeles gang researcher Léon Bing quotes an African American gangbanger saying:

You do things you’ve seen other people do. You try to get out the car like Warren Beatty did in *Bonnie and Clyde*. You try to do things you saw other people do when they did it to you. The way you walk up to someone and shoot ’em; the way you run when somebody tries to shoot you. It all becomes scenes from

thought, “If that was me, I’d say, ‘Take your Mexican food and shove it’” (Guerrero and Meece Montes, *Lalo*, 44-5).

movies—you're doing James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, or any of the people you grew up watchin' as gangsters.... I know people will hum music under their breath."²⁸²

By the time he recorded "Pancho Lopez" in Mexican-accented English, Guerrero had been working as a professional entertainer for more than thirty years and his musical personae had included Mexican folksinger, tropical bandleader, urban hipster, and mainstream Anglo pop crooner. He insisted that all those roles were natural to him, although all were also tailored to different, shifting markets. He sang in both Spanish and English as a child, switching and mixing according to his mood or the setting, but says that as a teenager it was "my dream to record in English, because I knew that was where the money lay," and he released his first English-language recording in 1947 under the name Don Edwards. This might suggest a degree of duplicity or selling his heritage for a mess of potage, and at least one writer has leapt to his defense by blaming the name change on his record company²⁸³—but in the 1940s it was still standard for performers to abandon "ethnic" names when they aimed at the mainstream. (Al Jolson was born Asa Yoelson, Edward G. Robinson was born Emanuel Goldenberg, and Tony Bennett was born Benedetto.) The degree to which Guerrero's various professional personae were types or stereotypes is a matter of definition and perception, but whether he was singing in Spanish, English, or a mix of languages, all involved adopting clothing, accents, and body language that

²⁸¹ Davis, Sammy, Jr., Jane Boyer, and Burt Boyer, *Sammy: An Autobiography*. New York: Macmillan, 2000, 10.

²⁸² Bing, León, *Do or Die*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991, 243.

²⁸³ Chablé, Christopher Alex, "Guerrero, Eduardo 'Lalo' (1916-2005)," in María Herrera-Sobek, ed., *Celebrating Latino Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Cultural Traditions*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012, 596. Chablé writes, "Imperial tried to have Lalo Guerrero change his name to Don Edwards," and describes "Imperial's failure in converting Lalo into an English-language sensation." Guerrero's own description of these events foregrounds his own desire to

differed from how he would have been likely to dress, talk, or move if he had followed his father's career as a boilermaker in the Southern Pacific railroad yards.

As it happens, Guerrero's most successful early recordings were also the most popular series of southwestern records to explicitly highlight linguistic code-switching—but the switching was not between Spanish and English. Around 1947, Guerrero made a record with El Trio Imperial of a composition inspired by his interactions with Pachuco hipsters in Tucson. Titled “La pachuquilla” (The Pachuco Girl), it is sung in the character of a Mexican man who attempts to flirt with a *pocha* and quotes her brushing him off in pachuco slang: “Porque no se pone al alba me está cayendo sura/ Se me hace que es puro esquér.” (Because you're not hip you're turning me off / It seems to me you're a pure square.) This record was very popular and the Trio followed up with “El pachuco,” in which the same narrator meets a pachuco who warns him about the pachuquilla's boyfriend, once again in exaggerated hipster dialect. Both songs also described current pachuco clothing, but their popularity was due to the spoken interludes—more than sixty years later, Al Hurricane responded to a question about pachuco slang by reciting passages of dialogue from these records and I have found them quoted without attribution in a dictionary of *caló* as typical pachuco conversations.²⁸⁴

Pachuco speech was played for comedy on both sides of the border, but with somewhat different intentions and receptions. When one asks Mexicans of Al Hurricane's generation about the same slang, their most common point of reference is the movie star Germán Valdés, “Tin Tan,” who grew up in Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso (the town whose slang nickname, “El

crack the English-language market, and the only instance where he describes Imperial's owner as pushing him to sing in English was “Pancho Lopez,” for which he retained his usual name.

Pachuco,” was the source of the term), and was one of the most popular Mexican comedians of the late 1940s and 1950s. In most of his movies Tin Tan was a Mexico City hipster who claimed to have lived in the United States, and although some critics attacked him for his “pochismo lingüístico” and lamented that audiences were applauding the vulgarities of contaminated border dwellers, his virtuosic wordplay also included effusions in French, Italian, German, mock Chinese, and the ornate Spanish of a flamenco singer.²⁸⁵ In at least one song he put pachuco speech on the level of the other languages, boasting of his skills “en francés, en inglés, en pachuco, y también alemán.”²⁸⁶

Guerrero was roughly the same age as Tin Tan and shared some of the same influences. Tucson was on the main train line between El Paso and Los Angeles, so by his late teens he was familiar with pachucos, jamming with them and picking up their speech and music. Nonetheless, his early Trio Imperial compositions were written from the point of view of an outsider, “making fun of the way that the pachucos were destroying the Spanish language.”²⁸⁷ The third song in this series was titled “Nuestro idioma” (Our language) and starts with the Trio explaining that Spanish is the most beautiful language in the world, then lamenting that they recently heard some guys talking on a street corner and although they were quite sure the men were “*de mi raza*,” could not understand a

²⁸⁴ Serrano, Rodolfo G., *Dictionary of Pachuco Terms*. Bakersfield, CA: no publisher, 1979, 35-6.

²⁸⁵ Aguilera Lozano, Guillermo, “Una divertida biografía,” <http://www.eureka.com.mx/ecsa/ga/tintan/7tatacha.htm>, accessed using Wayback Machine, 9/2/2012. The quoted critique was originally published by José Vasconcelos in *Novedades*, June 4, 1944. Mock languages are a whole other topic—Gurza writes of several Mexican records using mock Chinese, as well as one made up of a dialogue entirely in mock English (Gurza et al., *Arhoolie Foundation*).

²⁸⁶ “Germán Valdéz: Tin Tan El Pachuco de Mexico,” documentary for Biotv, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkwmgzjsE4>, uploaded Sep 19, 2011, accessed 12/9/12.

²⁸⁷ Guerrero and Montes, *Lalo*, 99. Guerrero recalled this song as starting the Trio Imperial’s run of Pachuco parodies, saying that Lew Chudd, the owner of Imperial records, liked it so much that they followed up with “La pachuquilla” and “El pachuco.” However, if Imperial’s numbering is to be trusted it was the third song in the series, following those hits.

word. Pleading for their listeners to help with this linguistic puzzle, they launch into a spoken conversation in exaggerated Pachuco idiom, ending with the wish that “por haber destrozado el idioma tan hermoso/ Nuestros antecesores nos han de perdonar.” (For having destroyed this beautiful language/ Our ancestors must forgive us.)

The Trio was performing in a familiar Mexican folk style and ostensibly criticizing the bastardization of castellano, but everyone who has mentioned these records to me over the years seems to recall them as hip celebrations of pachuco speech. Although he sings several of Guerrero’s songs, Al Hurricane displayed his appreciation for the Trio Imperial records by reciting the monologues rather than singing the melodies, and I had the impression that as someone growing up in a relative backwater, he considered them primers in how to talk exciting urban slang. They apparently were popular with the pachucos themselves, and by the fourth record of the series the narrator as well as the characters was using slang and the code-switching had become more complex: “El pachuco y el tarzán” is a jailhouse dialog between a hipster from California and a hipster from Mexico City, and derives its humor by contrasting their different varieties of caló. The remaining records in the series were cast entirely in pachuco idiom, including at least one song, “Maldita suerte del pachuco,” which is still performed by the New Mexico group Perfección de Chimayó—sung by Henry Martínez, the group’s oldest member, who proudly recalls that when he made his debut as a child mariachi singer in Santa Fe, Guerrero was the invited star of the annual fiesta and wanted to take him to California.

Although Guerrero at first positioned himself as an outside observer of the pachuco phenomenon, when his songs were accepted by the pachucos he quickly took advantage of the new market: “These [Trio Imperial] songs were just for

listening and laughing, but the pachucos loved to dance, so it seemed natural to write boogie-woogie and swing with caló lyrics.” He formed a hot rhythm quintet called Los Cinco Lobos (The Five Wolves) and recorded a series of upbeat, slangy hits including “Marihuana Boogie” and “Los chucos suaves” (The cool pachucos), both recorded around 1950 and still staples of Al Hurricane’s repertoire. Guerrero described these records as trilingual: “they were in Spanish and caló with a lot of English, because most of the pachucos were born in this country so they spoke English. The songs were a big hit with them—they liked being noticed and sung about, and they bought a lot of records because I spoke their language.”²⁸⁸

Once again we have the paradox of layered taxonomy: Guerrero describes the records as in three languages, and also describes that mix of three languages as “their language.” One can frame some of the linguistic play on these records as code-switching, but the codes are neither as clearly segregated nor as easily categorized as the Trio Imperial’s switches from standard ranchera Spanish to pachuco. On “Los chucos suaves,” the verses are in Spanish with some words of English and caló, sung in Guerrero’s normal voice and accent, and he also delivers asides and commentary in the broad pachuco accent of the early Trio Imperial monologues. If one wanted to classify these as separate codes, they could be called *pachuco singer* and *street pachuco*, but both suggest membership in the same linguistic in-group. As with Guerrero’s English-language recordings, one could argue that it was not his own in-group, but professional singers routinely assume a homogenized mainstream accent and vocabulary for their performances, avoiding the distinctive regional, ethnic, or class inflections of their day-to-day speech—and “mainstream” in this case means whatever is standard for their

²⁸⁸ Guerrero and Montes, *Lalo*, 99-100.

musical genre. Someone performing gangsta rap will use the inflections and vocabulary of an African American from the inner city and someone singing narcocorridos will use the inflections of the Sinaloan sierra—including an artist like Jesse Morales who identifies as Mexican from South Central Los Angeles and switches between those inflections depending on whether he is rapping or singing corridos.²⁸⁹

In New Mexico music the contrast between sung and spoken language is particularly striking because the basic linguistic performance code is to sing in Spanish and speak in English. This could be characterized as code-switching, but functions in the frame of New Mexico professional performance as a single code because the social message requires the alternation: a performer who failed to sing in Spanish or speak in English would not be fulfilling the norms of the environment. The division is by no means absolute, since it is normal to sing at least a couple of songs in English and to use some phrases of spoken Spanish. Indeed, some performers deliver extended comments in Spanish, and this is not only considered acceptable but advantageous, since it proves that they speak the language fluently. However, many of the fans who expect them to speak Spanish and applaud this ability do not understand the language, so any comments that need to be understood as more than a cultural gesture are delivered in English.

The idea of using Spanish as a cultural gesture suggests the contextualization required for any definition of code-switching. If code-switching is understood to imply mastery of two codes, then a Japanese soprano singing Schubert *lieder* is not code-switching because her performance does not imply that she speaks German, just as the use of *tout court* or *jouissance* in a lit-crit

²⁸⁹ Morales considers both of these speech styles representative of his own background and social world, but also told me about studying Chalino Sánchez recordings to get the Sinaloan

academic paper does not imply that the writer speaks French. On the other hand, the use of just one or two words in another language can be significant linguistic indicators if they convey the message that the speaker or writer is capable of switching into that language at will. Lars Hinrichs found that immigrants writing to one another in English often include phrases—sometimes as brief as a greeting or salutation—in their home language and interprets these as framing devices that mark what might seem to be one code as another (for example marking an email communication as Jamaican rather than British English).²⁹⁰

However one defines one's terms, the same linguistic gesture can have very different meanings depending on a speaker's intent and the norms of the specific group interchange. The message of mixing Spanish and English in New Mexico performances is that the community speaks both Spanish and English, but also that many individuals in the community do not speak Spanish—and both of those messages can be important if one wants to define the community as consisting neither of Anglos nor of Mexican immigrants. Those messages do not require that a performer's linguistic choices mirror her conversational skills. The “romantic bilingualism” Harris decries, whereby people typed as members of a particular ethnic group are often assumed to have a facility in the language associated with that group, can be not just a supposition but a compulsion for performers acting as symbols of the group. When Kid Frost uses a phrase like “hasta la vista” in a rap it reminds his listeners that he is Chicano, which gives the phrase a different linguistic meaning than it would have if rapped by an Anglo who might have picked it up from an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie—and that holds true even if Frost cannot speak Spanish and is imitating Arnold Schwarzenegger.

inflections right, and when Natalia Almada filmed him at a rap recording session he was being coached on his pronunciation by two black rappers (Almada, personal communication).

Along with signaling personal affinities, performers also routinely use words and phrases that are intended to indicate their familiarity with groups other than their own. The sociolinguist Ben Rampton coined the term *crossing* for the common practice of switching into someone else's code.²⁹¹ When Guerrero switched into pachuco speech in "La pachuquilla" the message was not "this is the way my group speaks" or "this is one of the ways I speak"; it was "this is how someone else speaks." Crossing often involves not simply emulation but exaggeration, emphasizing that one is adopting a different character and potentially distancing oneself from that character. As such it can be tricky business: Jane Hill has written extensively about what she calls "mock Spanish," attacking many of the ways Anglos use Spanish or Spanish-sounding words and phrases (Schwarzenegger's "hasta la vista, baby" or the common "no problemo") as racist and demeaning to Mexicans.²⁹² Her criticisms are valid in many situations, but I doubt there is anyone who does not at times imitate someone else's voice. Bakhtin writes that "hybrid" speech involving multiple accents or languages "occurs across the entire spectrum of tones—from reverent acceptance to parodic ridicule—so that it is often very difficult to establish precisely where reverence ends and ridicule begins."²⁹³ When someone who does not normally speak pachuco Spanish or ghetto English switches into one of those styles, the gesture may seem admiring to one person and offensive to another, and the semblance can depend as much on the situation and mood as on who is talking or judging.

²⁹⁰ Hinrichs, Lars, *Codeswitching on theWeb: English and Jamaican Creole in e-mail communication*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006, 90.

²⁹¹ Rampton, "Language Crossing."

²⁹² Hill, Jane H., "Hasta La Vista, Baby: Anglo Spanish in the American Southwest," *Critique of Anthropology*, 13(2), 1993; Hill, Jane H., "Mock Spanish: A Site for the Indexical Reproduction of Racism in American English. Electronic document. University of Chicago Lang-cult Site. <http://www.cs.uchicago.edu/discussionsll-c>, 1995, accessed 4/4/2012..

Performers constantly adopt characters, accents, and styles, some of which they think of as their own characteristics, some of which they think of as parodies of someone else's characteristics, and some of which are ambiguous—and in every case, members of their audience may make different judgments. Studies of code-switching often attempt to establish standard usage within particular bilingual communities and determine which kinds of switches are “acceptable”—for example arguing that no Spanish-English bilingual would describe a place as “his favorito spot.”²⁹⁴ But plenty of people, whatever their language skills, make these kinds of “unacceptable” switches not out of ignorance but because they sound weird and therefore funny. In one version of his hit “Chulas Fronteras,” Piporro confronts a border guard who accuses him of being illegal, protesting, “Wait a moment! I am working here. I am working in the pizcas, in the betabel and in the los arrozes. I got a papers, I got a papers.” A scholar of border language might argue that even someone with very limited knowledge of English would never refer to “the los arroces” (the the rices), nor would many be likely to refer to “a papers”—but plenty of people make “mistakes” like that when they are kidding around, because the exaggerated error is funnier than a more likely or authentic error would be.

While there is certainly a degree of mockery in such exaggerations, friendly mockery can be supportive and inclusive—Piporro recalled helping his uncles make annual illegal pilgrimages across the river and joked about his own “inglés pizquero” (crop picker's English).²⁹⁵ But whether mocking or friendly, normal speech is not limited to what even the most assiduous linguist could classify as

²⁹³ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 77.

²⁹⁴ Timm, L.A., “Spanish-English Code-Switching: el porque y How-Not-To,” *Romance Philology*, 48(4), 1975, 479. This subject is explored at greater length in several papers by Shana Poplack, e.g., Poplack, “Sometimes I’ll Start a Sentence.”

part of a particular community's norms. Talking funny or adopting odd locutions is part of language, and particularly of artistic language. People twist language for many reasons, some of which annoy other people—and sometimes annoying other people is the intention. The nuyorican poet Sandra María Esteves characterizes some of her bilingual writing as “just playing with the language” rather than reflecting community practices: “I was criticized for that, like when I wrote *Tabla de Contentos*. I know what *contentos* means, but I wanted to say it like that. It was a Puerto Rican intellectual who criticized me, but the thing is that control and domination are part of the colonial mindset.”²⁹⁵ As framed in this conversation, her language play was an assertion of linguistic freedom not only from Anglo norms but from the conservatism of Puerto Rican intellectuals back on the island. In another conversation, both she and her critic might have taken other positions: I don't know if she would have been equally happy about an Anglo writing “*tabla de contentos*,” or if the Puerto Rican intellectual would have considered the pun acceptable if it were made by a compatriot uncontaminated by residency in New York. We all have different standards for judging reverence and ridicule, and different tolerances for other people's standards—and all those standards and judgments shape our varying codes.

²⁹⁵ González, *Autobiogr...ajúa*, 307. Describing a trip to Paris, he also joked of speaking “francés pizquero.”

²⁹⁶ Hernández, Carmen Dolores. *Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997, 59.

9. Bimusicality and Other Linguistic Metaphors

The analogy of music to speech is often made in the context of calling music a universal language, and often in the contrary context of suggesting that differences between styles of music are similar to differences between spoken languages. When music is described as an international or universal language, the point is that one can enjoy and understand foreign and unfamiliar music in a way one cannot understand similarly foreign and unfamiliar speech. There are obvious limits to this analogy: people often dislike foreign sounds, find them disturbing, or even argue that they are not music. Just as Westerners have at times characterized the speech of primitive peoples as “not a language but a string of ill-sounding monosyllables which vex one’s ears,” they have characterized such people’s music as “savage howls which have hardly any distinct notes in them.”²⁹⁷ Nonetheless, music travels and is assimilated more easily than spoken language—no matter how popular English becomes, the number of English speakers worldwide is unlikely ever to approach the number of people who enjoy American music, and even famously monolingual societies like the British, French, and Anglo-American have eagerly adopted foreign musical styles.

One might argue that music is understood differently in different cultures and thus even if the sounds remain the same the language is different, but one of the most striking things about the spread of rock ’n’ roll in the 1950s was how similarly it was understood in New York, Mexico City, Paris, and Tokyo: as both high-energy dance music and a soundtrack of youthful rebellion. The shared rebel

²⁹⁷ Brands, H. W. *Bound to Empire : The United States and the Philippines*. New York: Oxford University, 1992, 95; Taylor, Timothy D. *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*. Durham: Duke University, 2007, 77. The first quotation is from a sarcastic characterization of racist American opinions of indigenous Filipinos, but represents a view that was once widespread and has by no means entirely disappeared.

message was due in part to the fact that in the 1950s movies still had more international presence than recordings: ranchera traveled abroad with the Mexican comedias rancheras, and rock 'n' roll first reached most regions as the soundtrack to *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Don't Knock the Rock*. But once recognized, its message was easily extended to similar-sounding songs performed in English, Spanish, or Japanese—young people could understand the music whether or not they understood the words, and in the last thirty years hip-hop seems to have attained a similar universality.

As a form of communication, music can convey not only fleeting emotions or a generalized zeitgeist, but quite precise messages, as when a change of rhythm instructs dancers to shift from a waltz to a cumbia. Even music that feels foreign is understood clearly in certain contexts: when we hear an Arabic song in a Hollywood movie we may not understand the words or know how to dance to the rhythms, but we nonetheless get the message that terrorists are nearby or in another context that a woman is about to take off her clothes. We have a lexicon of associations with foreign styles, conscious or unconscious: the success of the Buena Vista Social Club in the United States was in part due to decades-old associations of Cuban orchestras with wealthy socialites dancing in tropical paradises, and a tango signals passionate sensuality in the twenty-first century just as in the days of Rudolph Valentino. Josh Kun writes, “when we talk about music in America, and music’s role in shaping American identities and American meanings, we should be thinking of music in terms of the differences it contains, the differences it makes audible, not the unities or harmonies it can be used to fabricate. We should be thinking of pieces of music...as ‘audiotopias,’ small, momentary, lived utopias built, imagined, and sustained through sound, noise, and

music.”²⁹⁸

Music can likewise conjure dystopias, making us feel foreign and unwelcome. This is true not only of explicitly aggressive styles like heavy metal and rap; there are reports from Europe, Australia, and the United States of Bing Crosby’s mellow pop ballads and classical music being played in bus stations and shopping malls to make teenagers feel out of place and prevent them from gathering.²⁹⁹ Several of El Piporro’s recordings from the turn of the 1960s used current popular music styles to suggest the unfamiliar and unwelcoming culture north of the border. One of his most famous hits, “Natalio Reyes Colas,” begins with an accordion playing a waltz under the spoken announcement, “Ya no voy pa’l otro lado, porque no sé hablar inglés—y los que lo saben, pos no me entienden.” (I’m not going to the other side anymore, because I don’t know how to speak English—and those who do know how, they don’t understand me.) The song tells of a Mexican immigrant who travels to the United States, abandoning his homely, domestic fiancée and crossing the river without a backward glance, then meeting a *pochita* named Mabel Ortíz, whose name Piporro pronounces with a grating Anglo accent: “May-bell Or-tiss.” She changes his name in a pseudo-translation—Natalio to Nat, Reyes to King, and Colas to Cole—and the musical accompaniment shifts from a norteño waltz to the piano triplets and wailing tenor sax of a rock ’n’ roll ballad as he sings in the style of an Anglo pop crooner: “Bracero, bracero... Love is a many-splendored thing, it is the April rose that only grows in the early spring...” Or rather, he sings in a Mexican conception of the sound of an American crooner: “Lav iss a mayny splahndur teen...”

The accuracy of Piporro’s pronunciation is largely irrelevant, because his

²⁹⁸ Kun, Josh, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005, 21.

message is not in the words of the English-language lyric, but in the adoption of an Anglo style. He is singing in the familiar but tantalizingly foreign inflections of Anglo pop—a parallel to the real Nat King Cole’s albums in Spanish, which sold very well in Mexico although he did not understand the language and learned the lyrics phonetically. But by the same token Piporro is asserting his command of a shared musical idiom—he may not speak English, but can sing like Nat King Cole. Indeed, he is so familiar with the crooner’s idiom that he can overdo it, laughing at himself and taking for granted that his audience will find the sound familiar and recognize both the exaggerated mimicry and the affectionate mockery.

Bakhtin writes that in satire “two styles, two ‘languages’...come together and to a certain extent are crossed with each other: the language being parodied...and the language that parodies... against whose background the parody is constructed...[and which] is invisibly present in it.”³⁰⁰ He was specifically considering parodies such as Piporro’s Cole imitation, which are double-voiced but presented in a single language—an American pop song sung in English and backed by an American-sounding rock ’n’ roll band, but with Mexican language, music, and culture ever-present as a frame. The message is the same whether a listener understands the English words or just hears them as a familiar component of transnational pop. Either way they are both familiar and foreign, mirroring the temptations and dangers of *el otro lado*. In the context of this song, Natalio’s rock ’n’ roll crooning is a brief and ambiguous assertion of biculturalism, quickly rejected—the accordion comes back playing a comfortable waltz as Natalio abandons the *pochita* and returns to his home country, his

²⁹⁹ Mulder, Johannes, “Making Things Louder: Amplified Music and Multimodality,” PhD diss., University of Technology Sydney, 2013, 218.

³⁰⁰ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 75.

Mexican fiancée, and his native language.

This performance explicitly equates a linguistic divide with a musical divide, mapping Spanish with ranchera and English with rock 'n' roll, but simultaneously suggests the limitations of that analogy. Piporro is unquestionably switching between two different codes, clearly separated and assigned to different countries. But for most Mexicans on the cusp of the 1960s, rock 'n' roll was only a generation newer than música norteña and a couple of generations newer than the waltz, and urban bands from Ciudad Juárez to the Yucatán were playing variations of the new style alongside their polkas, waltzes, and boleros, just as twenty years earlier they had adopted the swing rhythms of “In the Mood.”

Stephen Cotrell uses the term *local bimusicality* for the skills required of musicians whose daily work requires them to play in a variety of settings or to play a diverse variety of styles in a single setting, as opposed to the bimusicality that would be necessary if one wanted to play completely unrelated styles such as norteño polka and classical Indian ragas, and he suggests that this kind of bimusicality is “more akin to a movement between different dialects, rather than a movement between separate languages.”³⁰¹ This is an appealing formulation since it mirrors the way people routinely change their speech styles to match different situations in their daily lives, as contrasted with the effort involved in mastering foreign languages. The problem with it is that virtually all professional musicians play a range of styles in virtually every setting and adopt pieces from foreign musical styles with an ease and regularity that not even the most adept linguist could hope to duplicate. For a Mexican band, the effort and adaptability required to cover Anglo swing or rock 'n' roll hits is very different from the effort and adaptability required to speak English, even with a strong Mexican accent. Mark

Slobin refers to a Middle Eastern group that played the Beatles' "Yesterday" in the midst of their usual repertoire as making "a sharp codeswitch...suggesting the band's complete mastery of its audience's tastes, which span the in-group and mainstream spheres."³⁰² But I would question whether it makes sense to refer to a band as bimusical or code-switching simply because it plays a song or melody from another culture or style. Latin bands on the Catskills hotel circuit often worked up versions of "Hava Nagilah," just as bands of virtually all sorts tend to be able to play "Happy Birthday," but that does not indicate any mastery of foreign styles—it just means they can play those songs.

Slobin does not claim that the Middle Eastern band's performance of "Yesterday" indicated mastery of pop or rock, but only a mastery of its audience's tastes, and there is certainly a parallel between code-switching from Middle Eastern melodies to transatlantic pop melodies and the linguistic code-switching people do when they slip a word of recent slang into their conversation or quote lines from movies and television to indicate their knowledge of current trends. Nonetheless, defining musical languages and associating them with particular cultures, nationalities, or ethnic groups obscures the ease with which music can be adopted as local or personal. Teenagers all over the world recall walking into movie theaters in the 1950s with little or no knowledge of rock 'n' roll and walking out two hours later claiming the music as their personal style.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Cottrell, Stephen, "Local Bimusicality among London's Freelance Musicians." *Ethnomusicology*, 51(1), 2007, 102-3.

³⁰² Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 91.

³⁰³ Reports of individuals having their lives instantly changed by seeing *Blackboard Jungle* or *Rock Around the Clock* are anecdotal and perhaps in some cases exaggerated, but the commonality of such memories is significant. Exploring the effect of the former film in Mexico, Eric Zolov describes its use of rock 'n' roll as having "established the association between the new youth culture and delinquency worldwide" (*Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999, 34), and a sample of descriptions of the effect of rock 'n' roll movies elsewhere includes Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2014, 71

Natalio Reyes Colas inhabited a neatly binary world in which the border between Mexico and the United States had Spanish and *música norteña* on one side and English and rock 'n' roll on the other. But even if we ignore that the *norteño* accordion style was originally developed in Texas using Central European instruments and rhythms, Reyes Colas's world was a nationalist fiction that bore little resemblance to the world of its creator. Piporro may have spoken only minimal English, but his first professional home was the border nightclubs of Nuevo Laredo and his description of the music and dancing there does not fit a neat binational division: "we were extra-expert tango dancers...of course, we didn't dance it in the rhythm of Buenos Aires, but certainly as 'cheek to cheek' blues, bolero, and even rumba or conga done Hollywood-style."³⁰⁴ I quote that reminiscence not to contradict his frequently-stated allegiance to *norteño* polka, but to highlight the overlapping styles and the routes he traces for them: rather than getting Latin American styles from one side of the border and Anglo American styles from the other, he approached tango by way of blues and got his conga from Hollywood.

Since many southwesterners are bilingual in Spanish and English and their musical tastes include styles from both Mexico and the United States, some writers have argued that they are correspondingly bimusical. Manuel Peña makes this a dominant trope of his study of Mexican American *orquestas*, arguing that southwestern dance bands evolved from a tradition of *coordinate bimusicality* in which they performed selections from both sides of the border, each played in its appropriate style, to a *compound bimusicality* in which styles from the two sides

(Argentina); Bruce Johnson, "Stealing the Story," in Bronwen Ann Levy and Ffion Murphy, *Story/telling*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland, 2001, 26-7 (Australia); E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 192 (Japan).

of the border were blended to form a hybrid style. The linguistic analogy seemed particularly appropriate to him because the musicians often described their musical hybridity in similarly hybrid speech. The Texas saxophonist Isidro López explained, “We have a different style than any band de otro país. Why is it? I don’t know. Puedo traer músicos del otro lado, pero aunque quieran, they can’t blow like me.”³⁰⁵ Neither Mexican musicians nor Anglo musicians could play like his *tejano* accompanists, just as neither shared his fluently bilingual speech.

The tricky thing about this analogy is that there are few if any musical performances in which one can sort Anglo and Mexican components as easily as one can sort the words in López’s description. For many southwesterners, country and western and ranchera are overlapping older styles, rock ’n’ roll is the music of the 1950s and 1960s, and tropical Latin rhythms arrived in the 1970s and are still regarded as relatively modern. Bands working Hispanic gigs in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, or Colorado are expected to play all those styles, just as bands in previous decades played the dance mix of their times, adjusted to fit particular locales and audiences, and they have particular flavors and skill sets developed from playing their regional mixes. But it would be misleading to divide this stylistic range into a neat binary of Spanish/Mexican/Latin styles on the one hand and Anglo styles on the other, as Peña himself indicates when he suggests that by the 1980s the southwestern orquesta tradition was in danger of being wiped out by the transnational power of cumbia and *balada*.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ “estamos re-buenos para el tango...claro, nosotros no en el ritmo ríoplatense, pero sí en el blues ‘chic tu chic’, bolero y hasta rumba o conga al estilo ‘Joligud.’” González, *Autobiogr...ajúa*, 61.

³⁰⁵ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 117.

³⁰⁶ Peña has at times even suggested that Mexican *norteño* might be a threat to the similar Texas *conjunto* style. In keeping with most Mexican scholars I consider the Texas style a variety of *norteño*, recognizing its regional particularities but seeing the main divide as eastern (Texas, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León) and western (Sinaloa, Durango, California). As for Peña’s more general views, he was clearly ambivalent about the interaction of Texas and southwestern traditions with

Lalo Guerrero started performing around 1930 at backyard fiestas in Tucson's Mexican immigrant barrio and recalled the musical mix in binary terms, saying, "The younger people wanted American music and the older ones wanted Mexican. It didn't matter to us; we could play both kinds." But as he traces his career this division gets fuzzier and less defining. By 1937 he had moved to Los Angeles, where he got a regular gig at the Club La Bamba on Olvera Street (which he says was more commonly known as the Bamba Club), and he recalled that the audiences were "95 percent Anglo" and "at first, almost all that we played were the Mexican standards that they were familiar with." Over the next few years he added other styles to fit evolving tastes:

Música Tropical became popular. The danzón from Veracruz has been around forever; now we added the conga from the Caribbean, and the customers would form long lines and dance around the room... The movies brought in the samba from Brazil and the tango from Argentina. And now and then we'd throw in some nice slow ones, some boleros."³⁰⁷

When Guerrero formed a dance orchestra and began touring the Southwest, his repertoire evolved accordingly: He particularly mentions boleros, danzones, waltzes, and "music that was popular at the moment, such as a porro colombiano

styles arriving from Mexico and elsewhere. His work is grounded in a Marxist commitment to working class culture, and he recognizes cumbia as an important working class style associated with Mexican immigrants but quickly assimilated by Texas and southwestern fans and musicians. However, his own musical affiliation is to polka and ranchera as played by Texas *conjuntos* and the orquestas of the *onda chicana*, and he tends to frame shifts away from those styles in the late twentieth century as local working class culture being swamped by transnational commercial culture. I do not entirely disagree with this formulation, but in the current context my point is that it does not parallel a linguistic divide between Spanish and English, since the musical assimilation is toward Mexico and Latin America while the linguistic assimilation is toward English.

³⁰⁷ Guerrero and Meece Montes, *Lalo*, 43, 66. After mentioning its official name, Guerrero thereafter refers to the venue as "The Bamba Club." This not only suggests he thought of it that way, at least when speaking English, but suggests that neither he nor the customers associated the club's name with the song "La Bamba."

like ‘María Cristina.’ When the cha-cha-chá hit, I would play that as well, and then the mambo when that was in vogue.” He also played “Beto Villa’s polkas...and some from Mexico,” though he singles this out as an obligation rather than a choice: “I am not a great polka fan, but when I was following Beto somewhere, I’d have to throw one in now and then because people demanded it.” He stresses that “in the forties and fifties, almost everyone who came to the dances was Mexican—not Mexican American. They were starved for Mexican music and we could play whatever they wanted.... For the younger people, we always included a couple of American pop numbers in each set.”³⁰⁸

The only style of music in this list that Guerrero associates with a specific artist is polka, which he presents not as a basic component of the southwestern sound but as the style of Beto Villa. A seminal figure in the evolution of southwestern dance bands, Villa is still remembered by older listeners throughout the region. His innovation was to play Mexican polkas with the instrumentation of a swing orchestra and the polka part of that equation was what was regarded as novel, since previous Mexican-American ballroom orchestras had played roughly the same repertoire as their Anglo counterparts. Describing one of the first major Texas *orquestas*, the Houston-based Los Rancheros, Peña writes, “Notwithstanding the pastoral image attached to the name, Los Rancheros was inescapably urban in orientation, from the modern business suits the orquesta wore for performances to the almost exclusively American repertoire it had

³⁰⁸ Guerrero and Meece Mentis, *Lalo*, 184, 116, 108. At least one of these quotations seems to have been taken from Manuel Peña’s interviews with Guerrero, since the repertoire list including “María Cristina” appears almost identically phrased in Peña’s book. Guerrero and Meece Mentis quote Guerrero in this sequence referring to the cha-cha rather than the cha-cha-chá, and I’ve corrected this to match Peña, since his transcription seems to me more reliable and this is what that rhythm is always called in Spanish (Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 186)—but it is perfectly possible that Guerrero, as an artist who often played for Anglo dancers, called it the cha-cha and Peña altered the quotation to match Spanish norms.

adopted.”³⁰⁹ That was in the 1920s, and I would note Peña’s use of the term “adopted” for the music but “modern” for the business suits. The implication is that the sartorial fashion was linked to a particular temporal orientation but not a particular ethnicity, while the musical fashion was adopted by one ethnic or national culture from another. The orchestral dance music of the 1920s and 1930s was new to both Anglo and Hispanic Texans, and embraced by both groups, so it would be perfectly accurate to call it “modern” rather than “adopted,” and although business suits were common on both sides of the border, Mexicans aspiring to middle class respectability in Houston presumably adopted the latest US fashions rather than the latest fashions of Mexico City. But we are used to linking music with particular groups and suggesting that one group has adopted a style from another, while it would be insulting to write that Mexican Americans in suits were dressing like Anglos.

In terms of mass-market, international pop styles, ascriptions of musical influence are not necessarily clearer than ascriptions of sartorial fashions. When Peña writes of the Texas bandleader Don Eloy Pérez being advertised as “The Glenn Miller of Latin American hipsters,”³¹⁰ it is as evidence that Mexican American orquestas were playing Anglo styles, but this is not necessarily a simple equation. The African American bandleader Fletcher Henderson was described as the “Paul Whiteman of the race” and various black singers were advertised as sepia or bronze Bing Crosbys, but jazz historians rarely take this to mean those artists were playing or singing white styles—on the contrary, they tend to take it as a symptom of the undeserved commercial power of white musicians who were imitating black styles or styles formed through ongoing interchange between the two groups. In Texas and the Southwest, there was a somewhat similar

³⁰⁹ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 127.

interchange between Anglo and Mexican musicians—or more accurately, between Anglo, Mexican, and Central European musicians, since both Anglos and Mexicans adopted variations of the polka as their most distinctive regional rhythm.

By far the most successful bimusical orchestras in the Southwest were the Western Swing bands, which explicitly presented two repertoires played in separate styles—swing music played with the instrumentation and approach of Count Basie and Benny Goodman and fiddle tunes played with the instrumentation and approach of square-dance bands—but also mixed these styles and instruments to create unique hybrids. When Villa hired the *norteco* accordionist Narciso Martínez to give his orchestra an authentic *conjunto* flavor, this paralleled what people like Bob Wills had been doing with hillbilly fiddling. Peña dates Villa's breakthrough to 1946, when he persuaded a Texas record company to let him record a Mexican polka in his big band style, and it may be significant that by that time Bob Wills had recorded a number of Mexican tunes, starting with a polka titled "Spanish Two-Step" in 1935 and including "La Golondrina," "Cielito Lindo," and "La Paloma." But the binary of hillbilly and swing or the ternary of those styles and Mexican music obscures the degree to which all of those styles were multi-ethnic hodge-podges: the Western Swing guitarist, singer and bandleader Adolph Hofner grew up in Texas speaking Czech and continued to record in that language throughout his career, started out playing ukulele in a Hawaiian trio, modeled his vocal style on Bing Crosby's, and got his first hit with the Spanish "Maria Elena."

When Peña writes that early Mexican American orchestras played the same repertoire as their Anglo counterparts, this has to be understood as a sort of

³¹⁰ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 130.

musical Venn diagram, since no orchestra played the same repertoire for all its audiences. Bands at gigs with older audiences played more polkas and waltzes while younger audiences wanted more swing, irrespective of whether those audiences were Anglo or Mexican, and bands playing gigs that drew a large proportion of Hispanic customers played more Mexican tunes, irrespective of the ethnicity of the players. While the ethnic divisions were significant and at times brutal, the musical divisions were always somewhat blurry. One of Piporro's code-switching hits, "Los ojos de Pancha," segues from accordion polka into sax-powered rock 'n' roll, but then makes a third switch into country-western, with him singing in comic English, "I am the cowboy Jim,/ I bring to you all my flowers,/ I have especially for you the 'Rancho Grande', mama." Just as virtually all Mexican bands in the Southwest played versions of "In the Mood," virtually all Anglo bands played "Allá en el Rancho Grande," and by the late 1950s it apparently made sense for at least some Mexicans to associate the seminal ranchera hit with Anglo tastes. As a testament to its broad cross-cultural appeal, by the 1940s, "Rancho Grande" had been adopted as the fight song of the University of New Mexico sports teams.³¹¹

Terms like bimusicality and musical code-switching are hard to apply in a region whose culture has been defined by multiple overlapping waves of immigration from Mexico, Europe, and the Eastern United States. Country music historians write of southwestern bands having to keep up with the latest New York pop hits in much the same terms Peña writes of Mexican American bands having to play those songs, and the Texas pianist Knocky Parker described Western Swing as a fusion of two styles that were both foreign to the region: "Mexican mariachi music from the south with jazz and country strains coming in

³¹¹ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 197.

from the east.”³¹² Nor was the overlap of Anglo and Mexican music unique to pop-oriented orchestras or adopted purely as a commercial choice. In a division between Mexican and Anglo styles, the Texas accordionist Tony de la Rosa would seem to be firmly in the Mexican camp, since he is one of the most admired *norteño* stylists on both sides of the border, but he recalled that although he grew up listening to Mexican radio and admired Narciso Martínez, “my strong point was country”:

It used to give me a go within myself. It was during the time of Bob Wills, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Roy Acuff, and Cajun, you know, Harry Choates, the Texas Top Hands, Adolph Hofner... My music was a mixture of all that. I listened to the melody of the violin, both in western-style country and Cajun country, and I played polkas on my accordion in that way.³¹³

One of de la Rosa’s most influential polkas, “El circo,” has become a *norteño* standard, although it was originally a ragtime-minstrel song, “Alabama Jubilee,” which de la Rosa adapted from a 1951 record by the country singer Red Foley, and those origins have been so thoroughly forgotten that it is often used as an accompaniment by Mexican folkloric dance troupes.³¹⁴ It would be appropriate to describe a Mexican group that sang the English lyric of “Alabama Jubilee” as switching into a foreign language, but played as an instrumental it is a common and familiar Mexican melody, and most *norteño* fans have no sense that it was ever anything else.

³¹² Roberts, *Latin Tinge*, 97.

³¹³ Ragland, *Música Norteña*, 69.

³¹⁴ I have never heard a *norteño* musician suggest that “El circo” was not a Mexican tune, and YouTube videos show it being used as a backing track by folk dancers wearing traditional costumes and presenting themselves as preservers of old, local styles (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDznrTNU6Lc> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq6X75cLFCo>, both accessed 6/20/13).

Given the ease with which music can not only take root in a new culture but lose its visible roots elsewhere, any reasonable definition of bimusicality has to include some consciousness of referencing multiple systems. Along with the infinite inextricable overlaps and intertwinings of southwestern music, there is a long tradition of performers explicitly presenting themselves as playing a mix of different styles, though rarely ordered in a neat Anglo/Latin binary. Cuarenta y Cinco advertises itself on Myspace as having “had much success by the blend of rancheras, cumbias, baleses, boleros, country/western, oldies and modern rock they perform. The ability of the band to go from hard core rancheras to country to rock and back again is what makes them one of New Mexico’s best known variety bands.”³¹⁵ This description does not divide the band’s repertoire into Hispanic and Anglo, but into seven rhythms within a higher taxonomy of three genre divisions. The order of the list moves through Latin styles to Anglo styles, suggesting some sense of ethnic division (and any ethnic ambiguity regarding waltzes is removed by calling them *baleses*), but this ordering also suggests that country is a bridge between the Latin styles and rock—an interpretation that parallels bandleader Ernie Montoya’s equation of ranchera and country-western as similarly rural, regional styles, as opposed to the more modern sounds of rock and cumbia.

The overlapping taxonomies of this webpage are not unusual, and suggest how variable and confusing musical taxonomies can be and the danger of taking them at face value. It is common for musicians to insist that they don’t think in terms of genres, boast in the next sentence of their ability to switch between genres, and a moment later describe all their music as part of a single genre—and if one wants to understand their relationship to music and genre one has to accept these shifts as complementary rather than contradictory. José Merlin Trujillo

³¹⁵ <http://www.myspace.com/micuaarentaycinco>, accessed 5/24/2013.

describes what he plays as New Mexico music, but also explains that he had to train his sidemen to switch between appropriate musical dialects: “I’d say, hey, that’s not the way... If it’s a ranchera, you do it *ranchera*. If it’s a cumbia, you’re gonna do it cumbia. If it’s a bolero, you gotta do it bolero. It’s three different styles.”

Any conception of music as language must be grounded in an attempt to understand what it communicates—not simply how it sounds, but how it sounds to particular listeners and what those sounds mean to them. Citing Goffman’s definition of frames as “the socially defined ‘principles of organization which govern events,’” Auslander warns that it is easy for outsiders to misframe musical choices. When I first heard a Mexican band play “El circo,” I recognized it as “Alabama Jubilee” and did not know it was a *norteño* standard, so I framed it as a cover of an American pop hit—much as a Mexican listener might frame Dinah Washington’s recording of “What a Difference a Day Made” as an African American performing a Mexican song. In both cases there is validity to the listener’s frame, but like the validity of framing an English-speaker’s use of “table” as a borrowing from French, it is not the normal frame of the relevant community. Whether a performance is bimusical depends not on the connections scholars can trace, but on what listeners hear. When Elvis Presley sings “It’s Now or Never,” listeners who recognize the melody as “O Sole Mio” hear a bicultural hybrid, but listeners who do not make that connection just hear a American pop-rock ballad.

Some musical performances foreground hybridity or code-switching, forcing listeners to recognize a clash of styles or cultures, but these tend to be presented as quirky novelties. The point of Piporro’s “Natalio Reyes Colas” and “Los ojos de Pancha” is that the two sides of the border are different worlds and

to make that point he switches between *norteño* and rock 'n' roll, but the result is not a hybrid style, it is a comedy routine juxtaposing two styles. Lalo Guerrero pioneered this kind of ranchera-rock code-switching in 1957 with “Elvis Pérez,” which was covered by several Mexican singers and bands, all of whom performed it in roughly the same way: the basic musical frame is a mariachi playing a *huapango* rhythm, the basic lyric tells of a Mexican mariachi singer who is turning to rock 'n' roll, and this frame is regularly broken with switches into Spanish-language versions of Elvis Presley hits—“Hound Dog,” “Heartbreak Hotel,” and “Don’t Be Cruel”—with pounding piano and drums replacing the mariachi’s acoustic guitars and violins. Three versions of this song hit almost simultaneously and they demonstrate a range of bimusical abilities: Guerrero was an adept singer of pop styles from both sides of the border, but although his mariachi singing is utterly convincing, his rock 'n' roll sounds like similar attempts by Anglo pop stars of his generation—cheerful, enthusiastic, but with none of Presley’s passion. A recording of the song by the ranchera movie star Luis Pérez Meza is less successful: in the Presley passages he is clearly affecting an unfamiliar, foreign style and loses control of both rhythm and pitch. By contrast, Sergio Bustamante of Los Lunáticos, one of Mexico’s first rock 'n' roll bands, is obviously familiar with ranchera and sings the basic verses competently, but rips into the Presley pastiches with the ferocious growl of someone who regards the new sound as a liberation rather than a joke.

Although “Natalio Reyes Colas,” “Los ojos de Pancha,” and “Elvis Pérez” all involve explicit bimusical code-switching, none suggests a balanced allegiance to ranchera and rock 'n' roll or an equal command of both idioms. Even Los Lunáticos, who obviously love rock, maintain the frame of Guerrero’s lyric, which mocks the song’s protagonist as a cultural turncoat who is losing his taste

for Mexican cuisine and eating nothing but hot dogs. Indeed, Guerrero maintains archaic *pocho* stereotypes that make little sense in a rock 'n' roll context, describing the singer as abandoning his charro costume for a Texan cowboy hat. All three songs display the performers' abilities to work in two idioms, but also their acute consciousness of cultural differences, and the use of two musical systems highlights the differences rather than the overlap, drawing lines between "us" and "them" rather than implying the possibility that someone could live comfortably in both worlds.

Guerrero recorded comfortably in English and Spanish and in a wide variety of Mexican, Anglo, and Latin musical styles, so the fact that "Elvis Pérez" maintains such a firm division presumably says more about his perception of the market than his personal sensibilities or allegiances. He made a similar choice on his comic pachuco records with the Trio Imperial, framing the pachucos as other, and when the pachucos themselves embraced those records he shifted his style accordingly to take advantage of their interest. One result was a record that like "Elvis Pérez" was a code-switching novelty, but kept the switching within a single group rather than using it to enforce boundaries between groups: "Vamos a bailar" invited pachuco audiences to demonstrate their versatility with verses that name-checked swing, danzón, and mambo, each followed by a brief instrumental section in the relevant rhythm. In contrast to the Elvis references, these switches assume a breadth of experience shared by the band and the virtuosic pachuco dancers, who were not only adept at swing, danzón, and mambo, but skillful enough to switch smoothly and instantly from one rhythm to another.

Sociolinguists have noted that some bilingual cultures tend to keep their two language systems separate while others favor bilingual play, and that smooth and frequent code-switching indicates not only a comfortable level of fluency in two

systems but also a shared culture of switching.³¹⁶ The pachucos' dancing, like their exuberantly complex language, was showy and extroverted, and "Vamos a bailar" suited not only their biculturalism and their knowledge of multiple dance styles but also their love of virtuosic exhibitionism. Beto Villa and Bob Wills both had audiences that wanted a mix of older rural and newer urban styles, but neither audience seems to have wanted to mix those styles within a single dance—at least, I have found no examples of either artist performing a dance arrangement that switched between swing, polka, hoedown, or waltz rhythms. By contrast, Guerrero recalled that when he had a regular club gig in San Diego during World War II rhythmic switching was part of his standard routine: "We were doing mostly Mexican songs with English lyrics and I would also do some songs with one chorus in Spanish and one in English. When I sang in English, the band would play American style; when I'd go into the Spanish half, they would switch to a Latin rhythm."³¹⁷

Guerrero does not specify which Latin rhythms he played, but in San Diego they would almost certainly have been Afro-Latin tropical styles rather than polka. The West Coast was late to welcome tejano or Mexican polkas, whichever side of the border one was on: Enrique Franco, a musician and composer raised in Tijuana in the 1950s, recalled that the main dance music in local clubs was mambo—specifically the Sonora Matancera and Tito Puente—along with rock 'n' roll, and said he had virtually no experience of norteño or other styles of "música regional mexicana."³¹⁸ (Peña writes that this was also true of early Texas orchestras, which "concentrated initially on American big-band music, such as swings, fox-trots, and the like with a few Latin pieces such as rumbas and tangos

³¹⁶ Gardner-Chloros, *Code-switching*, 17; Poplack, "Contrasting Patterns of Codeswitching," 217.

³¹⁷ Guerrero and Meece Mentos, *Lalo*, 91.

added for the sake of variety,” but no ranchera, which was regarded as low-class immigrant music.³¹⁹) Switching dance styles within songs seems likewise to have been a familiar urban hipster phenomenon. East Coast mambo bands in the 1940s and 1950s recorded some arrangements that switched between Latin and swing rhythms and “St. Louis Blues,” composed in 1914 during the first craze for public ballroom dancing, included a shift from foxtrot to tango and back.

Explicit and virtuosic switching, whether between spoken languages or dance rhythms, is a form of play or display that indicates mastery of multiple forms, but one can master multiple forms and not choose to indulge in showy switching. Most dancers enjoy a mix of rhythms, but prefer some rhythms to others—bandleaders throughout the Southwest in all periods talk about some styles getting the older dancers on the floor while other styles brought out the kids, or some rhythms appealing to Anglos, some to Chicanos, and some to recent Mexican immigrants. Even dancers who welcome all the styles played at a given event want to feel they are exercising a choice: at dances in New Mexico, the same people tend to take the floor for rancheras, cumbias, two-steps, and rock ’n’ roll, but almost always leave the floor after each song. Sometimes this gives them a chance to change partners or have a drink, but even couples who dance together throughout the night without a break tend to indicate the possibility that they might choose not to dance the next if it did not suit their taste. Musicians meanwhile are careful to keep an eye on who is dancing to each selection and talk about the need to provide a good mix that will please a variety of tastes, which means separating the various rhythms: a couple of rancheras, then a cumbia, then a two-step, another ranchera, and a rock ’n’ roll.

One of the most complicated issues in both spoken and musical languages is

³¹⁸ Enrique Franco, interviewed by Elijah Wald, Tijuana, 1999.

trying to sort out why some styles clash, some coexist while remaining distinct, and some fuse or supplant one another. Some languages, whether spoken or musical, might seem to intersect more easily than others: it would be logical to assume someone could more easily be bilingual in Spanish and Italian than in Spanish and English, or that Afro-Latin styles like mambo, danzón, and tango would mix with Afro-Anglo styles like swing or rock 'n' roll more comfortably than with polkas or waltzes. But languages are embraced or rejected not because of inherent similarities or differences, but because of their relationships and associations with broader social groupings. This not only means that the mixes may seem strange to outsiders, but that within a group they may not be regarded as mixes. Sometimes a foreign style is adopted as a second language, but sometimes it is assimilated as part of one's own language, and whether one thinks of it as foreign or native tends to have more to do with social groupings than with inherent structural constraints. Musicians whose native language is the Central European polka and waltz play very differently from those whose native language is the Congo-Angolan rhythms of the Caribbean and coastal Colombia, but that did not prevent cumbia from taking root in Northern Mexico and the Southwest—it just meant that Mexican and southwestern cumbia sounds different from Colombian cumbia.

The process that produced *cumbia mejicana* and *cumbia norteaña*, like the processes that produced all the other heterogeneous musical styles of the Southwest, is somewhat analogous to the linguistic processes known as pidgins and creoles. In a simple formulation, a pidgin is a form of communication used between people who speak different languages and establish a third, in-between style that is sufficient for a limited variety of interactions, and creolization is the

³¹⁹ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 280.

process by which such a pidgin may evolve into a native language. (This definition is confused by the fact that the term *pidgin* has been attached to languages that linguists define as creoles—Nigerian “pidgin English,” for example, is a creole since it is the first and only language of many urban Nigerians.) Some pidgins remain stable for generations or centuries because two populations continue to mix only in limited situations such as trading ports or marketplaces. Others evolve into creoles; a standard example is Swahili, which began as a trading pidgin used between Arabic-speaking merchants and their suppliers and clients in East Africa but now is the native language of millions of East Africans. A more controversial example is English, a mix of Germanic British languages with Norman French; like all pidgins it presumably began as a simplified means of communicating across the language divide and in that period lost many of the grammatical complexities of its Romance and Germanic sources, but over the centuries it developed its own complexities and most linguists do not currently describe it as a creole—which serves as a reminder not only that taxonomies are variable but that all taxonomies depend on the interests, experiences, and power of the people doing the sorting.

The analogy of pidgins and creoles to music may help us understand how some musics come to be recognized as native to a group or region while others continue to be considered foreign or hybrid. Mambo and the other rhythms typically grouped as tropical reached both Mexico and the United States in performances by Island musicians—particularly Cubans, with Puerto Ricans playing a significant role in the eastern United States. There were plenty of Mexicans and Anglos who played mambo, but the principle stars were Caribbean immigrants including Pérez Prado and Celia Cruz in both countries, Xavier

Cugat,³²⁰ Tito Puente, and Desi Arnaz in the US, and the Sonora Matancera in Mexico. A Mexican or southwestern orchestra covering a Pérez Prado hit, like the same orchestra covering a Glenn Miller hit, was playing for dancers familiar with Prado's and Miller's recordings and did its best to capture their sounds—everyone knew the music of “native speakers” and associated it with the exotic sexuality of the romantic islands, so dancers and listeners tended to think of mambo as an imported style and to equate playing it well with mastering a Caribbean musical accent.³²¹ As a result, there is no sense of *mambo mexicano* as a separate regional style, just as there is no sense of *swing mexicano*.

In both cases, one can present examples of different trajectories: Mambo became indigenized in New York as *salsa*, though it continues to be associated with Caribbean immigrant communities, much as *conjunto* is indigenous to Texas but specifically as the music of Mexican Americans or Tejanos. Western Swing started as a sort of pidgin—rural string bands did their best to play the latest urban hits, with limited success—but as Bob Wills and his peers found new ways of using steel guitars and fiddles, added horns to their arrangements, and asserted a modern regional identity with cinematic cowboy costumes, and as young musicians grew up playing the new style as their native language, it became a full-fledged creole. By contrast, Mexican orchestras continued to have a concept of swing as music that at best was played in business suits with the instrumentation of the Anglo big bands, and of mambo as music to be played in tropical orchestras with conga drums and güiros providing percussion and no

³²⁰ Cugat was born in Spain but grew up in Cuba and functioned in the United States as a Cuban bandleader.

³²¹ In Europe and the United States, the equation of Caribbean heritage and sexuality has often been cast in racial terms, with dark skin equaling passion, but in Mexico a similar equation was made without this component. The most popular *rumbera* or *cabaretera* movie star, Ninon Sevilla, was a Cuban who often played Mexican characters but always with a blatant sexual

obvious ranchera influences.

As in language, such musical mixes and evolutions are often described judgmentally. Dell Hymes writes of pidgins and creoles that “These languages have been considered, not creative adaptations, but degenerations; not systems in their own right, but deviations from other systems. Their origins have been explained, not by historical and social forces, but by inherent ignorance, indolence, and inferiority.”³²² I have met people who dismiss New Mexico music as a mediocre imitation of Mexican or Texan music and who dismiss banda rappers as wack rather than innovative. These musical value judgments often map with judgments about the people and cultures that perform and enjoy the music, but also are dependent on taxonomical designations. If what is spoken in Haiti is regarded as a variety of French, then by the standards of the Académie Française it is bad French; if it is regarded as a separate language called Kreyòl, it has its own standards. This is not just a difference in perspective between people in France and in Haiti; plenty of French people recognize Kreyòl as a full, legitimate language, and plenty of Haitians were upset when the local dialect replaced academic French as the language of government and education. Such disagreements are affected by prejudice, class, and social standing, and also indicate social and political choices; as with disputes about Ebonics or African American English, there are strong arguments in favor of recognizing people’s daily speech as legitimate, but also strong arguments for mastering speech styles that provide increased access to power.

In music as well, negative value judgments are not limited to outsiders. Professional musicians are acutely conscious that different jobs require different

component that was typed as Caribbean, and she was a blonde (presumably with chemical help, but blonde nonetheless).

³²² Quoted in Wardhaugh, *Introduction*, 53.

skills and some musical languages, like some varieties of speech, are associated with “ignorance, indolence, and inferiority.” Beto Villa had his first major success with musicians many of whom could not read music and who distinguished themselves by playing polkas with a rural Mexican feel, but although many fans still regard this as his greatest group, Peña writes, “he always yearned for a ‘good’ band—the kind that could execute the relatively more difficult arrangements associated with the big swing bands.” The “good” is in quotation marks because it was the word Villa himself used to distinguish such players and although he continued to feature polkas throughout his career, Peña writes that as soon as he could afford to hire such a band he replaced his old cohorts with “modern, literate professionals.”³²³

Phrased that way, Villa’s trajectory fits a common discourse of assimilation—he abandoned the musicians who gave him his distinctive flavor in favor of musicians who were arguably less distinctive or interesting, capitulating to the standards of an Anglo mainstream.³²⁴ But many southwestern bands arrived at analogous fusions from the other direction, moving from Anglo to Mexican styles, and they also experienced difficulties mastering the new language, even if by some arbitrary ethnic standard that language could be characterized as “theirs.” Oscar Lawson, leader of the Royal Jesters, which started out in San Antonio in the 1950s as a rock ’n’ roll band and evolved into a Santana-flavored *onda chicana* group known for anthems like “Yo soy chicano,” described their trajectory in a

³²³ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 141-3.

³²⁴ The tension between local vernacular styles and orchestras using European-style instruments and orchestrations was common all over the world, and the discourse of colonialist musical hegemony and assimilation was in many ways similar. However, in the Southwest bands like Villa’s faced direct competition from Anglo swing bands (both Euro- and Afro-American) and direct pressure to match the abilities of those groups when they played current pop hits. This was true for vernacular musicians throughout the United States, regardless of race or ethnicity; the “big bands” were recognized virtually universally as models of modernity and professionalism—

way that perfectly mirrors the pidgin-to-creole process, as well as providing a nice example of linguistic code-switching:

Todos nosotros, including the Royal Jesters, cantábamos puras piezas americanas. No había nada de mexicano. Mexicano wasn't in, hasta que Manny Guerra se metió con los Sunglows y tocaban en inglés y en español... That's where La Onda Chicana evolved from—tratando de agarrar los instrumentos que estaban usando las bandas locales to interpret their English numbers and trying to—con esos instrumentos tocar español. And they couldn't play it too well, so es lo que salió. It wasn't a Mexican Mexican, like Beto Villa. It was a Mexican americanado.³²⁵

Any style is determined by an interplay of skills and limitations, and it is by no means clear that virtuosic skills are more fruitful than technical or cultural limitations in producing lasting innovations. Contrasting the adoption of Cuban styles in Japan and the Congo, John Storm Roberts argued that Japanese musicians copied Cuban records so proficiently that their music was purely imitative and only served a local market that wanted live simulacrum, while Congolese musicians with more limited technical proficiency produced the most popular African musical styles of the late twentieth century: "It wasn't that a guitarist in the Congo decided to mess with Cuban music. It was that the Congolese developed a passion for Cuban music and started trying to do it and

though they also came to be recognized as representing a mainstream norm from which musicians seeking an alternative audience might choose to diverge.

³²⁵ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 255. "[All of us], including the Royal Jesters, [we sang nothing but American pieces. There was nothing Mexican.] Mexicano wasn't in, [until Manny Guerra joined the Sunglows and played in English and in Spanish]... That's where La Onda Chicana evolved from—[trying to take the instruments the local bands were using] to interpret their English numbers and trying to—[play Spanish with those instruments]. And they couldn't play it too well, so [that's what came out]. It wasn't a Mexican Mexican, like Beto Villa. It was a Mexican americanado."

couldn't do it very well, luckily, and developed their own style."³²⁶ In Lawson's terms, "they couldn't play it too well, so es lo que salió," and Peña noted that Lawson's term for the result, "Mexican *americanado*," neatly echoes the process he was describing since it is a colloquial border variant of the standard *americanizado*.³²⁷

Mexican cumbia evolved in a similar process. Whether because Colombia was further away than Cuba or because it lacked the same romantic reputation, Mexican promoters tended to import Colombian records but not Colombian performers.³²⁸ Colombian rhythms had been part of the tropical mix since at least the 1920s, with several *porros* becoming international standards, and cumbias—often indistinguishable from *porros*, at least to non-Colombians—were similarly adopted by the tropical dance orchestras that were popular throughout Mexico. Those orchestras were still based on Cuban models, and at least one cumbia historian has singled Mexico out as a meeting ground for Cuban and Colombian styles, crediting the Mexican singer and bandleader Carmen Rivera with

³²⁶ John Storm Roberts, interviewed by author, Tivoli, NY, 1989.

³²⁷ Peña underlined Lawson's point, writing that the musicians of his generation "were more 'naturally' American, just as they were less competent than their predecessors in the communicative ways of traditional Mexican culture." It is easy to read "less competent" as a value judgment, but I understand Peña's point to be that the two generations were each more competent in one cultural language and less competent in the other, mirroring a shifting balance of cultural affiliations within a consistently skilled and creative community. (Peña, Manuel. *Música Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1999, 151.)

³²⁸ The Colombian bandleader Luís Carlos Meyer, "the King of Porro," lived in New York for many years and toured and recorded in Mexico, and a few other Colombians followed his lead, but they were not a major force on the Mexican market, at least in the period I am discussing. Los Corraleros de Majagual became quite popular in Mexico over the course of the 1960s, but their main impact seems to have been on a particular, localized strain of cumbia norteña performers in the region around Monterrey (see José Juan Olvera Gudiño, "Cumbia in Mexico's Northeastern Region," in *Cumbia: Scenes of a Migrant Latin American Music Genre*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2013, 91-2). I have found no evidence that they influenced the cumbia grupera style that overflowed into New Mexico, and no cumbia covered by a New Mexico group seems to have been popularized in Mexico or the Southwest by a Colombian artist, either in person or on record—all were popularized by Cubans, Mexicans, or Southwesterners.

introducing timbales to the standard cumbia line-up.³²⁹ Along with the specialized tropical orchestras, there were also plenty of dance bands that tried to cover a broad musical range. One of the most influential Mexican pop groups of the late 1950s, Los Aragón, was named in honor of its interpretations of the cha-cha-chá hits of the Cuban Orquesta Aragón, but the *grupero* historian Toño Carrizosa writes, “their musical concept was to try to be a versatile and generic group so as to be welcome at all the parties of the late fifties, combining the music of Bill Haley, Billy Vaughn, Pérez Prado, Ray Conniff, Beny Moré, the Rock and Roll of Elvis Presley, the pasodoble and the Cha Cha Chá.”³³⁰

This was also the period of the first Mexican rock and roll bands, and although many were just groups of teenagers trying to play the music they loved, some were trying to make a living and hence had to attempt a varied range of styles—they couldn’t sound like the orchestras of Conniff or Pérez Prado, but combined “the music of Bill Haley” with the tropical rhythms dancers demanded. However, Carrizosa writes that their limitations were obvious enough to provoke an initially disparaging terminology: “people define a musician who doesn’t play tropical well due to his lack of experience, saying he is playing ‘chunchaca,’ which is nothing but an onomatopoeia of the sound a guitar makes when someone scrapes it,” and this term became standard for the style of cumbia “played by rock and roll groups that had not had much success in their own genre.” Carrizosa recognizes the Colombian critique of these groups, writing that the *chunchaqueros* “were playing a musical genre badly that should be respected with its original instrumentation,” but also emphasizes that the result was something

³²⁹ “La Cumbia en México,” <http://cuarteto-continental.unlugar.com/cuartetocontinental/cumbiamexicana.html>, uploaded Aug. 28, 2007, accessed 6/21/13.

³³⁰ Carrizosa, *Onda Grupera*, 18 (my translation, including correcting the spelling of Bill Halley to Haley).

new and different: “Cumbia played by a Rock group sounds like Cumbia, but with something missing, something that makes Colombians not recognize it as Cumbia, but rather as another rhythm. They call it Cumbia Mexicana.”³³¹

The most influential pioneers of cumbia mexicana were Mike Laure y sus Cometas, named in emulation of Bill Haley and the Comets. Laure was from Jalisco and got his professional start in an acoustic guitar trio, then joined a tropical orchestra before forming his own band, El Conjunto Monte Carlo, named for the club where they played in the lakeside resort of Chapala. His saxophone player recalled, “The group was versatile. It played boleros, it played swing, it played rock and roll, it played cha cha chá.”³³² Sources differ about when Laure changed his name from Miguel to Mike (pronounced “Meekay”) and formed the Cometas, but his first recordings were made under that name in the early 1960s for the Mexican branch of RCA, and consisted of various sorts of rock ’n’ roll: Spanish versions of Anglo hits like Haley’s “Rock Around the Clock,” instrumentals like “Boogie de la guitarra” (featuring electric guitar, accordion, sax, and steel guitar), and original numbers like “Manzanillo twist.” None were particularly successful, but around 1965 he was signed by Musart, and although the company expected more rock ’n’ roll he persuaded them to let him record a pair of cumbias that had been working well with dance crowds, “Tiburón a la vista” and “Cosecha de mujeres.”³³³ The arrangements were still rock-flavored and “Tiburón” in particular could be described as code-switching: it begins with hand-claps doubled by a snare and cymbal backing a piano riff reminiscent of

³³¹ Carrizosa, *Onda Gruperá*, 42-3, 47 (my translation).

³³² Raúl Rubio, in *Mike Laure: La historia detrás del mito*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVrBJ4VgOC0>, accessed 6/20/2013 (my translation).

³³³ Triana, Jorge, “Mike Laure, un amor en Chapala,” *La tarea: Revista de Educación y Cultura de la Sección 47 del SNTE*, 13/14, Guadalajara, Sept. 2000, at <http://www.latarea.com.mx/articu/articu13/triana13.htm>, and *Mike Laure: La historia detrás del mito*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVrBJ4VgOC0>, accessed 6/20/2013.

“Rock Around the Clock,” and returns to this riff between verses, but alternates these passages with vocal sections featuring Laure and a female singer backed by a saxophone and accordion playing in a Mexican tropical style. However, the dance rhythm remains steady throughout and “Tiburón” is always described as a cumbia—it was one of the defining hits of cumbia mexicana and despite Laure’s rock ’n’ roll roots and instrumentation, from then on he was marketed not as a rocker or fusion artist but as “El rey del trópico” (The king of the tropic).

One can easily frame Laure’s cumbia as a hybrid form, especially after he added a conga drum to his basic line-up of bass, electric guitars, sax, drum kit, and accordion in the later 1960s. (The accordion might already suggest a cross-border hybrid, but Bill Haley’s original Comets had exactly this instrumentation). It could also be framed as a pidgin, played by bands that lacked the fluency of Anglo rockers or Afro-Latin tropical orchestras in those respective styles, and therefore simplified the rhythmic and instrumental complexities of both Colombian cumbia and American rock ’n’ roll in a way that made their work particularly accessible for young dancers who liked both styles but regarded them as foreign imports. As with linguistic pidgins, it was frequently stigmatized: pidgin speech styles are often dismissed or disparaged as the language of impoverished illiterates, and the electric guitar-powered cumbia and its many later offshoots have similarly been disparaged by fans of other Mexican and southwestern styles—in both cases overlapping broader social or regional prejudices and characterized as threats rather than additions to older regional traditions.

Despite such prejudices, by the mid-1970s Mexican cumbia was a standard part of the border dance mix, played by accordion conjuntos and orquestas as well as the variously-sized dance bands that mixed Mexican and rock styles. Peña

writes that its appeal north of the border “was enhanced by the live appearances of groups such as Mike Laure’s in the widespread network of dance halls that linked California and the rest of the Southwest”³³⁴ and credit must also be given to the many Texas appearances of Rigo Tovar and his band Costa Azul, whose variant of Mexican cumbia sparked the *onda grupera* and still inspires an almost religious devotion from many fans. But even without such cross-border touring the similar rock ’n’ roll instrumentation made it easy for Hispanic rockers like Al Hurricane to add cumbia mexicana to their repertoires. At first such artists tended to treat cumbias as novelties, but dancers responded enthusiastically and the new styles stuck. Like the music, cumbia dancing in Northern Mexico and the southwest might be characterized as a pidgin or creole form: people raised on polka, two-steps, and jitterbug do not move their hips like people raised in Afro-Latin cultures, and devotees of Caribbean traditions tend to find southwestern cumbia dancing as inept as the music that accompanies it, but the relative simplicity of both the rhythms and the dance style—or otherwise phrased, their enduring debt to southwestern rather than Afro-Latin antecedents—made the local cumbia accessible to southwestern dancers in a way no other tropical style had been. By the 1990s it was fully creolized, in the sense that cumbias had joined polkas and rock ’n’ roll as part of a basic vocabulary shared by ranchera, tejano, and New Mexico dancers, many of whom dislike tropical bands, which they tend to associate with recent Mexican immigrants. (The Caravan East nightclub in Albuquerque has separate Mexican, New Mexico, and country music nights, and everyone involved takes it for granted that the New Mexico and country nights will mostly draw native Hispanics, while the Mexican night, typically featuring local tropical groups, will draw only immigrants.)

³³⁴ Peña, *Mexican American Orquesta*, 228.

Analogies of music to language are always flawed, as are all analogies, but the scientific statistician George Box makes the point that although “all models are wrong...some are useful.”³³⁵ His point is that models, whether physical or theoretical, should not be mistaken for accurate representations but can serve as tools in particular situations. Music is different from spoken language, but analogies of music to language are useful if they help us to hear either or both in new or different ways or to better understand how either interacts with other aspects of culture. This is true not only to the extent that the model is “right”—that divergent musical styles map with divergent linguistic styles, or map in similar ways—but also, and perhaps more importantly, when it is wrong. Border cumbia can be framed as Colombian music played with a Mexican or Chicano accent, but it can also be framed as Mexican or Chicano music played with a Colombian accent. The relationship of spoken languages to accents is not similarly reciprocal—I cannot imagine a phrase that could equally well be described as being English spoken with a Spanish accent or Spanish spoken with an English accent—and that disparity suggests a way in which music differs from spoken language.

Even when languages overlap and mingle, their separate histories remain stubbornly visible in a way musical histories do not—after five centuries, we still think of the main languages of the southwest as coming from Spain and England—and it is much easier to think of a newly acquired music as “mine” than to similarly embrace and assimilate a new language. Of course many Mexicans and Chicanos think of Spanish as “their” language and it is the only language they share as a group, but everyone remains aware that it is from Spain, while few banda or norteño fans are aware that their standard polka rhythms are German or

³³⁵ Box, G. E. P., and Draper, N. R. *Empirical Model Building and Response Surfaces*. New

Central European. The concept of bimusicality is useful in part because it forces us to acknowledge that difference, and in the process to recognize that bimusicality is a choice in a way bilingualism is not. Someone who speaks English and Spanish is inevitably aware of knowing two languages, but someone who plays polka and cumbia with rock 'n' roll instrumentation may think of himself as playing a single local style. On the other hand, someone who speaks Spanish differently in different settings tends to think of it as a single language, while someone who sings in some situations with a *norteño* band and in others with a *mariachi* tends to think of those as two distinct styles, although the singing may be identical.³³⁶

The juxtaposition of musical and spoken languages suggests multiple ways in which they map and fail to map with one another. Playing Spanish-language songs with electric guitars signals a different affiliation in Mexico, where it is heard as rock fusion, than in New Mexico, where it is heard as a preservation of old Hispanic traditions.³³⁷ When a Chicano rapper uses a *banda* or *mariachi* sample to back an English-language rap, there are ways in which that is like dropping a phrase of Spanish into his lyrical flow—but it has been far more common for Chicano rappers to signal their cultural roots with samples of “Chicano oldies” recorded in English by African American groups and these also could be said to function in this context like phrases of Spanish. Arguably the affiliation in one case is the music and language of Mexico while in the other it is

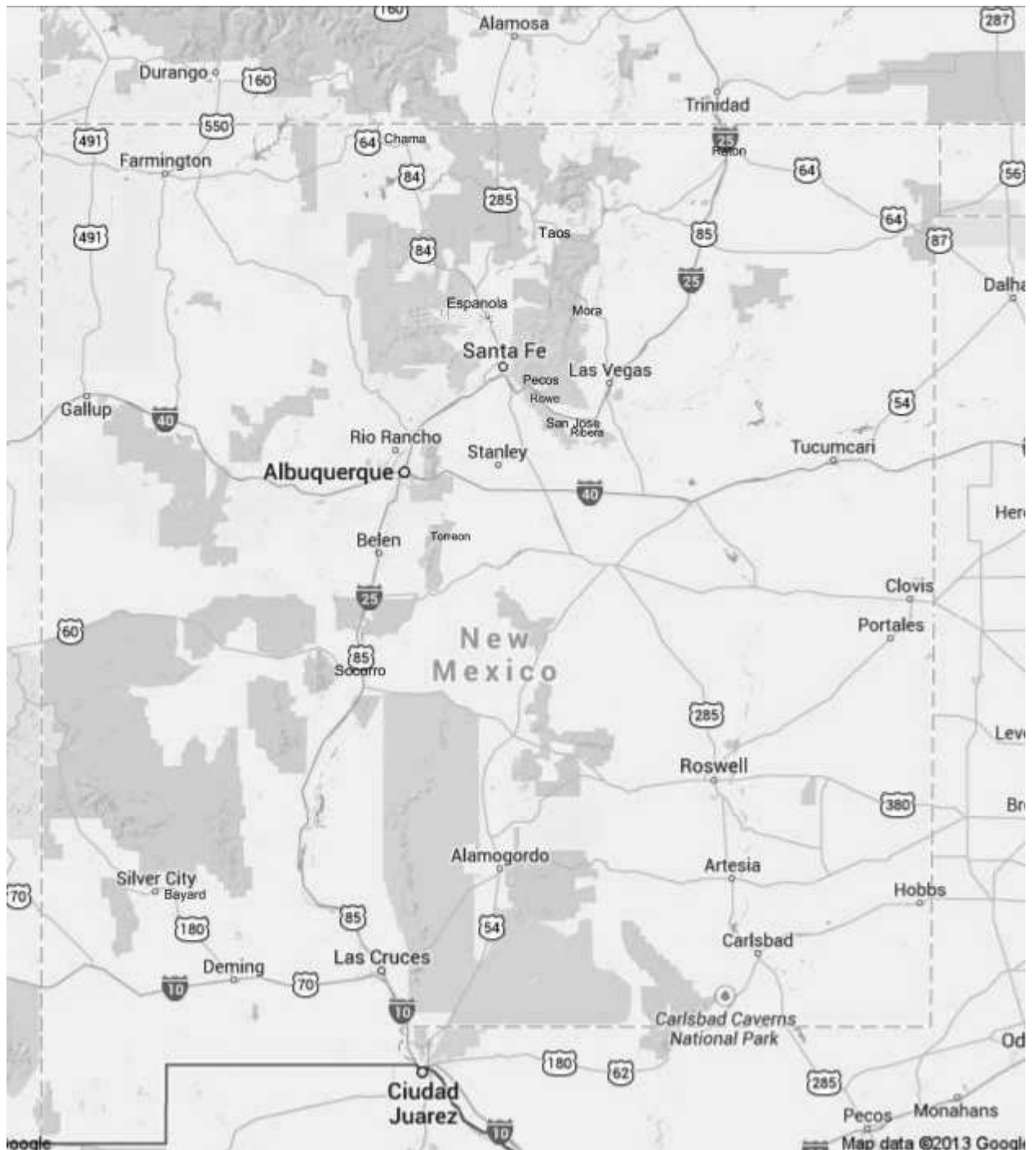
York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987, 424.

³³⁶ Since it has become standard to record vocal and instrumental tracks separately, there are numerous examples of vocal tracks that were originally recorded and released with *norteño* or *banda* backing later being issued with *mariachi* or pop backing to get additional sales or reach a different market—for example, posthumous CDs of Chalino Sánchez singing with *mariachi*.

³³⁷ When Mexican musicians cover *Tigres del Norte* hits with rock instrumentation the result is typically filed as “rock en español,” but I never heard any music classified that way in New Mexico and when local bands cover *Tigres* hits with that instrumentation it is considered traditional New Mexico music.

the music and language of urban barrios north of the border, but in both cases the Spanish phrase may be the same and the distinction between those affiliations is by no means always clear. Looking at musical and spoken languages as they sometimes overlap and sometimes diverge takes us beyond simplifications like bilingualism or bimusicality even when it uses both, and in the process highlights the daunting multiplicity and constant reshaping of cultural borders.

Section Two: Rocking Ranchera in Hispanic New Mexico



Map 1: New Mexico, showing towns mentioned in the text.

1. Local Background

The first Spanish explorers arrived in New Mexico in 1540, and the first Spanish settlers arrived in 1598. Led by Juan de Oñate, a colonial Spaniard (or *criollo*) born in Zacatecas, Mexico, the group consisted of 129 “soldier-colonists,” many with their families, ten Franciscan priests, and several hundred Mexican Indians. They settled near present-day Española, which was briefly the capital of the colony until Santa Fe became the seat of government in 1610. Over the succeeding decades Spanish rule was challenged by several Native American rebellions—most successfully in the Pueblo revolt of 1680—but by the end of the seventeenth century it was solidly established and New Mexico was officially a Spanish colony until Mexico declared its independence in 1821. The region remained part of northern Mexico until the Mexican-American War, was ceded to the United States in 1848 as part of Texas, and became the separate New Mexico Territory in 1850.³³⁸

During the Spanish and Mexican periods, New Mexico was connected to the rest of Mexico by a single trade route through the Sonoran desert and its largest town was El Paso del Norte (the modern El Paso/Ciudad Juárez), more than 250 miles south of Albuquerque. Spanish-speaking settlers in what is now the northern half of the state had ongoing contact with Mexico, but some areas were more isolated than others and the degree of Spanish or Mexican influence in any particular period is a matter of dispute and definition, as is the term “Spanish.” Richard Nostrand writes that during the Spanish colonial period, “Children of an Indian and a mestizo were classed as mestizo, and those of a

³³⁸ Jenkins, Myra Ellen, and Albert H. Schroeder, *A Brief History of New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1973, 13-31.

mestizo and a Spaniard were accorded Spanish status.”³³⁹ He also writes that the Spanish and Indian populations remained relatively segregated, but the Indians in that construction were local tribes and the Spanish population included everyone who arrived from Mexico, whatever their mix of Native American, European, or African heritage. There were also thousands of *genizaros* (“hispanized” or “detrribalized” local Indians), many of whom intermarried with the newcomers and had children who were considered Spanish.³⁴⁰

Nostrand estimates that by 1850 there were more than eighty thousand “Mexican Americans” in the newly acquired southwestern United States, roughly two thirds of them “Hispanos” living in Northern New Mexico (which he defines as the territory north of Socorro). Hispanos accounted for over ninety percent of the population in their “homeland,” which he defines as the areas of Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado in which at least ten percent of the population was non-Native American.³⁴¹ This terminology is somewhat tortured, since Nostrand is trying to avoid defining Hispanos ethnically, except in relation to local Indians and the Anglos arriving from elsewhere in the United States, and also as separate from those groups, although Hispanos intermarried with both local Indians and Anglos. The concept of a “Hispano homeland,” defined by excluding any place where Native Americans remained a significant population—for example, he includes the town of Taos and its surrounding area is part of the

³³⁹ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 57.

³⁴⁰ The term *genízaro* in this context seems to be unique to New Mexico. The word had previously been used in Spain for children of a Spanish and a foreign parent, but in New Mexico designated “North American Indians of mixed tribal derivation living...in Spanish fashion... in special communities or sprinkled among the Hispanic towns and ranchos (Fray Angelico Chavez, “Genizaros,” in William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians: Southwest*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1978, 198).

³⁴¹ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 22. Nostrand draws these figures from the 1850 census, with estimates for gaps, and despite acknowledging that they are not solid, provides very solid-seeming numbers, 80,302 Mexican Americans of whom 54,394 were Hispanos. I take these numbers to be speculative but indicative.

Hispanic homeland, but excludes Taos Pueblo—is clearly intended to position Hispanos as natives rather than immigrants, but by the early twentieth century one could have defined an Anglo “homeland” in the same region, meaning those towns or neighborhoods in which at least ninety percent of the population was neither Native American nor Hispano. Nostrand’s terminology is designed to establish Hispanos as different from local Indians but also native to the region in a way Anglos are not, which makes perfect sense from the perspective of early Spanish or Mexican settlers—but it is worth noting that this is a particular perspective.

The specificity of the term *Hispano*, which has become standard in academic studies of New Mexico, distinguishes this group not only from Indians and Anglos, but also from Mexican immigrants—a category that in Nostrand’s definition includes everyone whose ancestors arrived from Mexico after 1848. This basic concept of Hispano heritage and tradition, if not his specific definitions and terminology, is broadly shared by the core New Mexico music audience and is central to the way Hispanic New Mexicans think of their region and culture as unique. However, when individuals describe their familial or cultural roots they often add other shadings and interpretations: like the Anglo descendants of early New England settlers, Hispanic New Mexicans frequently claim some local Indian ancestry and many also mention Anglo, Irish, French, or Italian grandparents or great-grandparents. The distinction between Hispanic and Mexican is even more permeable: María Cristina López, who arrived in New Mexico from Chihuahua in 1963, writes that her Nuevomexicano friends “cringed when I said the word ‘Mexican’ [and] politely told me to say I was Spanish,” but everywhere she traveled in the state she found families that recalled ancestors arriving from Mexico and she writes that although “newcomers are always looked

upon with suspicion...after a generation and intermarriage they become part of the local community.”³⁴²

Compared to areas of the Southwest with large cities or industrial agriculture, Northern New Mexico has attracted relatively few immigrants in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.. The 1970 census reported that 3.7 percent of New Mexico residents were either born in Mexico or had a parent from there—significantly fewer than for any other border state—and that fell to one percent for the northern mountain counties with Hispanic majorities.³⁴³ In an article titled, “The Forgotten Diaspora: Mexican Immigration to New Mexico,” María Rosa García-Acevedo writes that almost a third of the miners working in New Mexico in 1920 were Mexican nationals,³⁴⁴ suggesting that in some periods and areas the proportion was higher, but the overall immigrant population was always relatively small and largely limited to the southern half of the state, between the border and Albuquerque. In the 2010 census, 46 percent of New Mexicans identified as Hispanic or Latino and 62 percent of that group identified as Mexican, but in the rural north the proportions were significantly different: 69 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, but less than a third of that group identified as Mexican and less than a sixth had been born in Mexico. It is hard to know how to weigh those statistics, since all the terms mean different things to different people, but one can safely say that although Mexican immigration has always been part of New Mexico’s cultural landscape, it has consistently been less influential than in

³⁴² López, María Cristina, “Tricky Mirror: Mexican Immigrants in New Mexico,” in Marta Weigle et al., eds., *Telling New Mexico: A New History*. Santa Fe, Museum of New Mexico, 2009, 401, 403.

³⁴³ In 1970, the percentage of first or second generation Mexican immigrants in California was 5.6 (7.2 in Los Angeles County), in Arizona was over 6.4, and in Texas was over 6.3. (For Arizona and Texas, the census only provides specific national origins for people in cities of over 100,000, so fails to count the presumably large populations of immigrants in rural areas.)

neighboring states: as of 2010, 16 percent of Hispanic-identifying New Mexicans had been born in Mexico, as compared to 30 percent of Hispanic Arizonans and 37 percent of Hispanic Texans.

1970	New Mexico state	Bernalillo County	Santa Fe County	Northern New Mexico (w/o Santa Fe)
total population	1,015,998	315,774	52,756	69,910
% Spanish origin or descent	30%	30%	50%	61%
% Mexican birth or parent	3.7%	1.4%	1%	1%
% Spanish as "mother tongue"	33%	31%	56%	71%
% African American	1.9%	2.1%	0.5%	0.2%

2010	New Mexico state	Bernalillo County	Santa Fe County	Northern New Mexico (w/o Santa Fe)
Total population	2,059,179	662,564	144,170	107,457
% Hispanic or Latino	46.3%	47.9	50.6	68.5
% Mexican ethnicity	28.7	27.6	22.4	22
% born in Mexico	7	7	8	3.4
% Speak Spanish	26	23.5	29	48
% African American	2.1	3	0.9	0.7

Table 1: New Mexico ethnicity and language, 1970 and 2010. Bernalillo County is the site of Albuquerque; Santa Fe is the only substantial city in Northern New Mexico, and has a somewhat different demographic from its surrounding area. "Northern New Mexico," in this instance means the four other counties with Hispanic majorities (Rio Arriba, Taos, Mora, and San Miguel), including the towns of Española, Taos, Las Vegas, and the smaller villages to which virtually all New Mexico music artists trace their immediate ancestry. The census categories were somewhat different in 1970 and 2010, so comparisons are inexact—it is undoubtedly true that fewer people speak Spanish, but also possible that some who say they do not would nonetheless list it as their "mother tongue." It is also hard to estimate how one should assess the different percentages of people currently checking "Hispanic or Latino" or "Mexican" for their ethnicity and those who checked "Spanish Origin" in 1970.

³⁴⁴ García-Acevedo, María Rosa "The Forgotten Diaspora: Mexican Immigration to New Mexico," in Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel, eds., *The Contested Homeland: A*

Beyond what can be statistically quantified, the meanings of *Mexican* and *Hispanic* in Northern New Mexico have been affected by a discourse of “pure Spanish” heritage, which was espoused and promoted by some of the state’s most prominent folklorists. The pioneering scholar of New Mexico Spanish culture, Aurelio Espinosa, after spending decades collecting traditional ballads in the region, wrote, “As a result of comparative study, it is now a well-established fact that the folklore of New Mexico is for the most part of peninsular Spanish origin.”³⁴⁵ This claim says more about what Espinosa chose to study than about the folklore of New Mexico, but is in keeping with common claims that the Spanish spoken in Northern New Mexico is closer to what the conquistadors spoke when they arrived in the Americas than is the variety spoken in Mexico. Like similar claims of Anglo-Celtic cultural purity and archaic survivals in the mountains of Appalachia, this discourse has a basis in fact: people living in isolated areas commonly preserve language, music, and other traditions that have disappeared elsewhere. However, the fact that such populations preserve unique practices, language, and lore does not mean they remain closer to a pure or primal source; it just means that their evolution was different.

Some writers have argued that the discourse of “pure Spanish” heritage is a claim to white racial status in the United States, developed in reaction to Anglo prejudice or as part of the effort to gain statehood for the New Mexico Territory, and that was undoubtedly a factor, at least for some people in some regions and periods.³⁴⁶ However, a very similar discourse exists in mountainous areas of

Chicano History of New Mexico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2000, 218.

³⁴⁵ Espinosa, Aurelio M. *The Folklore of Spain in the American Southwest: Traditional Spanish Folk literature in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1985, 68.

³⁴⁶ A particularly full discussion of this subject is provided in Anthony P. Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848–1912*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2011. In the 2010 census, 60 percent of New Mexicans who identified as Hispanic

Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America,³⁴⁷ and as with all claims of ethnic or racial purity, the point is not to trace genealogy but to define a group in contrast to other groups. People who feel isolated from a more powerful surrounding culture are naturally tempted to frame their isolation as superiority and to claim affiliation with groups that have more status or power, and as the relations between groups change, their claims of purity are often reframed or take on different meanings. Many of the people I interviewed in New Mexico described their heritage as Spanish, but also used the term “white” specifically to refer to Anglos. The New Mexico anthropologist Sylvia Rodríguez writes, “Spanish can mean white or not white depending on the context... ‘Spanish’ in one context and point in time means, first and foremost, not-Indian; in another it means not-Mexican.”³⁴⁸

As with virtually all formulations of identity, individual interpretations of New Mexico Spanish heritage constantly confound generalizations: Ernie Montoya firmly says that he does not “have *any* roots in Mexico.... My family’s been here in this valley four hundred years.... Came *through* Mexico, through Zacatecas into El Paso and up this way, but have never had any roots there.” But far from framing this as a claim to pure European heritage, he comments scornfully on people who say their Spanish ancestors were “blue-eyed,” saying “the ones in Spain were, [but] the ones the king of Spain was sending here were all Arabic descent...the explorers that came, Coronado, Pizarro, Oñate, were all

described their race as “white alone,” which is higher than the national rate (53 percent), but not wildly higher.

³⁴⁷ Marcia Farr writes that *rancheros* in the mountains of Jalisco still “identify strongly with the Spanish side of their heritage,” and have maintained traditions of “*pureza de sangre*,” in some cases even distinguishing between those who are pure Spanish and those whose ancestors arrived from Spain but have Moorish blood. (Farr, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán: Language and Identity in a Transnational Community*. Austin: University of Texas, 2006, 136.) I similarly heard Sinaloans point out that many people in the mountains were blond and blue-eyed, although I never actually met such a person. Deborah Pacini writes that people in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic make similar claims to Spanish heritage (personal communication, 11/25/13).

³⁴⁸ Rodríguez, “Tourism, Whiteness, and the Vanishing Anglo,” 206.

Moors that were converted to Christians and Spanish.”³⁴⁹ He also says, “A lot of the Spanish language here was influenced by the Pueblos: We use like a lot of the words, like *puela*, which means a pan, is a Puebla word, it means the little bowls they had. The word *jejene*, which is mosquito, is an Indian word.”³⁵⁰ He frames this as underlining the difference between New Mexicans and Mexicans, saying, “there’s a lot of Indian words that we incorporated in the Spanish language that the Mexicans come here and they don’t understand.”

Similarly, Mathew Martínez of the band Perfección explains his preference for the term *Hispanic* by saying, “You couldn’t say we’re Mexican, because we aren’t Mexican, purely. And we can’t say that we’re Native American, ’cause we’re not. And we can’t say we’re from Spain because we’re really not. The mixture is pretty unique.”

For some New Mexicans, pride in Spanish heritage is undoubtedly intertwined with racial or ethnic prejudices, but as Phillip Gonzales writes, “If we look behind the content of the Spanish-culture and pure-blood claims, what appears is a bedrock identification, not with Spain or things Spanish necessarily, but with New Mexico fundamentally.”³⁵¹ In my experience, it is common for New Mexico natives to frame their identity not only as non-Anglo and non-Mexican, but in regional terms as non-Texan—which in part may reflect a history of Anglo

³⁴⁹ Montoya says that Oñate in particular was “one hundred percent Moor, they called him un moro cristiano.” I can find no authority who supports this contention, though several trace some Jewish ancestry. It is certainly true that many of the people who left Spain for the Americas were Jewish or Moorish *conversos*, and in any case the populations of North Africa and southern Spain have mixed and overlapped forever, and modern distinctions that treat the Mediterranean as dividing rather than joining them have very little genealogical basis.

³⁵⁰ Neither of these words is in fact indigenous to New Mexico. Cobos (*Dictionary of New Mexico and Southern Colorado Spanish*, 139) traces *puela* to the French *poêle*, and although some Mexican scholars have traced *jején* to a Mayan root, the more common derivation is from the Anahuac *xixén*, and the word is used throughout the Caribbean basin, Central America, and along the northern coast of South America.

³⁵¹ Gonzales, Phillip B., “The Protest Function of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico,” Southwest Hispanic Research Institute Working Paper #111, 1985, archived at <http://repository.unm.edu/handle/1928/20251>, 4.

invasions from Texas, but in musical contexts has at least as much to do with the dominance of tejano artists and recording companies on the southwestern music scene.³⁵² People's specific ways of framing local identity included ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and geographical factors in varying degrees depending on momentary context, and many mentioned parents or grandparents who were Anglo, French, Mexican, or members of local Indian tribes without suggesting that this diluted their basic identification as Spanish, Hispanic, or native New Mexican. Nor do northern New Mexicans tend to map their home region according to the state's official borders: many regard southern Colorado as part of Northern New Mexico, while describing southern New Mexico as "more like Texas." As Gonzalez suggests, their "bedrock identification" is with a particular region, culture, and history, and whatever term they prefer, they understand it to mean: "us, here."

At least, that is the way the people I spoke with seemed to understand their identity in relation to New Mexico music. In that context, musicians and fans tend to stress their differences from Mexicans and tejanos rather than from Anglos—most of their music is in Spanish, so they feel no pressure to differentiate it from Anglo styles and often note similarities to Anglo rock or country that differentiate the local style from other varieties of ranchera. What sets New Mexico music apart from other styles of southwestern ranchera is its particular emphasis on rooted, local heritage. In Texas and California, people who stress the uniqueness of local styles tend to stress the innovations that set them apart, but claims of

³⁵² The relationship between Hispanic New Mexicans and Texas is far too complex to be covered here in detail, but especially in the northern mountains, Texas symbolizes both Anglo incursions and a Mexican and Mexican American recording industry that has tended to ignore New Mexico artists and styles. In terms of the transnational music business, tejano is generally recognized as the major southwestern style, to the point that the only Grammy category in which a New Mexico Spanish recording might be considered is called "Best Regional Mexican or Tejano Album."

uniqueness in New Mexico tend to be framed as retention—Texans take pride in having modernized the music, but New Mexicans criticize them for having made it too “jazzy” or complicated, and stress their fidelity to tradition.

As an outsider, what first struck me about New Mexico music was not that it was either traditional or innovative, but simply that it was so resolutely defined as its own genre by local radio programmers and music marketers. Outside of New Orleans, I had never heard a radio station promote itself as playing exclusively local music and in New Mexico I heard that claim on multiple stations. Some of the music I was hearing on those stations interested me, but a lot of it sounded like what I had heard played by bar bands elsewhere in the Southwest. Bar bands tend to play roughly the same mix of music that is on a venue’s jukebox, and all over the Southwest it is common to find bars whose jukebox includes Los Tigres del Norte, Merle Haggard, and Elvis Presley. A band in Tucson that can play hits by all of those artists is considered versatile and will be likely to get jobs that a less versatile band would not, but it is not considered to be playing “Arizona music,” for the obvious reason that none of the source artists is from Arizona. Nor do those bar bands tend to get significant radio play or to make records of the familiar hits they cover, except perhaps to sell at gigs. By contrast, in New Mexico I was hearing music that sounded very similar to the kind of ranchera played by Arizona bar bands, and it was being promoted as a unique regional style on stations that did not play Los Tigres, Haggard, or Presley.

When I began my research, I was less interested in the music itself than in this framing: I was curious why roughly the same musical mix, played in roughly the same way, is framed in Arizona as a band playing various styles and in New Mexico as a band playing New Mexico music. Any attempt to answer that question has to start with the further question: Framed by whom? In some earlier

period I could presumably have found plenty of people in New Mexico who thought of their local bands as versatile cover groups, and presumably there are people in Arizona who would claim that their local bands have a special sound. But New Mexicans have developed record labels and distribution networks, radio stations, festivals, award ceremonies, and a devoted fan base for something they define as “New Mexico music,” and despite the fact that this music has virtually no penetration outside the state (except in southern Colorado and among New Mexicans living elsewhere), this scene seems more stable and cohesive than any other specifically local style I am aware of elsewhere in the United States. (Despite the popularity of Cajun and Tejano styles, there is only one Louisiana music station in New Orleans, which plays mostly local blues and jazz, and no Cajun music station in the state, nor can I find any Texas station that maintains a solid tejano playlist.)

The evolution and endurance of New Mexico music as a genre is one of the main themes of this study, but that theme is explored as part of a broader argument that musical genres, like other defined languages, are not particular ways of sounding or talking, but rather ways of defining a group of people who share them. Group definitions, though often phrased as if they comprised a group of people who are similar, are not based on individuals who are similar, but rather on the way in which a heterogeneous selection of individuals are similar—in Stuart Hall’s terms, their “point of suture.”³⁵³ It might seem that large groups of people would be more varied than any individual person, but by definition the

³⁵³ Hall writes: “I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.” (“Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” in Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996, 5-6.)

opposite is true: a group is defined by the relatively few attributes or characteristics they share, and individuals are only members of any group to the extent and in the respect that they share that similarity, while being different in myriad other ways.

In the case of New Mexico music, the process by which it has been defined as a unique genre involved separating it from the styles that influenced and surrounded it. That process began with the growing popularity and influence of a single musical family and in particular with the work of a single artist, Al Hurricane. So it is logical to begin a study of New Mexico music with a study of him and his family and their musical evolution and contributions. The following section is arranged to suggest the broadening process of an individual musician's experience, and then the narrowing process of genre definition. It tells the story of New Mexico music first by looking at the breadth and variety of music explored and performed by the style's foundational figure, and then at the ways in which an increasingly narrow repertoire and style of playing has come to define the core New Mexico sound.

2. Al Hurricane, the Godfather

The Spanish music of New Mexico has been written about for more than two hundred years and became a frequent subject of study for folklorists in the twentieth century, but the genre called “New Mexico music” is specifically derived from the work of one artist, Al Hurricane. Without exception, everyone involved in the New Mexico music scene credits him as a major and defining influence, the only question being to what extent this credit should be shared with the rest of his family—his brothers Tiny Morrie and Baby Gaby, his sons Al Hurricane Jr. and Jerry Dean, and his mother, Bennie Sánchez, who managed much of their business and was at times the most prominent concert promoter in Albuquerque. Morrie in particular has had a separate musical career centered on his son Lorenzo Antonio and his four daughters, who form the group Sparx, and they have been far more successful than the rest of the family outside New Mexico. However, when his branch of the family separated their musical style from Al’s, this is commonly described as a decision to stop playing New Mexico music and Morrie’s enduring New Mexico hits were all recorded as part of the older family unit—the billing on his early singles was “Tiny Morrie with Al Hurricane’s Orchestra.”³⁵⁴ Indeed, although Al and Al Jr. are the only family members to have adopted that surname, it is common to hear the family referred to collectively as “the Hurricanes.” Al Hurricane’s band has also been a training ground for successive generations of singers and musicians on the Albuquerque scene: the most prominent current guitarist in the New Mexico style, A.J. Martínez, started performing as a guest with the band at age eleven and became a

³⁵⁴ This billing reflected how Morrie was viewed, at least on the local scene. Sidro García recalls, “Tiny Morrie was just the lead singer for Al Hurricane... Isn’t that weird? And Tiny Morrie had the hits, during that era.”

regular sideman at age sixteen, and the two most successful young singers on the scene, Tobias Rene and Gonzalo, were both band members before going solo.

Early life: Ethnicity and Language

Al Hurricane was born Alberto Nelson Sánchez on July 10, 1936. His parents were then living in Dixon, a small mountain village halfway between Española and Taos, and he spent most of his early childhood around the small towns in that area, in particular his father's home village of Ojo Sarco. His brother Amador (Tiny Morrie) and his sister Frances were born in Ojo Sarco in 1941 and 1942, and the youngest child, Gabriel (Baby Gaby) was born in Embudo, a village bordering Dixon, in 1943. Their father, José Margarito Sánchez, was a miner, and when Al was born he was working in Terrero, a mining camp about forty miles from Ojo Sarco as the crow flies but almost ninety miles by road. Their mother, Beneranda "Bennie" López, was born in Albuquerque and raised mostly in the Martineztown section of that city, but spent some of her childhood in Pecos, the nearest town to Terrero. When Al was five, the family moved for a while to Jerome, Arizona, briefly returned to Ojo Sarco, then settled for a few years in Bayard, in southwestern New Mexico, where his father worked in the Santa Rita mine.

Al's early memories are of small town life, childhood accidents, and new technologies:

In Jerome I got hit by a truck and broke my collarbone. And then I fell off, on a tricycle, off a second story ledge...so I was accident prone when I was younger. And then from there we

moved back to Ojo Sarco. We weren't there very long, but I'll tell you one story that stands out in my mind: One night there was blood all over the floor. My dad had come from a dance in Peñasco. And he got in a fight there, he and the brothers got in a fight.... That's one of the memories I've got about Ojo Sarco. And the other memories I have is the radio, the first time you hear a radio. There was no TV, no nothing, you know, just listening to the radio and the news and stuff. Then from there we moved to Bayard. And we had outhouses [in our previous homes]. In Bayard we had a government home, with toilets inside. It was the first time we ever had toilets inside.

Al recalls that his father wanted to leave Bayard and go back to Ojo Sarco, but "my mom talked him into coming to Albuquerque." In 1947, when Al was eleven, they bought a restaurant called Wade's Barbeque, at 1221 South Second Street, which served workers at the nearby railroad yards, and renamed it the Friendly Cafe. From then on the family was based in Albuquerque, where Al finished elementary school, attended high school, and began his musical career.

Al's paternal grandparents were all from the area around Ojo Sarco and he describes their ethnic background as "a mixture of Indio and Spanish, Hispanic from Spain." His maternal grandfather was from a similar background, but his maternal grandmother was from a large family of Italian immigrants from the region of Naples and Al remembers his great-uncles singing Italian songs and playing mandolins. He still enjoys playing and listening to Italian music and often mentions his "Italian blood," but when I asked him how he prefers to be described, his response was fairly typical of other New Mexico musicians of his generation:

Oh, man, I, uh, probably—it's hard to say. I mean I, I know people are saying *Latino* but I, am I really a Latino? Because everybody's a Latino when you get down to it, you know. Mexicans, Spaniards, and all that. But Spaniard's Spaniard, Mexican's Mexican, New Mexican is New Mexican. But uh, how would you categorize our people here? Chicanos? Hispanic? Hispanic is more of a—accepted, you know, like you, if you tell somebody, “What is Al Hurricane?” “Hispanic.” And that's more accepted. We say Chicano, it's kind of like in between, like we talk a little pachuco maybe and something else, you know, like—I don't know. I guess that's the way I would categorize myself: Hispanic.

Al's pronunciation of *Latino* was distinctly Spanish when he described it as a term used by other people, but when he went on to wonder if it applied to him, he pronounced it more like an English speaker. His association of the term Chicano with pachuco speech matches the way many people from his generation connect it to a particular barrio sensibility. He is somewhat willing to accept that association—it goes along with his nostalgic memories of using pachuco slang—but in many hours of interview he never used the term Chicano to describe himself. In the course of our interview he used the word only three other times, all to designate a musical style rather than an ethnicity: twice to distinguish southwestern music from Caribbean or Eastern urban styles, contrasting his band with a Puerto Rican group by saying he played “the Chicano type of music,” and later saying “take a Salsa musician, right, they can't do the Spanish songs. No way they're going to do a Chicano song or a Spanish.” In the third instance, he used it to describe the modern Texas styles, contrasting them with mariachi.

Interviewed by Peter García in 1998, he used the term only once in four days of taped conversations, also in the context of musical style: musing about the origin of the local wedding song, “La entrega de los novios,”³⁵⁵ he said, “If you ask me if it’s Mexican, Spanish, Hispanic, Chicano, I couldn’t tell you.”

Despite choosing Hispanic as his designation of choice, Al did not use the term again in our interview. He used it more frequently in the interviews with García, perhaps influenced by the fact that their conversations took place in the newly inaugurated Hispanic Cultural Center: He referred to the Trio Imperial as “an American trio of Hispanic descent,” praised some of his high school teachers for being “very instrumental in pushing Hispanics, Hispanic culture,” and described himself as working in Albuquerque’s old town as a boy singer “of Hispanic descent that had a Mexican costume.” He emphasized the distinction between Hispanic and Mexican in that description:

All these tourists that used to come from the east said, “Have you seen that little Mexican,” you know, “play?” You know? And I learned a lot about education too, because, you know, to them—this is back in the late forties, when I was attending school here—we were Mexicans, no matter what. As a matter of fact they didn’t even know New Mexico was in the Union.³⁵⁶

Al talks about Mexico much the way a local Anglo might talk about England, as someplace related to his heritage, but not where he comes from. For example, he finished a story about sitting in with a band in Acapulco and impressing them with his versions of “La múcura” and “La bamba” by saying,

³⁵⁵ Though Northern New Mexicans commonly pronounce this word *entriega*, particularly in the context of this song, Al used the standard Spanish pronunciation.

³⁵⁶ The “here” where he attended school was specifically the building where Garcia was interviewing him, which had been his elementary school before being turned into the Hispanic Cultural Center.

“That was one of the greatest things that happened to me in life, because, I was in a foreign country, and so from that day on I said, I’ll fit in anyplace, because I know I can pick up the music.”

Al sometimes uses the term Hispanic specifically for United States citizens who trace their culture and ancestry to early Spanish-speaking settlers in the Southwest, as opposed to Latinos with Caribbean ancestry, but sometimes uses the term more broadly to include both groups. For example, discussing the tejana star Selena, he equated her with a Miami-based Cuban-American singer, saying “I think she...had a bigger impact on Hispanic culture, you know, than maybe even Gloria Estefan.”

Al often referred to himself and his culture as Spanish, contrasting the different ways “Spanish people” party in New Mexico and California and saying he left Fats Domino’s band because it was taking him away from his family and “Spanish people are more attached.” In another interview he phrased a similar thought, “Latino people, Hispanics, we have a tendency to get real sentimental about things.”³⁵⁷ Clearly, he was not making careful distinctions in his varied uses of these terms. His quote about salsa musicians not being able to “do Spanish songs” suggests that in some contexts that term has a specific association with New Mexican or southwestern culture, but at another moment in our interview he spoke of tropical music as having a “Spanish beat.”

Al’s choices of ethnic terminology are undoubtedly more significant in some situations than others, but the most striking thing in these few interviews is the casual way he shifted between terms and definitions, seemed willing to accept other people’s terminology, and at times corrected himself in ways that suggested ambivalence about his own choices, as when he mentioned his preference for

Spanish songs to García, then added, “Now, when I say Spanish, or I should say Hispanic...” Our discussion of this subject ended with him suggesting that rather than having strong feelings about terminology, he was inclined to settle for the most common, easily pronounced terms. At one point he asked me, “What do you call them in Texas, ‘Tex-Mex’?” I responded, “*Tejano*?” and he repeated the word as if it were a good answer, then tried a potential equivalent and promptly dismissed it:

Nuevomexicano? See but it, nuevomexicano doesn’t sound as good as tejano. Uh, Idahoan. You know, from Idaho, Idahoan doesn’t sound right. Uh, Coloradoan it just—I mean, names are names, you know, but if you find something that fits and that’s easy for somebody to say it, then you just kind of accept it, you know?

In terms of ethnicity, Al seemed to use the terms *Spanish* and *Hispanic* interchangeably, and the former word may have come up more frequently than usual in our conversations because we were talking a lot about language, which is always called Spanish and in the southwestern context is a defining component of ethnic identification. Speaking of his trouble mastering English as a child, he said, “So my accent still is, you know, you can still tell that I’m Spanish.” However, he also pointed out the increasing complications of this association of language with ethnicity in the modern era, saying, “now most of our Spanish people, Spanish-speaking people, or I’d as soon say Spanish-speaking, they don’t speak Spanish or understand a lot of Spanish.”

The home language in the Sánchez household was Spanish, although Bennie in particular seems to have sung and spoken in English at times, and Al

³⁵⁷ *Al Hurricane: Native Legend*. VHS Documentary. Albuquerque: DJR Productions,

also remembers speaking some Italian with Bennie's maternal relatives. Like many children of his generation, Al only began speaking English regularly in school: as he told García, speaking of his Italian skills, "I can speak Italiano and sing some Italian. No como en español, or not like English. English I had a hard, tough time adjusting to." Elementary schools in Northern New Mexico varied widely in their attitudes to Spanish, with some allowing children and teachers to use the language and others strictly proscribing it. In all cases, though, it was regarded as a home language rather than a school language, and students were not taught to read or write in any language but English. Al told García that in Ojo Sarco they had a one-room schoolhouse for kindergarten through eighth grade, and the teachers taught them only English, but spoke both languages:

The teacher used to come into the classroom and say

"Buenos días. ¿Como están todos? Today we are going to learn the ABCs. ¿Saben lo que quiero decir?" This is, it was sort of a bilingual, but they never did teach us in Spanish...what I'm saying is, they spoke to you in Spanish, and taught you in English language, but they never taught you in Spanish. If you said an incorrect word in Spanish they would not correct you. Their job was to teach you English.

Al remains troubled by what he describes as his poor skills in both languages and told both García and me about an experience that seems to have been particularly traumatic, when he was a sophomore in high school in Albuquerque and a teacher scolded him for pronouncing the word "sheet" like "shit":

God, man, she was so mad at me. And I couldn't understand,

because it was an honest mistake. You know? And then I learned to say “sheets.” And cheating and the sheets are two different things. But I learned that, over time. That made me aware that I had to learn a little more English.

Al Jr. says his father is still more confident in Spanish than in English and is self-conscious about speaking English with an accent, and Al referred to his accent several times in our interviews.³⁵⁸ However, unlike some older artists who seemed relieved when I switched into Spanish and who spoke that language with a gusto they lacked in English, he only occasionally used any words of Spanish with either me or García, except when quoting song lyrics, nor did he express a preference for singing Spanish rather than English songs. When I asked whether he felt differently about singing in the two languages, his first response was, “I think, like, my pronunciation’s better in Spanish...but if I do, like, a blues or something like that, then, I mean, I can get into it.” And when I pressed him as to whether the feeling was different, he continued, “It depends on the song, I think, you know?”

Al also expressed the common New Mexico awareness that the local Spanish is poorly regarded in other regions, and particularly in Mexico. This came up in a discussion of the fading Spanish skills of the younger generation. While saying he did not like to criticize the young singers, he explained that he had similar problems when he started but was eager to get help and advice from people who spoke the language better—meaning closer to a Mexican media standard—telling of a radio programmer in Ciudad Juárez who liked his record of

³⁵⁸ Al’s accent in English is not particularly strong or noticeable, but in his interview with Peter García he used a couple of words that are clearly calques or translations from Spanish: he said a high school friend “was married with Barbara”—in English, that would be “married to” but in Spanish is “casado con”—and also, “I contender,” pronounced like an English word and meaning “I contend.”

the corrido “Reyes Ruíz” but criticized his pronunciation:

The guy liked me, this is what I’m saying, the guy said... “I love your song, I love your voice, but you know what? In Spanish,” me dice, “you are pronouncing some words wrong. And there’s no such thing as a huachuquilla. It’s *huajuquilla*.”

“Ahhh.”

So he said... “I’m gonna play your record,” he said, “even though, we’re going to play it because we like you. But in the future if you want to record something and you need some help, come to me and I’ll help you.”

I think that was the greatest thing that happened to me. I said, “OK, now I’ve got to be careful with the words.” But some of the artists, both in Texas and here, and California, but mostly New Mexico and Colorado, they just sing it the way they hear, or what they think they hear.

When I asked if this meant he thought local artists should sing more like Mexicans, he said no, but that they should be aware of how people from other regions would hear them:

There are certain things that you can do, where you can sing like a dialect and stuff, but you have to be careful, you know. Like, when you say, “tu te fuiste.” You can say, and get away with it, “tu te fuites.” But once you put that into a song, you just turned off the Latin world.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ Al also gave the example of New Mexicans using the archaic *asina* instead of *así*, saying, “this is not too bad, but...once you say the word *asina*, it might turn off the people from Mexico, from Cuba, from other places.” This word is by no means unique to New Mexico, being found in older Spanish texts and throughout the Americas, especially in rural areas. However, in all areas it tends to be associated with lack of education: Peter Haney writes that the San Antonio,

I was struck by this example because in a study of the Sinaloan singer Chalino Sánchez, Sam Quiñones quotes a Los Angeles record producer similarly singling out “fuites” as an example of rural, regional dialect, but arguing that for Sánchez the use of such dialect was a professional asset: “instead of saying ‘te fuiste,’ he’d sing ‘te fuites.’ That’s how it’s said in the hills. He knew how to say it correctly. But he’d say it that way so that people, campesinos, would hear it the way they were used to.”³⁶⁰ The contrasting judgments of this pronunciation suggest the varied meanings and values that may be ascribed to regional identity in a national or transnational market. Both Sinaloan and New Mexican audiences have tended to celebrate artists who proudly display local styles of speech and music, but in the broader transnational entertainment market the two identities are seen very differently: the Sinaloan *sierra* is considered cool—it is the legendary heartland of the Mexican drug traffic and the most daring crime lords—while rural New Mexico is considered both hick and pocho.

When I told Al that people had appreciated Chalino for using the pronunciation he was criticizing, he agreed that rural dialect could have commercial potential, but like Chalino’s producer he stressed the difference between using such dialect intentionally and out of ignorance:

You can still get away with it, don’t get me wrong. Pedro Infante and Antonio Aguilar, they do that, they do those dialects, but they do it more in a fun way. See, there’s a difference. When you do it in a fun way, you’re saying OK, they know how to pronounce the words but they’re doing it like “Hey, how’s it going, dad.” You know, stuff like that. So they get away with it.... It’s

Texas, comedy team of Netty and Jesús used *ansina* as a mark of their lower-class speech. (Haney, “Carpa y Teatro, Sol y Sombra: Show Business and Public Culture in San Antonio’s Mexican Colony, 1900-1940, Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2004, 262.)

like... George Strait, he says he “ain’t got nobody.”³⁶¹

A few New Mexico singers have likewise sung lyrics that mix Spanish and English “in a fun way,” representing local speech, but Al has recorded few if any bilingual lyrics and in our interviews he rarely used any Spanish words or pronunciations except when quoting song titles and lyrics. The exceptions were always in the context of describing or suggesting Spanish speech, which he typically translated into English but with hints that he was thinking bilingually. For example, when he quoted the Mexican radio host telling him to be careful about his pronunciation, the quote was in English but set off with “*me dice*” (“he said to me”). He likewise used a couple of words of Spanish when he described his mother giving him the nickname that became his performance monicker:

When I was a child, I used to knock things over. I’d reach across the table, knock the salt shaker down, the syrup, anything in my way, glasses of water. And so she used to, her favorite expression was “¡Ay, qué hurricane! I don’t know what I’m going to do with this hurricane.”

Al’s parents spoke Spanish at home, so the phrase his mother used to say was presumably “¡Ay, qué huracán!” But in this context, explaining how he got the name Al Hurricane, the Spanish pronunciation would not work as well. In another anecdote about his mother, he described some Mexican concertgoers expressing their appreciation of her, and signaled that they were speaking in Spanish by quoting them as referring to her as “la Mrs. Sánchez” (though not “la

³⁶⁰ Quiñones, *True Tales*, 18.

³⁶¹ Hurricane also suggested that there are limits, saying, “Once you make that mistake from ‘fuiste’ to ‘fuites,’ you might get away with it, but ‘fuistes’? Then you start saying, is it really necessary?” However, many singers do use “fuistes”—Los Tigres del Norte even list the title, “Apenas Te Fuistes Ayer” on one of their CDs. Nor is this limited to Mexican usage—the pronunciation is common throughout the Americas, and is used by the New York Latin singer Joe

señora Sánchez), although the rest of the quotation was in English.

Al also varies his inflections of Spanish words, generally using English inflections when speaking English, but sometimes pronouncing them with a Spanish inflection in particular contexts. Speaking of the birth of his youngest brother, he first referred to him as Gabriel with a short, English *a* [eɪ], as in Baby Gaby, then immediately corrected himself to the long *a* [a] of the Spanish *Gabriel*, which the family would have used. Speaking with García, he made a similar correction when he mentioned the tejana singer Selena, first pronouncing the second syllable of her name with an English *ee* [i:], the way it would be said by an Anglo radio or television announcer, then immediately querying that pronunciation by asking “¿Selena?” with a Spanish inflection and a central *ay* [e]. Similarly, describing his first experience of tropical or Caribbean music, he said, “The first thing I ever heard was *rumba*: rumba, by Xavier Cugat.” In the first phrase, describing the music generically, he pronounced the *u* of rumba as in Spanish [u], but when he referred to the rumba played by Cugat, whom he would have heard regularly on English-language radio, he pronounced it with the English *u* [ʌ] of an Anglo announcer. At least, that is one logical interpretation, but it may be misleading to overinterpret such varying pronunciations: speaking elsewhere of the local tendency to call any tropical beat a cumbia, Al said, “everyone says cumbia now, but some of the songs are merengues, sambas, cumbias, rumbas, but they all have that little tropical beat.” In this instance he pronounced both “rumba” and “tropical” with a standard American English inflection, and the only contexts in which he referred to Caribbean music as *tropical*, with a Spanish inflection, was when he was talking about hearing it played by groups from outside New Mexico, such as the musicians he sat in with

Bataan (of mixed Filipino-African American parentage, but raised in a Puerto Rican

in Acapulco or East Coast salsa bands.

The only context in which Al showed a marked preference for Spanish inflections while talking about local subjects was when he pronounced Spanish proper names. Many New Mexicans pronounce Spanish names with English inflections, but when Al mentioned Antonio Aguilar he always rolled the final *r*, and he tended to give bilingual names the respective inflections of each language: when he spoke of his early bandmates Joe Polaco and George Quintana, he pronounced their first names with clear Anglo inflections and their last names with clear Mexican inflections. Again, this seems to be fairly standard among older New Mexicans: the Spanish surnames are strong markers of an identity that is associated with the Spanish language, and for at least some people it remains important to pronounce them correctly. (On the other hand, names that are thought of in English-language contexts are pronounced as English, even if they derive from Spanish: in every recording I have found of the Spanish-language “El cumbia de San Antone,” whether by Texans or New Mexicans, the singers inflect all the lyrics with standard Spanish pronunciation except the city name, “San Antone,” which is pronounced as a two-syllable word with nasal English *a*’s.)

Musical development

Al Hurricane’s recollections of his musical environment and training reflect a relationship to Hispanic and Anglo styles that are in some ways analogous to the Spanish and English linguistic styles of his speech, but in some ways very different.³⁶² While he was aware of different styles of music from childhood,

neighborhood) in “Mujer Mía,” a popular Latin oldie ballad.

³⁶² When I refer to styles like swing or rock ‘n’ roll as *Anglo*, I am referring to the broad English-language pop market, regardless of the race or ethnicity of particular performers. There were a handful of African American performers on the Albuquerque scene in the 1960s, including a doo-wop group called the Charms that recorded for Hurricane records, but the African American

those styles did not necessarily divide in a binary, bicultural way. For example, the music played at public dances was a mix of popular tunes coded by dance rhythms—waltz, polka, swing—rather than by ethnicity. When Peter García asked him what live music he heard in his youth, he recalled attending dances in Peñasco, near Ojo Sarco, where the musicians were Hispanic and much of the music would have been Mexican or Hispanic polkas, but the one song he specifically mentioned was a mainstream Anglo pop hit:

You'd go to a dance, and here's the dance hall, and there's a three or four piece, whatever you want to call it—banda, conjunto—maybe an accordion, maybe a saxophone and guitar, and not even a bass, just the drums. And they started playing the songs like, let's say, one of the favorites that Don Luz, in Peñasco, used to play was "Mockingbird" [he sings the melody of "Mockingbird Hill," a national hit from 1950-51 that was most famously recorded by Patti Page and Les Paul with Mary Ford]. I remember him playing that. You get a partner to dance, you get out on the dance floor, and then they play about a minute, maybe a minute and a half, and it'd stop. And they had it roped off like this where you couldn't get off the dance floor. Follow me? A lady would come with a little apron, and collect a dime from each one—or a nickel at first, then it used to be a dime—and then she'd

population of New Mexico has always been very small (around two percent for the state as a whole and under one percent in the north), and I never heard anyone in New Mexico suggest that they thought of either swing or rock 'n' roll (or any particular song) as notably black or white, though both styles were clearly framed as Anglo. Hurricane's examples of favorite swing-era bandleaders included Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, and Earl Bostic (two white, one black) and among rock singers he named Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Fats Domino. In contrast with Los Angeles, where many Chicanos specifically favor "oldies" by African American singers and groups, in New Mexico the most beloved oldies are often surf instrumentals and aside from Elvis

go like this, with her arm in the air, to say “I collected from everybody,” and then they’d go finish the song, and go on. Now if you wanted to dance all night long without having to pay, you pay a dollar and that woman, when she came up to you, you had a little ribbon that tied around your—or I can’t remember exactly what, or a bell or something. But then, every time she’d get through, she’d go, “OK. OK. Toquen.” And so whatever they played, whatever they picked up, or whatever, that’s what you listened to here, live.

Al’s father and six uncles had a dance band called Los Sánchez, including guitars, violin, accordion, drums, and saxophone. The accordion may have been a specifically Mexican or Hispanic touch, but in many parts of the United States the instrument was as common in rural communities of Anglos and Central European immigrants as among Hispanics, and Al’s description of the band’s repertoire suggests the overlapping tastes that made both accordions and polkas popular throughout much of the United States: “They played the polkas, the traditional—“Beer Barrel Polka,” “Mi pecosita,” “Indita mía,” any of those songs that, you know, get back to the forties.”³⁶³

Bennie Sánchez remembered her husband being competent on five

the artist most frequently mentioned is probably Buddy Holly, who recorded all his hits in Clovis, NM.

³⁶³ The “Beer Barrel Polka,” recorded in Berlin by the Glahe Musette Orchestra, was one of the biggest hits of 1939, an example of the new prominence of recordings due to the jukebox market (Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ roll*, 127). In Mexico it is called “El barrilito,” which was how Glahe’s record was labeled in Spanish-speaking countries, and remains a norteño standard, but the Texas accordionist Narciso Martínez used the English title when he recorded it in the 1940s for the Ideal label, and New Mexico musicians consistently call it “Beer Barrel,” suggesting that they got it through US rather than Mexican distributors. “Mi pecosita” was a popular polka written around 1948 by the Texas accordionist Pedro Ayala, whose recording features a band much like Los Sánchez, including a sax soloist. It was also recorded in 1949 by Beto Villa, who went on to have a much larger orchestra, but in that period led a sextet. New Mexico dance bands like those of Don Luz and the Sánchez brothers were presumably playing in roughly the same style as their Texas contemporaries, including national hits from both sides of the border, southwestern polkas, and perhaps a few specifically local melodies for older dancers.

instruments, and Al recalls him playing guitar, saxophone, and clarinet.³⁶⁴ Bennie was not from a particularly musical family, but her father played harmonica and she liked to sing, sometimes performing with her husband's band and also singing with him informally at gatherings of family and friends. Al told García, "She used to sing at parties and all over, her and my dad used to sing together... not professionally you know, but they would sing at parties and weddings. They used to sing songs like 'Indita mía,' [and one] called 'Sal a verme.'"³⁶⁵ He also remembered his parents singing the corrido "Leandro Rodríguez," and his father singing the corrido "Reyes Ruíz," but when Bennie spoke about this period she said that when Al was a child she mostly just strummed guitar at home and sang "western songs," meaning English-language country or cowboy music.

Al says the family had a cheap Kay guitar and his mother gave him his first lesson on it when he was in the fourth grade, teaching him to pick out a melody on one string, then his father said he should play on two strings and taught him the Mexican *requinto* technique of playing in parallel thirds. The first song his mother taught him to play was "Home on the Range" and the first song his father showed him was "A la guerra me llevan," a song about a soldier going off to battle that was recorded by numerous Mexican and Mexican American artists during the Second World War.³⁶⁶ He says his father also taught him his first three

³⁶⁴ All Bennie Sánchez quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from *Al Hurricane: Native Legend*, VHS Documentary. Albuquerque: DJR Productions, 2000.

³⁶⁵ Bennie Sánchez's only issued recording is a version of "Sal a verme" on Al Hurricane, *Que Viva El Godfather*, Hurricane 10042, 2003.

³⁶⁶ "A la guerra me llevan" was composed by Felipe Valdés Leal, a popular composer and record producer who was born in Saltillo, Coahuila, and began his musical career after moving to Los Angeles in 1923, where he became an artistic director for Brunswick records, then worked as a promoter and producer for many of the top Mexican stars on both sides of the border, before moving back to Mexico in 1943 and becoming an artistic director for CBS records. (SACM – Biografía de Felipe Valdés Leal, <http://www.sacm.org.mx/archivos/biografias.asp?txtSocio=08354>, accessed 8/9/13.) "A la guerra" was revived in the Vietnam War era by Little Joe y la Familia, and recorded with local success by Al Hurricane Jr. in 2008.

chords, naming them in a mix of Spanish and English terminology: “He showed me D; *sol*, which is G; and A seven.” As he told García:

He said that’s basically what you need to play almost every ranchera song, you know? And so, sure enough, [sings] “Home, home on the range,” I used to do that, and “A la guerra me llevan madrecita,” and “Soldado raso”... those kinds of songs.

This description indicates the cultural and musical kinship of Spanish and Anglo music in the rural Southwest. Speaking in general of “ranchera” songs, Al’s first example of the genre is “Home on the Range,” a classic paean to southwestern ranch life that had been a major hit throughout the United States in the 1930s and was famous as Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s favorite song, followed by two Mexican songs that were particularly popular with southwestern singers during the war years, and he groups all three as “those kinds of songs.”

Al says he had no further instruction on guitar, and worked out the rest on his own:

I don’t remember listening to anyone else on guitar, I mean, say, in the rancho, except my dad... If I just heard a song with a saxophone or with a trumpet or something, I would just pick it up on guitar and do my thing, do what I wanted to do. So I think I became more like a—I’m not saying unique, but what do you say?—Style. I think I got my own style.

Al began bringing his guitar to school and performing for his fellow students while the family was still living in Bayard, and he recalls that the first song he played was, once again, “Home on the Range,” along with another western standard, “Carry Me Back to the Lone Prairie.” It was a transformative experience for him: “The kids in school loved it. I played with the guitar, you

know, and I said, ‘Wow, man,’ you know, ‘I love people to like me.’” Although his main repertoire was country and western, he says he sang with a Spanish accent and also did “a couple of Spanish songs.”

When the family moved to Albuquerque in 1947, his parents realized that Al’s music was more than just a passing whim and they bought him a new guitar, a Gibson L-5 archtop. He told García that this purchase represented a major investment: “This guitar cost a hundred dollars...back then, I mean, it would be like if you went out and paid like four or five thousand dollars for a guitar today. That’s what it was like to pay a hundred dollars. So my dad, he worked the mines, and my mom worked at the café, and they worked their butts off to buy me this guitar.”

His mother also sewed him a little charro costume and Al began performing in Albuquerque’s Old Town Plaza, standing by the wishing well, a favorite site for tourist photographs, or strolling from table to table in the surrounding restaurants: La Hacienda, La Placita, and La Cocina. His listeners were mostly tourists, his earnings were in tips, and in keeping with the environment and his costume, his repertoire was made up mostly of Mexican songs along with a couple of pseudo-Latin pop hits he still recalls with affection: “Managua, Nicaragua” and “Mañana.”³⁶⁷ He speaks of this period as his “troubadour days,” and says his mother wrote out lyrics to her favorite Spanish songs for him and he kept up with recent Mexican and Latin pop recordings by listening to local Spanish-language radio pioneer Henry Tafoya on KGGN and buying the songs that appealed to him: “I’d go to a place called the Lucky Penny record shop on first street, Louie’s Lucky Penny Record Shop, and I’d say, ‘Hey, I just heard a song by Trio Los Panchos called “Sin tí.” You have it?’ ‘Have it right here.’ So I

³⁶⁷ “Managua, Nicaragua” and “Mañana” were number one pop hits in 1947 and 1948.

got a collection of 'em.”

Al and his father also performed Spanish songs on the radio, with the twelve-year-old singing lead and his father playing second guitar and singing harmony, and Al appeared on his own in the talent contests held every Saturday at the Isleta Theater, regularly winning first prize. He recalls those performances with pride and pleasure, but always adds that the contest also forced him to learn an important lesson: as he has repeated in numerous interviews, he was so used to winning that he thought he was unbeatable, until one day a little “*gringuito*” came onstage in a cowboy outfit and sang a country song: “I saw my meter come up to here, and I saw *his* meter go way up. I said, ‘whew!’ He took first place. I still took second place, but I mean—I didn’t cry, but I was a little heartbroken and said, ‘Wonder why they liked him more than me?’” Rather than comforting him, his father urged him to learn from the experience: “My dad says, ‘Remember...no matter how good you are, there’s always somebody better than you.’ My dad always said that to me: ‘Never put down anybody, and say, “OK, I can learn from this guy.” No matter, even if he’s good, bad,’ he says, ‘watch him close and pick up what he’s trying to do.’”

Although his professional performances seem to have consisted mostly of Mexican or “Latin” songs, Al was still playing country and western music for his friends and schoolmates, and by high school he says he had a new idol, the Alabama-born singer and songwriter Hank Williams: “Oh man! 1953, ‘Your Cheating Heart’ came out and I was crazy for it. I used to do [he breaks into Williams’s version of “Lovesick Blues,” with its distinctive yodeling]: *‘I got a feeling ’cause I’m bloo-oo-oo, oh lord, since my baby said goodbye.’* I learned all those songs.”

Al also began singing with other students, and the bilingualism or

bimusicality of these collaborations overlapped in both directions: one of his regular partners was a “*gringa*” named Barbara Schumacher (some sources spell this Schumaker, but Al pronounced it in German style, with the guttural ch (kh) and broad a (ah), though adding “we called her ‘Shoemaker’”), and they sang Spanish songs together, “stuff like ‘Cielito lindo’.” Al was known around the school for these solo and duet performances in classrooms, at assemblies, and for gatherings on the school grounds. Along with the country hits and Mexican standards, he had some more unusual showpieces—he recalls that at the 1954 Senior Talent Assembly at Albuquerque High, he performed Lalo Guerrero’s bilingual comedy number, “El bracero.”

Al formed his first band in 1953 or 1954, calling it the Sentimentalists and using Tommy Dorsey’s “Sentimental Journey” as a theme song. “It had nothing to do with Spanish,” he told García. “Here I am playing Spanish songs out there, and all of a sudden here I am into ‘Sentimental Journey,’ Sentimentalists, and you know I’m thinking of Glenn Miller and all this kind of bands that they used to be popular.” The Sentimentalists played the standard big band repertoire of the period, “but on a very small scale, I just had a saxophone,” and after a while the other members lost interest. “They were all like high school guys that said, like, ‘Aw, man,’ you know, ‘This is OK, but it’s not my bag.’”

Al already had professional ambitions and when the Sentimentalists broke up he kept going. His father had taught him to play some saxophone and for a while that became his main instrument:

I just called a couple of guys, we started playing for tips at a drive-in—drums, a guitar, and my saxophone. And after that I said, You know what? People love the music. So why don’t I just—get a band together? So I got a five-piece band. And we started playing

at a place called the Oasis and the Heights Community Center, and we started packing 'em in with the young kids.... One thing led to another. The next thing you know, I'm forming a...bigger band, added some horns, you know, three saxophones for a while, and then trumpets.

By that time rock 'n' roll had arrived and Al's groups were playing roughly the same repertoire teen dance bands played throughout the United States: the popular hits of Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, "even 'Sentimental Journey,' once in a while, but mostly rock and roll.... And people loved it." By 1957 they had become popular enough to be hired as the opening band at Albuquerque's Civic Auditorium:

There's a gentleman by the name of Mike London that used to promote wrestling, and he saw us perform at the armory, and he says, "Hey, let me put you at the Civic Auditorium, to open up." So we opened it up in 1957, and we used to have ninety-cent dances, and we used to get anywheres from four to five thousand people in there, kids. And you know, I'm a ham: the more people that saw me, I mean, you know what? "I can do this, I want to play." And so the manager [C.W. "Chuck" Swan, manager of the Civic Auditorium] said, "Why don't you come down and we'll make a little deal...."

I was only twenty years old, or nineteen. Anyway, he says, "Come down and talk some contract." When I come down he says, "Oh, by the way, how old are you?" And when I told him, he says, "Oh, my gosh, we can't sign a contract. Bring your parents...." When Mr. Swan at the Civic Auditorium said "bring your parents,"

my dad said, “You go,” to my mom, ’cause he’s not, he was never a businessman, he was a miner. He used to work in the mines, and he had a fourth grade education and he supported the family with his work. So that’s how my mom got into it and my dad just supported her, backed her up.... And my mom, she’s a heck of a businesswoman anyway...so she signed the contract, for twenty-four dates a year, promoting us.

By that time the band was called Al Hurricane and his Night Rockers, although Al experimented with various names in the next few years. He told García that in one instance this was a direct response to ethnic discrimination:

I wanted a permit for a dance at Old Town Society Hall. So I went down to City Hall and I had to fill in the application and I put “Albert Sanchez” and they turned me down. Well I found out, in a few years, I found out later on that there was some people there that were prejudiced and were not giving a Hispanic a license.... And I noticed that when I changed...my band’s name to Bert Nelson, it just sounded like Lawrence Welk or whatever. And when I went down to get a license with the name Bert Nelson I had no problem.

He used the name Albert Nelson again in 1961 when he recorded “Lonesome Summertime” and “That’s The Way You Are” for the 7 Arts label, a pairing also released by Decca in Europe—the only European release he has had. But at the Civic Auditorium his band seems always to have been billed as Al Hurricane and his Night Rockers. Al says his professional alias was Tiny Morrie’s idea: “My mom used to call me hurricane when I was a kid, you know: ‘Ahhh, there’s that hurricane again!’ Cause I used to knock things over. So my brother

just looked and me and says, “Well, Hurricane. What do you think of—Hey! There’s Hurricane Jackson, Hurricane Carter. Hurricane Sanchez? Hmmm.” So we just reversed it, so just, OK: Al Hurricane.”³⁶⁸ As for his brothers’ nicknames, Al takes responsibility for Morrie’s: “He was the shortest guy in the band, so I called him Tiny.” (Morrie grew up to be taller than Al, but is four years Al’s junior and joined the band when he was twelve or thirteen.) The third nickname was provided by Al Tafoya, son of the announcer Henry Tafoya, who had become a popular radio personality himself:

He started announcing one time, he says, “Yeaahh,” he said, “we got the little king of rock and roll, Al Hurricane, at The Civic Auditorium this Saturday Night!” And then he says, “Aw, that’s T.M.! T.M., *too much*, Mr. Tiny Morrie, along with Al Hurricane. And we got in addition Mr. Baby Gaby, the youngest in the family.” So he actually gave him the name Baby Gaby and we just accepted it.

Al had an entrepreneurial bent to supplement his musical skills, and in 1958 and 1959 he released two 45 r.p.m. singles on his own Hurricane label. All four songs were English-language rock ’n’ roll, featuring Morrie on vocals and billed as “Tiny Morrie with Al Hurricane’s Orchestra.” Al explains that his brother had gradually become a central figure in the group: “Morrie was playing in a band for me, I was paying him, and then my mom and I decided, let’s pay him more, because he’s part of the family, he’s doing some things. And so little by little we got him into the business.” The material Al and Morrie chose for those first singles shows an astute command of current styles: The first record had two songs with a strong New Orleans flavor, “You’re the Girl for Me,” written by Al and

³⁶⁸ The boxer Tommy “Hurricane” Jackson was active by 1951, so may have helped inspire

clearly based on Clarence “Frogman” Henry’s “Ain’t Got No Home,” and “Hey! Let Me Tell You,” written by Morrie and performed with piano backing reminiscent of Fats Domino. The second coupled a fairly generic pop ballad, “After I Had Gone,” with a Chuck Berry-flavored dance number, “Everybody Rocks.”

In the late 1950s the Sánchez brothers were part of an exploding teen rock ’n’ roll scene, and dreamed of getting hits on the national market. They recorded their first single at Norman Petty’s studio in Clovis, which had established itself nationally by producing Buddy Holly’s records, and Al says Petty was particularly impressed by Tiny Morrie’s singing, saying, “I work with Buddy Holly, I work with The Crickets... I think you got a chance.” However, the records only sold a few thousand copies to local fans—decent sales for a regional rock ’n’ roll act, but nothing special. The band’s next three releases were instrumentals featuring Al’s guitar, perhaps influenced by the fact that the most successful New Mexico rock ’n’ roll band of this period, an Anglo group from Raton called the Fireballs, was also recording at Petty’s studio and hitting with what would soon become known as the “surf guitar” sound.

A couple of Al’s instrumentals suggest a nod to his Hispanic heritage with their titles, “Burrito” and “Lobo,” but in the same period the Fireballs had a hit with “Vaquero” and the Ventures with “Perfidia,” so it might be a mistake to read too much into this. Morrie continued to be featured on all the band’s vocal releases through the early 1960s, and all were in English except “Maria Cristina,” a lighthearted party record with a guitar accompaniment clearly influenced by Richie Valens’s “La Bamba,” and a cover of “La Bamba” itself—both of which were paired on singles with English-language songs. After the first two Hurricane

Al’s alias, but Rubin “Hurricane” Carter only began fighting professionally in 1961.

releases, both brothers' recordings were picked up by national companies: they released instrumentals on APT in 1960 and Challenge in 1961 as Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers, in 1961 Al had his Albert Nelson single on 7 Arts, and Morrie released two vocal singles for Challenge in 1962 and 1963. None of these records was particularly successful outside the band's home area and the brothers continued to make their living playing local dance and club dates and backing other artists on larger shows. Bennie Sánchez, after getting her start by producing Al's dances, quickly realized that she could earn extra money and provide a showcase for her sons by producing concerts for more famous artists and she became one of Albuquerque's top promoters, presenting shows at the Civic Auditorium that typically included the Night Rockers as an opening and backing band. Al told García:

We used to back up a lot of artists. Now back up means, we didn't really perform with them, like as Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie, we backed them up: Like Chubby Checker, he'd come up and do a show and we were the band. We'd have to practice all his songs, so they'd come out. Chuck Berry, Bobby Vinton, Bobby Vee, Bobby Rydell—lotta Bobbies. And then this guy, Bruce Channel... [sings:] "Hey, hey Baby...won't you be my girl?" It was a very, very big song, like the only hit he ever had. But we brought him into the Civic Auditorium one time and we backed him up. Then we backed up a guy that was a lady's man. Jimmy Clanton.

In 1964, one of these back-up gigs led to Al's closest brush with the world of mainstream pop: Fats Domino was performing in Española and his guitar player got sick, so he asked Al to fill in, then hired him as a regular bandmember.

Al proudly told García that he was “the only non-black” in Domino’s band, and he still enjoys telling road stories about the five or six months he spent working with the New Orleans group. He says Domino wanted to keep him on, but by this time he was married with children and hated being away from his family, so when Domino announced they would be making a European tour he quit and went back to Albuquerque. He took one other brief sideman gig, with Marvin Gaye, but told García that although the back-up work was musically challenging and inspiring, by that time he had decided he was more comfortable playing his own style:

Here’s Marvin Gaye, and they started playing some songs, and I played, like, “Hideaway” I played “Honky Tonk,” and I played some blues. This is three-chord blues, very simple blues, I mean, and they were all excited. His horn section was backing me up like if I was the main guy. But maaan, when they said, “We’re going to do a little song here,” and...they throw me a couple of their songs, their type of blues—and I was lost. But, I guess my point was, I was lost with the music, but as long as the guy, kept, you know, yelling the chords out to me, the bass player was playing, said, “Give me an F, with a flatted thirteenth and blah-blah,” so I was, ohhh, man! I went and got a chart, and started learning all my flatted thirteens, flatted nines, flatted fifths, and all this—Well, anyway, to make a long story short, right then and there, I thought, “Well, I can fit in with these guys but it’s not really my bag.” In other words, that kind of music I love to hear, and I can play for my own enjoyment, but my thing was with the people of New Mexico. And so I came back, from all those trips, I came back here.

Looking back on this period from the perspective of the 1990s, Al compared his evolution to Linda Ronstadt's. She had recently recorded two albums of Mexican songs backed by mariachis, and he pointed out that he and his brothers likewise started out playing Anglo pop music and rock 'n' roll, then realized "Hey, we need to get into the Spanish, I mean, it's our background, Hispanic background, and not only that, but it's beautiful." He released his first vocal record in 1965, shortly after leaving Domino's band, and it was a two-sided Spanish pairing, Lalo Guerrero's "La Mula Bronca" backed with a polka he had written called "Panchita." Like their English-language rock singles, it was originally released on the Challenge label, and Al says, "I recorded it in California, to see how it did, and it started doing good, and I said, 'Hey, people are hurting for the Spanish music.'"

That statement suggests a particular understanding of "Spanish music." There was no shortage of Mexican music coming across the border, and there had been some successful Hispanic bandleaders on the local scene, but none had developed a distinctive regional style. Al recalls that the main Hispanic bandleaders of his youth in Albuquerque were Sol Chávez, who played standard big band swing, and Nato Hernández, who "used to do Latino, you know, the Xavier Cugat sort of thing." He admired both bands, but his own approach was completely different. Like his Texas contemporaries Little Joe Hernández, Sunny Ozuna, and Agustin Ramírez, he was an electric rocker who shifted to a Spanish repertoire without giving up his taste for rock instrumentation and arrangements.

At least, that is a simple version of the Hurricane story. In a more nuanced telling, Al's choice was also influenced by his secondary role as co-owner of a record company. After "La Mula Bronca," he stopped working with Challenge and released five Tiny Morrie rock singles on Hurricane, which by now was co-

managed with Morrie and their mother, as well as reissuing “La Mula Bronca” and “Panchita.” Then they had a surprise hit with a record by a local mariachi group, Los Reyes de Albuquerque: it told the story of a Mexican American soldier who had died in Vietnam, and they released it as a bilingual single, with “El Corrido de Daniel Fernández” on one side for the Spanish market and “The Ballad of Dan Fernandez” on the other side for Anglophones. With sponsorship from veteran’s groups, Los Reyes were invited to New York and received more attention from the national media than the Hurricane family had previously experienced—and it was after that success that Al released the best-selling single of his career: its A side was a comical children’s song he had written with the inspiration of an old Trio Imperial record, “Mi Saxophone” (he pronounced the instrument’s name *saxofón*, with a stress on the last syllable, but wrote it in English) and the B side was an original ballad whose title recalled his old band name: “Sentimiento.” He also released another electric guitar instrumental record, but this time put his ethnicity front and center, titling the tunes “Pedro’s Girlfriend” and “Mexican Cat.”

In many ways the evolution Al and his brothers went through in this period can be seen as part of a larger regional movement led by the more famous Tex-Mex bands, but there was at least one significant thing that set the Sánchez family apart: by the mid-1960s, Bennie Sánchez was a major promoter of both rock and Mexican music. She almost brought the Beatles to town—Al still tells with chagrin of how he and Morrie persuaded her that they were too expensive—and promoted James Brown, Ray Charles, Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, and dozens of other Anglo stars, major non-musical productions like the Ringling Brothers Circus and the Ice Capades, and the annual visits of Antonio Aguilar with his Mexican rodeo. Hurricane records was less ambitious, but likewise released

recordings not only by family members and other Hispanic singers, but by local garage bands that included a mix of Anglo and Hispanic players and a couple by a local African American R&B group, the Charms. As a result, the Hurricanes had a prominence on the local scene that extended beyond the Spanish market and a level of financial security that allowed them to concentrate on the local market rather than being dependent on broader national or southwestern touring careers and record sales. Al proudly recalls how well “Mi saxophone” and “Sentimiento” sold in California, Texas, and Chicago,³⁶⁹ but does not seem greatly troubled that the other records he made in this period remained largely limited to New Mexico and southern Colorado.

The Hurricanes’ connection to contemporary rock styles may also have had an effect on their musical choices. While the Tex-Mex stars of this period tended to feature horns and keyboards and took pride in the increasing complexity of their arrangements—Little Joe’s defining hit, “Las Nubes,” featured backing by the Dallas Symphony—the Hurricane sound was still largely dominated by Al’s electric guitar. It was ranchera, but with the energy of a rock ’n’ roll combo, and as Morrie continued to release English language hits it gave the Hurricane band a unique appeal to young Hispanic garage musicians—unlike the more complex Texas sound or Mexican ranchera’s accordions and mariachi orchestras, the Hurricane sound was instantly accessible to bands that were simultaneously playing surf rock. Indeed, “surf guitar” is to some extent a misnomer, since although the style is primarily associated with coastal California, it had deep roots in the inland Southwest—the Texas guitarist Freddy King is often filed as a blues

³⁶⁹ Al Hurricane told Peter García that this record went gold and was “the number one selling record in, mostly the West Coast. You know, in Chicago I got some airplay. As a matter of fact I got some airplay in Florida. But you know very little in Florida, because that’s Cubano, Puerto Riqueño country, salsa. In New York, a good variety, I got some airplay. I have some

artist but every surf band played his “Hideaway” and “San-Ho-Zay,” and the Fireballs are considered influential pioneers of the surf style for their early hits “Torquay” and “Bulldog.” That guitar style easily crossed ethnic lines, and “Bulldog” remains a standard “dollar dance” tune at Hispanic weddings in Northern New Mexico, along with “Mosquito,” an electric guitar polka by Eddie Dimas, who moved from Phoenix to Albuquerque in the mid-1960s and became Al’s only significant rival for the local Hispanic guitar crown.

More precisely, Dimas and Al were the most prominent local lead guitarists whose work was aimed specifically at the Hispanic market. They were not necessarily the most prominent Hispanic guitarists, since the most popular rock band in Albuquerque during this period, the Sneakers, was also made up mostly of Hispanic musicians and led by a guitar virtuoso named Sidro García. The Sneakers performed only English-language songs (except for “La Bamba” and a few instrumental polkas like “El Rancho Grande”), but García and his brother Sal, who played sax, came from a very similar background to the Sánchez brothers, having started out playing with their father and uncles in a Beto Villa-style dance combo called Los Garcías.³⁷⁰

García recalls that when he first formed the Sneakers, Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers was the dominant band in Albuquerque and although he was aware that they were Hispanics, he thought of them simply as a rock ’n’ roll group:

correspondence from radio stations that said, ‘You are an upcoming artist.’ But really it hit the West Coast and Texas.”

³⁷⁰ The Albuquerque rock scene in the 1960s was full of Hispanic teenagers—one of the most successful groups, the Sheltons, consisted of players named Lucero, Romero, Avila, and Elks; The Lincoln Street Exit were Chapman, Chavez, Viramontes, Martinez, Herrera, and Suazo; and the hottest soul band, Doc Rand and Purple Blues, had an African American lead singer backed by musicians named Leyba, Padilla, Castillo, Cruz, Crockroft, Romero, and Peralta. “Los Garcías” is an interestingly bilingual name, since the standard Spanish would be Los García, and at this remove it is hard to know which version they in fact used—possibly both, interchangeably. By contrast, Al recalls his father’s band as following the Spanish practice and calling themselves Los Sánchez.

I'd hear on the radio advertisements for the Civic Auditorium, featuring "Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers at the Civic Auditorium every Friday and Saturday."... They had songs out that were in English, and I'd keep saying "Wow!" And then one time I finally got to go see them, and it was packed, probably about twenty-five hundred, three thousand kids in there dancing, you know? And they were playing a lot of Hispanic and American music. Which you had to do in that part of the country, to survive, because you've got a mixture of races there.

The way the Hurricanes marketed themselves in the mid-1960s is suggested by the way they chose to present their first two LPs, both released in 1968. Hurricane 10001, *Mi Saxophone*, consisted exclusively of Al's Spanish-language songs, but the list of Spanish titles on the cover was prefaced with the word "Includes," and the liner notes were entirely in English—though they establish his Hispanic background in the first sentence by stressing his original surname: "Albert N. Sanchez has been making music for almost as long as his nickname, Al Hurricane, has stuck with him..." By contrast, Tiny Morrie's first album, *Lonely Letters*, was entirely in English and its liner notes do not give his surname, but only some English aliases: "Tiny Morrie, who is sometimes referred to as simply 'Little T.M.'—The Most, Too Much, Top Man." The only clue to his Hispanic background is in the songwriter credits, which all read, "A. Sanchez/M. Sanchez." (The brothers shared equal writing credit on their compositions in this period whether they were writing individually or as a team.)

Morrie's album was already somewhat anachronistic: it consisted entirely of songs that had previously appeared on singles, and by the late 1960s his English-language releases tended to sound more like "oldies" than like what was currently hitting on the rock scene. As an Anglo band, the Hurricanes were not keeping up

with the latest rock trends, which had moved away from dance hits, nor had they mastered the current African American R&B styles. Although Morrie kept recording English songs into the early 1970s, the most successful of these was a sequel to his biggest hit, “Lonely Letters,” titled “Another Lonely Letter” and backed with an alternate version sung in Spanish, “Otra carta triste.” (The labeling of this single maintained rigid language boundaries, with the English side credited to “Tiny Morrie with Al Hurricane’s Orchestra” and the Spanish to “Tiny Morrie con la orquesta de Al Hurricane.”)

In hindsight most of the Hurricanes’ fans tend to focus on the brothers’ Spanish recordings, and only “Lonely Letter” survives as part of the standard New Mexico dance band repertoire. The English-language recordings were always an attempt to reach outside the local market and to keep their music on local pop radio. (Through the 1960s, “Top 40” stations still typically included some local records in their rotation, and a leaflet from Albuquerque’s KQEO listing the top hits for the week of May 27, 1967, has a “Local Spotlight” listing of Tiny Morrie’s “Look at the Rain” along with its main playlist of national artists including the Young Rascals, the Bee Gees, The Who, and Aretha Franklin.) Morrie in particular always had his eye on a wider market and when he shifted his focus from English to Spanish material in the 1970s he adjusted his target from the United States to Mexico and Latin America, getting Mexican hits on his own and then turning his children into international superstars. By contrast, Al was always primarily a live performer—he regularly describes himself to interviewers as “a ham” and thrives on the applause and excitement of a room packed with dancers.

In the mid-1960s, the Sanchez family bought a nightclub in Albuquerque, which they named the Far West, providing the band with a regular home venue,

and they continued touring throughout the state with occasional dates in southern Colorado and further afield. In the late 1970s they decided to split into two bands in order to get more work, with Morrie fronting one and Al, Gaby, and Al Jr. in the other, and for a few years Al was booking both groups and they maintained an overlapping repertoire. This was a hot period for southwestern Spanish music, with groups loosely affiliated with the *onda chicana* drawing huge crowds from Texas to California, and in New Mexico the Hurricanes defined a local subsection of the broader trend. Other local groups covered their hits and copied their sound, and though some of those groups added their own innovations, everyone now working in New Mexico music credits Al and his brothers as the style's defining figures.

Although the basic elements of the New Mexico style were set by the late 1960s and bands continue to cover some of Al's early ranchera hits—"Mi saxophone," "La mula bronca," "Maldita suerte," and "El burro norteño"—a survey of the modern repertoire suggests that the Hurricanes' influence reached its peak in the 1970s. By then their style had undergone several fundamental changes: they were concentrating on Spanish-language songs; they had added a horn section and put decreasing focus on Al's guitar leads; and they joined the craze for cumbias that was sweeping northern Mexico and the Southwest. A key moment in this transformation came in 1969, when Al had a car accident on the way to a gig in Colorado that almost killed him and left him with only one eye—or, in professional terms, provided him with the eye patch that became his trademark and added a mythic, piratical aura to his public persona (see Figure 4). The first LP he released after this accident, *Canciones del Alma* (1970), broke with his earlier practice by focusing on new material rather than compiling previously released singles, providing liner notes in both English and Spanish—

though these notes are just a brief paragraph mentioning his accident—and including two cumbias: “Rosa María” and “La Múcura.”



Figure 4: Al Hurricane LP covers: *Mi Saxophone* and *Canciones del alma*.

“Rosa María” was an obvious choice for a ranchera-rock band jumping on the cumbia bandwagon, since it originally hit in 1965 for Los Moonlights, a Tijuana band that had followed Mike Laure’s pattern of adding tropical percussion to what was fundamentally a rock ’n’ roll outfit—though Al and Morrie rearranged the song to feature more guitar along with their new horn section. By contrast, the Al’s arrangement of “La múcura” reached back well before the cumbia craze: although the song had been a standard with tropical orchestras since the late 1940s, recorded by everyone from Pérez Prado and Beto Villa to Cab Calloway, it does not seem to have been adopted by the new wave of cumbia rockers before Al revived it, and his version opened with a guitar riff adapted directly from the 1949 recording by the Trio Los Panchos.³⁷¹

Al says he was already playing cumbias—or at least some tropical songs that are now considered cumbias—in his twelve-year-old troubadour days, and that they were always popular with audiences. However, he never recorded them

³⁷¹ The history of “La Múcura” is traced at greater length in chapter 2: “What’s in a name?”

because he felt there was no point without the tropical percussion Pérez Prado, Luis Arcaez, or La Sonora Santanera were using, and he thought it would be strange to mix that style with ranchera. This remained an issue when he changed his mind, but Morrie sidestepped it by playing the percussion for “Rosa María” and “La múcura” on cardboard boxes, providing a thumping beat that somewhat resembles the conga sound of the tropical orchestras. These recordings do not seem to have attracted much attention at first, though Al’s version of “La múcura” may have been the source for Rigo Tovar’s version of the song four years later, which imitated the same instrumental introduction and established the song as a standard with Mexican *grupera* musicians. Nor did Al fully commit to his new sound—although he used horns in all his later live groups, two of his most popular albums of the 1970s were a collection of classic border corridos and a duet tribute with Tiny Morrie to their mother, both of which omitted the horns in favor of electric lead guitar, presumably as a bow to older, more traditional tastes. However, cumbias became a regular feature of the Hurricanes’ dance sets and Baby Gaby became their specialist in the style, releasing an album in 1976 called *Baby Gaby canta cumbias* that included his most enduring hits, “Me voy al amanecer,” “Tipi tipi tin,” and “La cumbia de San Antone.”

The standard New Mexico Hispanic dance band repertoire still leans heavily on these 1970s recordings, and Al’s hits in particular. Anyone working regularly on the circuit is expected to be able to play his versions of “Mi saxophone,” “La mula bronca,” “El burro norteno,” “Maldita suerte,” “Rosa María,” “La múcura,” “Vestido mojado,” “Mi última parranda,” “Puño de tierra,” “Dos ojos sin rumbo,” “Por una mujer casada,” “Rumbo al sur,” “Eres casado,” “Gabino Barrera,” and “Valentín de la sierra.” Morrie’s contributions to the standard repertoire include “La del moño colorado,” “A medias de la noche,” “El asesino,” “El pescado

nadador,” and “El sauce y la palma,” and his wife, Gloria Pohl, though not a member of the regular working band, recorded one enduring standard, “El golpe traidor.” (I have no proof that her version established the song in the local repertoire, but it was undoubtedly influential.) Al Hurricane Jr. joined the group a little later, but he contributed one of the most popular hits in New Mexico history, “Flor de las flores,” as well as “El pintor.”

Although Morrie in particular has been extremely successful as a songwriter in both Spanish and English, and Al’s “Sentimiento” has been recorded by numerous Mexican and Tejano artists including the tejana superstar Selena, none of this basic New Mexico repertoire was original to the Sánchez family and most of the songs are Mexican ranchera standards. Nonetheless, these particular Mexican standards took root only with the Hurricane recordings and are still typically played in the Hurricane arrangements: “Flor de las flores” is known throughout Mexico and the Southwest, but few New Mexico bands would play a version that did not begin with some approximation of the jazzy chords that introduced Al Jr.’s record.

That introduction is also significant, at least in Al Sr.’s description, as one of the band’s rare debts to what was happening at the same period in Texas. In general New Mexico artists sharply differentiate their style from tejano, arguing that their playing is simpler, faster, and more traditional, and despite his background in big band swing, Al is no exception to this rule. He claims some kinship to the early tejano stars, Little Joe and Sunny Ozuna, but says, “Tex-Mex... where it started to take a change is they started jazzing up a lot of their songs.” He makes a limited exception for the Latin Breed, a group formed by some of Ozuna’s back-up musicians in the early 1970s, saying they added a jazz flavor “but they did it so good that it was accepted,” but adds, “people that tried to

copy them tried to jazz up too much in the songs.”

When you hear the mariachi, you hear the bass and you hear the strum, and that’s what make a mariachi so strong, see? And when Tex-Mex got started, Little Joe and Sunny, that’s what they used to have, kind of a sound of mariachi but in a Tex-Mex sound. So it went, people loved it. But then when you get into the jazz...only the musicians appreciate it. You know who Paul Desmond is..., Dave Brubeck. OK, that’s jazz. And when you listen to that jazz you can appreciate it and say, “OK, that’s listening music.” I can sit here and I can say, “Man, these guys are good musicians.” But when you hear it in a Spanish song, it takes away from the uh, *corazón*... I may have done that with a couple songs here and there, you know, and I said, “Hey. Be careful.” “Flor de Las Flores,” we start off with, not jazz chords, but we started with a D minor, you know, and then an augmented chord, diminished chord, augmented, and then minor, boom, back to seventh, and then you hit the chord and you go into ranchera. It’s kind of like preparation, like the one with the Latin Breed, “Yo vendo unos ojos negros.”

Through at least the mid-1970s, Al seems to have seen himself as part of the same broad movement as his Texan contemporaries. A *Billboard* article from 1974, covering a Latin-Chicano music seminar the magazine had sponsored in Corpus Christi, included a focus piece on Al that says, “As the leading distributor of the Texas product in New Mexico, Hurricane Enterprises considers itself a part of the Texas scene.” Asked about this, he recalls that he did make some attempts to expand into that market:

They were really nice guys. Sunny Ozuna, Little Joe, Roberto Pulido, you know, all these guys, and I became friends with a lot of those people and I became known to them. And that's why they told me "Al Hurricane has become part of the Texas scene." And...you know, there are some similarities to the music. But the Tex-Mex is the Tex-Mex. They had their thing going.

However, Al strongly rejects the idea that the Texans were an influence on his style. The people he cites as influences are first of all older Mexican artists: Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, Luis Aguilar, Antonio Aguilar, and the Trio Los Panchos. He also cites some older Southwestern performers including Lalo Guerrero, with and without the Trio Imperial, Lydia Mendoza and the Mendoza sisters, and Beto Villa. Among Anglos, he singles out Earl Bostic as a particular favorite, along with Glenn Miller and the Dorsey Brothers, then Hank Williams, and then the various rock 'n' rollers who captured his attention in the later 1950s. But when I ask about Sunny and Little Joe, his response is categorical:

I don't want to say they were an influence on me. I can't say that, because, I mean, these are like back when you're classmates—with your classmates you're kinda like, OK, we're classmates, you know...? New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, they all got their own little styles still, everybody got their style. But I think I got in between, somewhere, and started, I said, no, I got my own thing. Little Joe...I just respected the guy for doing what he's doing in Texas. Freddy Martínez, Grupo Mazz, Tortilla Factory, you know, all these guys... I consider us, like on a level, we all respect each other and we do our thing.

Whatever the interchange in earlier eras, the Hurricanes clearly maintained

their own style and identity. They also remained very much a family operation. When Morrie first split off in the late 1970s, Al continued to book both bands and two local television appearances from this period show versions of his main group: one has him on guitar or keyboards fronting a septet that includes Baby Gaby on sax and Al Jr. leading a three-piece teenage trumpet section including Gaby's son Michael, and the other features him and Al Jr. singing vocal duets in front of a similar backing band including Morrie on guitar.³⁷² In the early 1980s Morrie moved his family to Mexico, where his twelve-year-old son Lorenzo Antonio became a Latin American superstar, shortly followed by his four daughters, who formed a Latin child-pop group called Chikis and later the adult group Sparx. Morrie tried to work a similar Latin pop alchemy with Al and Al Jr., producing three albums for them on major labels under the group name Bandido, but although the albums had some limited success the new band never really caught on internationally and most of their New Mexico fans preferred the older Hurricane sound.

Meanwhile, with Morrie away, the Sanchez business empire fell apart. The Far West nightclub was lost to back taxes, the recording studio went with it, Bennie Sánchez stopped doing major concert promotions, and eventually Morrie and Al formally split their holdings, Al keeping the Hurricane recording catalog while Morrie kept their song publishing company, Striking Music. Al also had a succession of personal problems: his first marriage, to Al Jr.'s mother Netty, broke up amicably in 1971, but his second broke up disastrously in 1986 and one of his baby daughters was abused and murdered by his ex-wife's new boyfriend. Between the business and family stress, he went into a depression and had a major

³⁷² Al's son Jerry Dean has posted eight songs from the first show and three from the second on his YouTube channel. Both are from the local TV variety show hosted by Val de la O, which for a time was syndicated to stations throughout the United States.

heart attack in 1990. He came back in the early 1990s with *The Return of Al Hurricane “El” Godfather*, which some fans speak of as his best recording, and twenty years later he has added six more albums to his catalog and remains the most popular performer on the New Mexico music scene. He continued to expand his stylistic repertoire and when he is in the mood will sometimes employ wah-wah and other funk-style effects on a guitar solo—he boasts that this even impresses the kids who are into rap and heavy metal. Nonetheless, it is significant that his usual showcase for these guitar effects is the Chuck Berry oldie, “Johnny B.Goode.” Likewise, his most recent album, *Hey, Sugar Baby*, includes one track in modern reggaeton rhythm, but it is a revival of Lalo Guerrero’s pachuco classic, “Los chucos suaves.”

Overall, Al’s current shows—like the shows of most other New Mexico bands—consist largely of songs he, his brothers, and his son recorded in the 1960s and 1970s, the period when they shaped the New Mexico sound. Each time I have seen him with Al Jr., they have played not only their own hits, but Morrie’s “Lonely Letter” (sung by Al Jr.) and at least one of Baby Gaby’s signature numbers. They also play some more recent songs, but these are as likely to be standard additions to the New Mexico repertoire that they have not recorded—George Strait’s “Does Fort Worth Ever Cross Your Mind,” for instance, which Al sings—as songs featured on their own later recordings, like their 1990s covers of the Gypsy Kings’ “Baila Baila” and Los Tigres del Norte’s “La Puerta Negra.” Their musical style is similarly consistent: the basic band line-up continues to be Al on electric guitar, Al Jr. doubling on keyboards and trumpet, another electric guitarist, a trumpet, sax, bass, drums, and often a conga player.

Personal Tastes: An Afternoon with Al Hurricane

The way I have traced Al Hurricane's evolution as a professional musician in the previous sections follows a typical biographical pattern: starting out by looking at the range of styles and artists that influenced him, then at his experiments with different styles of instrumentation and repertoire, and finally looking at what he accomplished as a mature, established figure. Studies of professional musicians typically focus on their public performances and recordings, and Al Hurricane's professional biography has been similarly, albeit more briefly, traced in previous studies, both popular and academic.³⁷³ This is also the aspect of Al's musical life that both Peter García and I focused on in our interviews. However, Al has often described himself as "a ham," and when we finished our first interview he offered to play me a couple of songs, sat down at the piano in his living room, and gave a private concert that lasted almost an hour.

Al's selection of songs that afternoon was very likely influenced by our conversation, which had concentrated on his childhood and early career, and may also have been prompted in part by my offer to find him copies of various old recordings he was seeking. Just before going to the piano, he played me a recording of "Managua, Nicaragua" on his cell phone, which he has saved as a ring tone, then sang a verse of Peggy Lee's "Mañana" and showed me some of his record collection, including albums by the norteño and mariachi star Cornelio Reyna, the Trio Los Panchos, and Luciano Pavarotti. It was a comment on these records that prompted him to go to the piano, saying, "When I'm a fan of something, I pick up on things, like..." then playing a brief arpeggio and

³⁷³ García, "La Onda Nuevo Mexicana"; Chew Sánchez, Martha I. *Corridos in Migrant Memory*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006; Harbert, Nancy, "Al Hurricane Takes the Spanish Music Scene by Storm," *New Mexico Magazine*, January 1988; Terrell, Stephen W., [no title] reprint of article from *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 7, 1998, at

beginning to sing Lucio Dalla's "Caruso," an Italian song composed in 1986 and recorded by Pavarotti that year, which was on the album he had just showed me, *Tutto Pavarotti*.

Al followed with "O Sole Mio," and for both songs his piano accompaniment was a sort of semi-classical pastiche: basic chords on the left hand and single-note chordal arpeggios mixed with snatches of melody on the right, all played with theatrical panache. Al's singing was in the same vein, a heartfelt imitation of operatic bel canto, suggesting many years of listening and amateur performance, in the literal sense of performance prompted by love of the style.

I asked Al if this kind of music was something he recalled from his childhood, and he nodded, saying, "When I was a little kid I learned a lot from my grandmother and from her relatives, the Pedroncellis. Her family lived in Griegos and Pecos, New Mexico.... They spoke Italian and Spanish and English, all the same way, like [breaking into song]:

Penso che sogno così non ritorni mai più,
 Mi dipingevo le mani e la faccia di blu,
 Poi d'improvviso venivo dal vento rapito,
 E incominciavo a volare nel cielo infinito.
 Volare..."

The song, Domenico Modugno's "Nel blu dipinto di blu," or "Volare," was a huge hit in the United States as well as Italy, but since it was first recorded in 1958 it cannot have been something Al heard as a child. Nonetheless, he sang in Italian with an assurance presumably acquired among his Italian relatives, and his next selection was a more likely example of something they might have sung:

“Santa Lucia.” This performance included a telling linguistic slip: he sang the verse in the same pseudo-operatic style he had used for the previous songs, but on the final “Santa Lucia! Santa Lucia!” his voice faltered a bit on the repeat, and having clearly pronounced the *c* in the first Lucia with an Italian [tʃ] (like English *ch*), he pronounced it on the repeat with a Castilian Spanish lisped [θ] (like English *th*). Notably, both pronunciations are foreign to his normal speech—neither Mexicans nor New Mexicans lisp their *c*—so although my first inclination was to categorize the Spanish pronunciation as a lapse into his own accent, it may have been influenced by listening to Spanish singers such as Julio Iglesias, who has recorded “Caruso,” “Pensami,” and other Italian songs, singing this song or similar material.

In any case, Al was nostalgically free-associating, and next sang a garbled version of the introduction to Dean Martin’s pseudo-Italian hit, “That’s Amore”: “In Napoli, when boy meets girl, here’s what they say,” then briefly segued into the upbeat rhythm of the chorus, but broke off after singing “Whennn the...,” laughing and apologizing: “I haven’t learned that song, I wanted to learn the Italian version... I ran across it the other day on the internet someplace.”

Perhaps because that song got away from him, Al changed the subject, saying, “I was talking about the mambo a while ago,” and attempting a version of Pérez Prado’s “Qué rico el mambo.” He set too fast a tempo and the right hand melody got away from him, though he continued energetically through the mistakes. He was clearly aware of this, and explained, “On piano I do things a little different, for my own enjoyment,” by way of introducing a version of “La múcura,” which he pointed out was faster than the way he plays it onstage. He sang only a brief snatch of the lyric at this fast tempo, then a slower snatch of the

same song to demonstrate the tempo he normally plays it with the band. He began a further explanation: “That’s the difference in music, when you get a song you want to do...” This presumably was leading into a comment about how one has to adapt a song to one’s own style, but instead of continuing the explanation he asked, “Have you heard ‘Mucho corazón’?” He sang two verses of Luís Miguel’s romantic hit from 1992, then flubbed a chord, tried again, and broke off, saying, “Remember, this is all lyrics, lyrical, I mean I don’t—everything’s by ear.” (The word “lyrical” in this sense is a calque of the Spanish *lírico*, which applies to any skill learned on one’s own rather than from a teacher.³⁷⁴)

That statement led directly into a piano blues with a boogie woogie bassline, over which Al sang “Chattanooga Shoe-Shine Boy,” a number one hit on both the pop and country charts for Red Foley in 1950. Breaking off part-way through, he commented: “It’s kind of neat, eh? It’s my favorite pastime when nobody’s around.” He then played several piano variations on Fats Domino’s “Blueberry Hill,” after which he drifted into a generic blues improvisation, which reminded him of something else: “My mom’s favorite song on the piano, she always wanted me to play this for her.” The piece was a slow blues instrumental with the habanera-flavored bass pattern that blues pianists typically associate with the Chicago pianist Jimmy Yancey, though Al credited it to Ray Charles. I have not been able to find any recording by Charles that uses this bass line, though it is somewhat similar to his “A Bit of Soul.”

I expressed surprise that this was Bennie Sánchez’s favorite, saying, “I was thinking the Italian songs were what your mother liked, and then you tell me her favorite was Ray Charles.” Al’s reply began as a confirmation, then free-

³⁷⁴ This meaning of *lírico* is not standard Spanish, but is common in Mexico: “Que ha aprendido por gusto y solamente a base de práctica, sin recibir lecciones: *un pianista lírico, un médico lírico.*” (Lara, *Diccionario del español usual en México*, 561.)

associated to another style his mother presumably liked: “She loved for me to play that song. ‘Play it again,’ she’ll tell me. And there’s some boleros, I do a bunch of boleros...like my daughter, the one in the middle, she can sing with me, and she gives me harmony on a song like this...”

Al then played a selection of classic boleros, segueing from one into the next without pausing in the piano accompaniment: “Sabor de engaño,” which has been recorded by the Mexican movie star and *bolero ranchero* singer Javier Solís and numerous female singers including the Texans Chelo Silva and Lydia Mendoza; “Sin ti,” which Al recalled hearing on Henry Tafoya’s radio show in the 1940s, probably by Trio Los Panchos, who first recorded it in 1948; “Amorcito Corazon,” which was recorded by Pedro Infante, Beto Villa, and Los Panchos, among many others; “Rayito de luna,” recorded most famously by Los Panchos, which Al identified as the one he sings with his daughter; “Lloraré, llorarás,” which Al credited to Javier Solís, who recorded it numerous times, including a version with Los Panchos.

Without comment or warning, Al then started playing an instrumental polka that at first sounded like a version of “Los ojos de Pancha,” but quickly solidified into “Beer Barrel Polka.”

“I love to do this,” he said, meaning to sit at the piano and free-associate. “I even do stuff like...” he played a slow, lyrical version of “Stardust,” then ordered himself to “Jazz it up,” and increased the tempo, though he shortly returned to the original tempo and drifted off the song’s chords into a sort of free improvisation, then quit with a comment reflecting his earlier criticism of tejano musicians: “See, I jazzed it up a little bit. That’s what I mean: you get away from the tune, and then it doesn’t sound the same.”

Perhaps to emphasize the point that it is best to stick to basics, he then said,

“There’s a little tune that I like” and sang another Italian favorite, “Torna a Surriento”—though rather than singing the lyrics recorded by Caruso, Pavarotti, Mario Lanza, and other Italian singers, he performed the alternate Italian-language lyric popularized in the United States by Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin in the 1950s. This lyric was recorded by the Mexican tenor José Mojica around 1940, so it may have been known to Italians in New Mexico, but the Sinatra connection is a reminder that much of Al’s Italian repertoire consists of songs composed or recorded after the 1950s and although he presents them in the context of childhood memories and his Italian immigrant relatives, many if not most were presumably learned from popular records that he heard and acquired in a broader American context.³⁷⁵

Al then shifted gears again, singing Fats Domino’s “Let the Four Winds Blow” and a snatch of a similar Domino hit from the 1950s, “I’m Gonna be a Wheel Someday,” which he said he had recently heard on a CD by the Western Swing revival group Asleep at the Wheel. Then he shifted back to Italian, beginning “Pensami,” a song he had talked about earlier in our interview, which he recorded on his last CD, *Hey, Sugar Baby*, and has rearranged with a tropical beat “somewhere between a mambo and a cumbia.” After singing a couple of lines he broke off, saying, “I can’t do that on the piano—that’s the one I told you has a bunch of chords.” He kept trying, though, and shortly got it, first singing the song in ballad tempo and a bel canto tenor, then shifting into the Latin beat he

³⁷⁵ Despite combing the internet and consulting several experts on Italian popular song, I have been unable to find any Italian sheet music or recording with the lyric sung by Al and recorded by Mojica, Sinatra, Martin, and a few other North American singers. It may have existed in oral tradition in Italy, but seems to have surfaced commercially only in the Americas, and it begins “Guarda il mare com’e bello,” as compared to the standard Neapolitan dialect lyric, which begins, “Vide ’o mare” or the standard Italian lyric, which begins, “Vedi il mare.”

uses on the recording.³⁷⁶ I had forgotten his previous reference to this song and thought he was reminding me of “O Sole Mio,” which he had also mentioned arranging for the band, and when I mentioned the latter song he instantly switched, singing a bit of “O Sole Mio” in his pseudo-operatic style, then showing how he would do it with a tropical beat. He explained, “That’s kind of the original, and I’m trying to do it like ‘La múcura’... We were working on it last night. But when I get on the piano, I still want to do it like...” and shifted back into the familiar version. He put more emotion into the operatic version and I said it sounded good that way. He nodded agreement, then said, “But I’m not gonna record it that way. I’m gonna record it more to a dancing beat.”

This comment suggests a division Al makes between his personal tastes and his professional obligations. I suggested that a lot of his fans would probably never imagine he could sing like an Italian tenor, hoping he might expand on this theme, but apparently it just made him think about other ways he might surprise them, since rather than continuing in the same vein he responded by saying, “And then, of course, I do the...” and broke into Hank Williams’s “Your Cheating Heart.” His playing seemed particularly relaxed and comfortable on this and other country and western songs, suggesting that at some point he probably played a lot of this music on piano, but also showed signs that he has not done so recently—he kept a solid, even dance beat with his left hand, but stumbled several times in the right-hand passages, despite the song’s simple melody.

Al’s next selection was “I Don’t Know Why (I Just Do),” a standard that has been recorded by numerous pop singers (including Frank Sinatra and Dean

³⁷⁶ Julio Iglesias recorded “Pensami” in Italian, and may have been Al’s source. In our interview, he said, “Louis Miguel does it in Spanish, and he says ‘Piensa en mi’,” which would make sense, but in fact Miguel’s version is titled “Júrame,” and does not include that phrase. It is the only song Al has performed publically in Italian, and he says the fans like it: “People say, ‘Do it again, do that Italian song.’”

Martin) and boogie-woogie pianists in the country and western genre (Jerry Lee Lewis and Moon Mullican), though his version sounded more pop than country. As if that were a bridge to pop, he followed with a snatch of “I’m in the Mood for Love,” then changed direction yet again, saying: “The one that’s hard for me to do is stuff like...” and playing a fast boogie-woogie bass that gave him obvious trouble, then shifting into an equally fast but more steady boogie with the comment, “That beat’s hard for me, so I do this other beat.”

The shift into boogie-woogie gelled as a slow, rocking, twelve-bar blues, the first English-language song that he sang all the way through:

Wellll, No, I don’t want to buy it, that meat’s too high for me
 No I don’t want to buy it, I know where I can get it free
 But I’ll never name the city, ’cause it might start a big stampede

Well, I went to see my baby, she said “Daddy, just relax.”
 Well, I went to see my baby, she said “Daddy, just relax.”
 But that night as I was leaving, I paid ten dollars luxury tax.

Now, you know this here sensation, kind of hard on a man,
 Causing me such aggravation, but I do the best I can
 I’m gonna take a little vacation, roam from east to west
 [loudly growling:] IIII’ll seeeeeeeee, who’s causing all this mess

Wellll, No, I don’t want to buy it, that meat’s too high for me
 [spoken aside: I’m sorry, baby, now]
 But I’ll never name the city, where I know I can get it free.

Al finished the final line laughing, and I asked where the song was from. He said, “It’s ‘Luxury Tax Blues’ from 1947.” I said it sounded like Louis Jordan, and he said that it could have been, suggesting that although he recalled the exact year of the recording, he was unsure about the artist. In fact, it was by Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, who had a hit with it in 1947, and although Al had switched or altered a few lines, his lyric was on the whole an accurate recollection of Vinson’s. (The only significant change was singing “sensation” rather than “inflation” in the first line of the bridge.”)³⁷⁷

Both in the earlier interview and at the piano, Al expressed his comfort with the blues idiom, and his playing and singing bore this out. His piano playing remained simple, but with virtually no clumsiness or mistakes, and he sang the lyric with wry, knowing humor. Confirming this impression, he said, “Sometimes I just make up things like that, with a blues,” and resumed the same accompaniment, singing a semi-improvised lyric:

You know they call me Hurricane, that’s a nickname some gave me
 But you know it’s because of you baby, cause I know I’m going away
 But you know you done me wrong, baby, I’ve got to let you go

Bobby Soxin’ baby, you headed for stage, screen and radio
 You left me here, right? I’m begging you to come home, baby
 Oh, Bobby Soxin’ baby, I’ve got to let you go

Cause you’re no good for me—that’s what people tell me, from time to time.

This lyric used some phrases from T-Bone Walker’s 1946 hit “Bobby Sox Baby,” and Al ended the second verse by hitting a final chord on the piano, then

³⁷⁷ Van Rijn, Guido, *The Truman and Eisenhower Blues: African-American Blues and*

dropping his voice a fifth from C to a low F on the last word, a standard pop-blues device. He explained, “I write some, several songs, I write ’em, some blues. Blues are real easy to make, ’cause you—I’ll be sitting on the piano and say:

Well, that baby of mine—or I think she’s mine—but I’ll find

She’s messing around on me. You know what is?

I just found out it was my neighbor, oooh, he was my very best friend.

Although the lyrics were improvised haphazardly, with no rhymes or regular meter, and his vocal phrasing overflowed the musical measures, the piano accompaniment maintained a steady boogie bassline and followed the regular chord changes of a twelve-bar blues. Al’s obvious comfort with this style led me to ask, “For you, is there any difference between doing the English and the Spanish stuff, or is it just all...?”

He replied, “I think if I, uh—my pronunciation’s better in Spanish, I mean, but if I do, like, a blues or something like that, then, uh, I mean I can get into it, see. Like, there’s a Spanish song I can do...” Shifting to a faster rhythm, he went into a somewhat altered version of Lalo Guerrero’s twelve-bar Pachuco composition, “Muy Sabroso Blues”:

Yo tengo una baby que sabe besar,

Cuando me besa, yo no hay lo que hacer

Que lindo besa mi baby, que lindo besa mi baby,

Que lindo besa mi baby, esa sí sabe besar.

Me dame abracito, y me dame apretón,

Y bajo las luces y rom-pom-pom-pom,

Que lindo besa mi baby, que lindo besa mi baby,

Que lindo besa mi baby, esa sí sabe besar.

Le gusta bailar, le gusta hacer el twist,

Se da una vuelta y me [kiss sound] tira un kiss.

Que lindo besa mi baby, que lindo besa mi baby,

Que lindo besa mi baby, esa sí sabe besar.

Without pausing in the accompaniment, Al said, “And then I change it,” and segued into Guerrero’s “Marijuana Boogie”:

Mi jaina se llama Juana. Juana, Juana, Juana.

Pero ya todos los vatos le dicen,

Ay, Mari, Mari Juana boogie

Mari, Marijuana, that’s my baby’s name.

“That used to be a Lalo Guerrero song, but I changed some of the words, to kind of modernize it, now I kinda forget what the other words were.... ‘Que lindo besa mi baby,’ that was one of his too, but I changed the words, I added that one:

Le gusta bailar, le gusta hacer el twist

Se da una vuelta y me [kiss sound] tira un kiss.

Que lindo besa mi baby—

“And people, when I do stuff like that, they go nuts.”

When Al referred to doing “stuff like that,” I assumed he meant Spanish-language boogie, but he may have intended a broader association with songs of that period or in that rhythm, since he next began playing a similar accompaniment and said, “another song that—as a matter of fact I don’t even know the name of it, if I can get that, it’s ‘Tennessee Boogie Shuffle’ or something like that.” The lyric he sang was in English, a version of Red Foley’s

“Tennessee Saturday Night” from 1949 with some lyrics reworked and others omitted—at one point he just gave up and sang “da ta da da dada, da da da.” This song was a hit on the country charts and may well have crossed over to some southwestern pop radio playlists, but Al played it with a very similar feel to the Guerrero boogies. Since Guerrero and other Hispanic bandleaders in the 1940s and 1950s played plenty of English language hits, it may be somewhat misleading to trace the songs’ separate roots and suggest they are from different genres: Al’s free association suggests that a Hispanic dance band musician who came up in that period might group “Muy sabroso blues” and “Tennessee Saturday Night” in the same category, as popular jitterbug boogies from 1949.

Those songs ended Al’s piano performance, though as a coda he went into the back room where he keeps his guitars, dug out a 1940s Gibson archtop, and played a swing arrangement of the pop standard “Some of these Days.”

It would be presumptuous to read too much significance into Al’s song selection on one afternoon, and his choices were undoubtedly influenced both by our prior conversation and by my reactions as he played. Nonetheless, I was struck by some aspects of this stream-of-consciousness excursion through his informal repertoire.

For one thing, although he has mentioned in other interviews that he can speak Italian, he has recorded only one song in that language, so it is significant that he has a large Italian repertoire, apparently plays this music fairly regularly, and continues to learn new songs in the language. In the course of our impromptu concert, he went back to his Italian repertoire several times after singing in Spanish or English, and sang it with a passion that indicates he feels strongly about it. To some extent, Italian music seems to serve the same function for him that New Mexico Spanish music serves for the younger people in his audience:

though it is not in a language he speaks commonly or fluently, it connects him to an ancestral culture that remains important to him, and by continuing to sing Italian songs he asserts both his connection to that heritage and his difference from the mainstream culture around him—but in his case that mainstream includes the contemporary New Mexico music scene, and Spanish as well as English.

As if to drive this point home, not only was Al's living room selection quite different from his public performance repertoire, it included virtually no overlaps with that repertoire. Of all the songs he played, "Pensami" is the only one he has recorded, and his recording is in a tropical dance style and sounds nothing like the semi-operatic, slow-paced solo performance he did for me. Indeed, he specifically commented that although he has reworked both "Pensami" and "O Sole Mio" to fit his club act, he personally prefers to sing and play these songs in the traditional Italian style. Likewise, although he occasionally plays "Marijuana Boogie" onstage and sometimes intersperses a verse from "Muy Sabroso Blues," he was careful to point out that he was showing me Lalo Guerrero's original versions.

Al Jr. said the selection I heard was typical of what Al plays at home, and the divergence between this and Al's performance repertoire suggests the potential pitfalls of judging a performer's personal tastes or self-image based on the music and character he presents onstage or on recordings. As a professional performer, Al experimented with various personas in his youth—Mexican folksinger, country singer, swing bandleader, saxophonist, rock guitarist, rock/R&B bandleader—then settled on a mature style, but as an amateur musician he has continued to play many of those earlier styles and also some styles he never played in public. Nor is this just a matter of retention: he has continued to expand his home repertoire in directions he has rarely if ever explored onstage, in

particular romantic boleros and Italian pop ballads.

Al's range of tastes is exceptional in some ways, but in others not. His mother, for example, spoke Spanish as her main language and devoted much of her life to promoting New Mexico Spanish music, but the first song she taught him was "Home on the Range" and her favorite song in his home repertoire was a piano blues by Ray Charles. Other people I interviewed in the region likewise mentioned liking and in some cases preferring other styles to New Mexico music, although I was specifically interviewing them about their involvement in the New Mexico genre. Al is unquestionably the defining figure in that genre, and the fact that his tastes include so much else does not compromise his commitment to it or his importance as its main innovator. But this discrepancy highlights the extent to which New Mexico music, like any musical genre, language, or identity, is a point of suture, connecting individuals to one another and to abstract conceptions of shared culture, rather than defining them as individuals. As such, it is defined by the ways in which it binds those individuals and serves as a meeting point between them. What Al Hurricane played in the 1950s, the 1960s, and even in the 1970s, much as it influenced and defined the modern style, was not yet New Mexico music in the modern sense. Having formed his style before it defined a genre, he may be less personally attached to that genre than his followers, and may see it as constricting where they see it as unifying.

3. Musical Evolutions in Northern New Mexico

“It’s a feeling, and it’s a culture. It’s red or green, it’s being a native New Mexican, it’s being a Hispanic, it’s being American. That’s New Mexico music.”³⁷⁸

Rockin’ Rick Padilla, deejay at KDCE, Española

“It’s the sound of the music, the way the music is performed and it’s like a tradition...I always describe it like chile. Because we have red chile and green chile but yet, you know, most of the places, you go to Texas, their chile is just not chile to us, it’s like tomato sauce or something.”

Jerry Dean, son of Al Hurricane and owner of Atlantis CDs

When Al Hurricane began recording Spanish-language songs and instrumental polkas with electric guitar leads and a horn section in the mid-1960s, he did not think of what he was playing as New Mexico music—on the one hand he saw himself as part of a new wave of musicians including the Texans Little Joe, Sunny Ozuna, and Augustín Ramírez, and on the other he prided himself on having his own style. It was the success of his records and live performances, the choice of other bands to imitate him, the choice of radio stations to explore the possibilities of a locally-focused playlist, and the choice of listeners in New Mexico and elsewhere to embrace both the music and the idea that it was a distinctive regional style that led to New Mexico music being marketed and recognized as its own genre. Over the years, what was embraced as a new sound

³⁷⁸ “Red or green?” is the question asked of anyone ordering local cuisine in a New Mexico restaurant, referring to the two kinds of chile sauce, and in 1999 it was adopted as the official

in the 1960s has been reframed as a local tradition, a continuation of the earlier rural music of Hispanic New Mexico, and particularly of the northern mountains. The style is frequently associated with family heritage and the Spanish language, and although New Mexico music events draw some young dancers, the core audience is middle-aged and many fans describe themselves as preferring rock in their youth and gravitating to the New Mexico style as they married, had children, and became concerned with preserving their familial culture and passing it on to future generations. Even teenage fans often trace their love of the music to respect for grandparents or earlier ancestors, and it is the intensity of this local, familial frame that has distinguished New Mexico music and provided its staying power.

The earliest mention of the genre in print seems to be a *Billboard* magazine article from 1974 about Latin music in the Rocky Mountain region. A Denver record store owner, Mrs. Chris Marquez, described a new trend that “she calls New Mexico music, characterized by such artists as Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie from Albuquerque.” Her description of the style included three of the four attributes that fans, musicians, and programmers still routinely cite: electric guitar leads, simplicity, and difference from Tex-Mex or tejano; the missing attribute being a fast tempo. She explained, “This is a different music than say Tex-Mex. It has a lot of guitar and is styled with more, shall I say, simplicity.” Ms Marquez singled out “Ni por mil puñados de oro,” a duet from Al and Morrie’s tribute LP to their mother, as “an example of the Hurricane New Mexican style,” and suggested that this style was influencing groups not only in the New Mexico-Colorado region, but also in Mexico, noting a recent version of “La mula bronca” by a Monterrey norteño band called Los Coyotes del Bravo that mimicked Al’s

“State Question” (“New Mexico Legislature” handbook, <http://www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/lcsdocs/nmleghandbook01-05.pdf>, accessed 9/3/13).

guitar-driven recording, though it also had sections featuring accordion.³⁷⁹

Al recalls that the commercial music business he grew up with in Albuquerque did not include anything distinctively local. The dominant forum for Spanish music was Henry Tafoya's early morning program on KGGM, and "What do you think he played on the radio? Los Panchos. Pedro Infante. José Alfredo Jiménez, Luís Aguilar, Jorge Negrete. All the Mexican artists. Because at that time, there were no New Mexico artists. I mean, there were, so to speak, but they were...like Gregorio Ruíz and all that, no one made any professional recordings."³⁸⁰

Older Styles

Gregorio Ruíz was a fiddler from Pecos who was born in 1889 and began playing at dances when he was nine years old. He was one of a handful of older village fiddlers who were still active in the 1970s, and these artists were celebrated by academic folklorists and folk dance societies as repositories of a vanishing tradition. Henry Ortíz, a Santa Fe musician, deejay, and record store owner who produced Ruíz's only album, recalls that Ruíz and a guitar player were regularly brought to Santa Fe to accompany dancers at the annual fiesta and performed in the old style, with no amplification. The sponsors were local folk dance societies, such as La Sociedad Colonial Española de Santa Fe, which was founded in 1947 "to preserve the dances and *cuentos* of the old days."³⁸¹ The styles of dancing revived and disseminated by these groups are frequently referred

³⁷⁹ Earl Paige, "Rocky Ritmo: Latin Music Industry Recognizes Rocky Mountain Region," *Billboard*, 27 Jul 1974, 34. Los Coyotes' recording of "La mula bronca" is still a popular polka oldie, as testified by multiple postings on YouTube with effusive commentary by fans, several of whom describe it as their fathers' favorite record, and it alternates guitar leads with accordion doubled by saxophone.

³⁸⁰ Al Hurricane, interviewed by Peter Garcia, 1/8/98.

³⁸¹ Montaña, *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas*, 210.

to as “Spanish colonial dances,” but few can be reliably dated to the colonial era (which ended in 1821) and some of the most popular arrived as part of the international wave of couples dancing that swept the Western world in the mid-nineteenth century. As with the use of “Spanish” for ethnic heritage, the use of “Colonial” for these dances is an assertion of enduring local traditions rather than literally meaning that a particular dance dates to the colonial period, and it is not unusual to come across anachronistic references to the waltz, polka, or varsoviana as “19th century Spanish Colonial dances.”³⁸²

New Mexicans did dance to violin and guitar music during the colonial period: Zebulon Pike, who visited the region in 1806, wrote, “The music made use of [at dances] is the guitar, violin, and singers,” mentioning in particular the fandango and the minuet, though adding that the latter “is still danced by the superior class only.”³⁸³ It is not clear what he meant by either *fandango* or *minuet*, and none of the surviving descriptions provides enough detail to establish what aspects of the preserved or revived dance repertoire were common in the Spanish

³⁸² Brunt, Charles D., “Marking History,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 10 April 2011, at <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/metro/102328453322newsmetro04-10-11.htm>. The term “colonial dances” has been current since the early twentieth century and is still frequently used by dancers, musicians, and in the popular press, though rarely in academic texts. An interesting summation of the term’s anachronistic scope is given in Aurora Lucero-White, *Folk-Dances of the Spanish-Colonials of New Mexico*. Santa Fe fiesta souvenir pamphlet, 1937, 12. She writes that the Polish dances that became popular at the court of Maximilian and Carlotta were forbidden by the Mexican government around the turn of the 20th century, but:

New Mexico, far removed from the Capital, had already sworn allegiance to the new government [of the United States], and the people of this colony were under no obligation to harbor hatreds of things foreign. Besides, the Polish dances were entirely to their liking, fitting in with their courtly standards of elegance and decorum. So why discard them? Unlike the Mexicans they could hardly take on the dances of the aborigines, who were barbarians as compared to the Aztecs; and they were still too cautious to want to adopt anything American. As a consequence the dances of the Radziwills and Ploniatewskis were unofficially adopted into the Spanish-Colonial folk pattern.

³⁸³ Pike, Zebulon Montgomery, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America* [1811]. Denver: W.H. Lawrence, 1889, 373.

colony.³⁸⁴ Despite Northern New Mexico's enduring reputation as an isolated backwater, the region's music and dance traditions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were affected by constant interchange with both Mexico and the United States—as well as by broader southwestern Hispanic trends, including the re-importation of Spanish dances like the *jota aragonesa* in the early twentieth century—and are markedly heterogeneous. Mary Montaña writes that although “most scholars agree that the Polka was introduced with the reign of Maximilian and Carlotta [who ruled Mexico from 1864 to 1867] others suggest that it was introduced in 1847 from the United States during the Mexican war.”³⁸⁵ The two explanations need not be framed as contradictory, since the polka was popular in both Mexico and the United States and there is no reason to think it arrived in New Mexico from a single source. Likewise the *varsoviana*, which is by far the most widely performed “colonial” dance aside from waltzes and polkas. Though often described as having been introduced to Mexico during Maximilian's reign and traveling north from there, it was popular in the United States by the 1850s and the most common tune associated with it was widespread among Anglos as well as Hispanics, known as “The Varsouviana,” “The Varsouvienne,” or “Put Your Little Foot.” It was danced as far away as Boston, and non-Hispanic sources tend to trace its arrival directly from Europe.³⁸⁶ (To further complicate this

³⁸⁴ There is no reason to doubt the description of some early local dances, such as the *indita*, *comancha*, or *coneja*, as dating to the colonial period, and they may well preserve influences from local Native American traditions, but it is very hard to establish how these dances were done in earlier times, how they developed, and how they may have changed over decades or centuries.

³⁸⁵ Montaña, *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas*, 193.

³⁸⁶ This was the only older dance mentioned by anyone I interviewed, aside from the polka and waltz, and despite its name, which refers to Warsaw, it is regarded by many northern New Mexicans as unique to the region. Loeffler begins his section on the *varsoviana*, “Ironically this dance did not originate in New Mexico, as so many New Mexicans believe...” (*Música de los Viejitos*, 135). He traces the standard history found in both popular and academic sources on New Mexico traditions, writing that the dance was introduced in Paris in 1853, became a favorite of the Empress Carlotta, traveled to Mexico with her in the 1860s, and thus “made its way first to the New World and then northward into the hearts of *la gente*.” However, an article published in San Francisco in 1859 already referred to the “Mazourka, Varsouvienne, Esmeralda, &c.” as graceful

discussion, there is no reason to assume that early references to the dance are necessarily references to the melody most New Mexicans call “La varsoviana.” Ken Keppeler, who has spent many years playing and collecting the old local dance music, recalls the fiddler Cleofes Ortíz, who was born in Rowe in 1910, playing him five different varsoviana melodies in an afternoon,³⁸⁷ and other melodies and variants are played to accompany the dance in Europe.)

Imported styles were changed to fit local tastes and skills and subject to local innovations, so my point is not to deny any dance or tune the status of “local tradition” or to argue that it does not include influences from Spain, Mexico, or Native Americans, but only to suggest the range of influences involved. Mela Sedillo, one of the first scholars of New Mexico folk dance, noted in the 1930s that the *indita*, which is often mentioned as preserving indigenous Native American traces, resembles a Hungarian *czardas*, and Weigle and White write that a tune Cleofes Ortíz played to accompany the *Valse de los paños*³⁸⁸ is “almost identical to a polka” still played in Poland.³⁸⁹ The resemblance of *indita* to *czardas*

older dances that were falling out of favor and described them as “Italian, French, or High Dutch” imports (*Hutchings’s California Magazine*, No. 37, July 1859, 43). Similarly, a description of a dance held in Kansas City in 1900 refers to “a stately grand march, followed by a Virginia reel, minuet, tally-ho, varsouviana, and other dances of a century earlier” (Londré, Felicia Hardison, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007, 255). As Guy Bensusan summed up (“A Consideration of Norteña and Chicano Music,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 4, 1985, 160): “It was popular in Mexico City during the 1860s days of the French Intervention and Maximilian, and it came to be known both as varsuviana and redova in Northern Mexico. Similar versions immigrated to the United States directly from Europe, moved westward, and became a well-known dance in the Southwest frontier. Curiously, therefore, on both sides of the United States-Mexican border, the varsuvienna was played, sung, and danced with variations in instruments, language, and style of body movement appropriate to the respective cultures.”

³⁸⁷ Ken Keppeler, telephone conversation, 9/12/13.

³⁸⁸ “Spanish New Mexican names for some dances differ from standard Spanish: ‘El Chotis’ or ‘El Chote’ for ‘La Chotis’; ‘El Cutilio’ for ‘El Cotillón’; ‘El Valse’, with a distinct *e* on the end of the spoken word, for ‘El Vals’” (Stark, *Music of the “Bailes,”* vii). Older New Mexicans consistently say *valse* (pronounced “valsay”), perhaps in a back-formation from the plural *valeses*, perhaps as part of the broader practice by which a “paragogic *e*” is added to some words, as mentioned in Bernal-Enríquez and Hernández-Chávez, “La enseñanza del español,” 99.

³⁸⁹ Montañón, *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas*, 202; Weigle and White, *Lore of New Mexico*, 473.

may have begun and ended in Sedillo's imagination, but there is nothing surprising about finding a Polish source for Ortiz's tune, and Weigle and White added that the second half of the same Polish polka was very similar to the southwestern Anglo favorite "Buffalo Gals" (which Al Hurricane reworked into a guitar instrumental called "Lobo" in 1961). Central European dances and melodies were popular throughout the Americas and successive waves of Central European immigrants with fiddles and accordions arrived in the southwestern and midwestern United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so for both Hispanics and Anglos in those regions the repertoire of popular polkas and waltzes was in part a matter of direct transmission.

Tunes and styles continued to arrive throughout the twentieth century, and sometimes worked their way into the "Spanish" or "colonial" repertoire. Weigle and White write that Gregorio Ruíz "learned dozens of Irish fiddle tunes from itinerant railroad workers, and he taught these tunes to *violinistas* in the Pecos area, who in turn played them at dances far and wide." They also quote an Anglo musician's recollection of an African-American fiddler who was active in the Hondo Valley, southwest of Albuquerque, in the late nineteenth century and "played many tunes that he just made up himself, and he taught a lot of the native Mexican fellows."³⁹⁰ Although census figures indicate few if any African Americans in most parts of Northern New Mexico, there were occasional exceptions to that rule: Las Vegas was a railroad hub with an African American hotel to serve the Pullman porters, and the musician Nick Branchal recalls that when he was growing up in the tiny lumber town of Pot Creek, near Taos, "I was the only Hispanic kid [in my class], and one white kid, and all the rest were black kids." (Which said, the total African American population of San Miguel County,

³⁹⁰ Weigle and White, *Lore of New Mexico*, 192, 202.

which includes Las Vegas, was 31 people in 1960 and the black population of Taos County was 54 and ten years later had dropped to 28.)

Altogether, the range of influences was as broad for Hispanic southwesterners as for their Anglo counterparts and there was plenty of interchange in both directions. Weigle and White list Anglo pop, parlor, and minstrel tunes common among Hispanic fiddlers, including “After the Ball,” “Home Sweet Home,” and “Turkey in the Straw,” and Keppeler reports that from the 1920s through the 1940s dances in Northern New Mexico often “were split between the Spanish musicians and dances, and Anglo/Cowboy musicians and dances. Both groups would dance the others’ dances and the musicians often helped each other out.”³⁹¹ The local repertoire expanded still further with the growth of mass media in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1941 Olen Leonard and C.P. Loomis wrote that local dancers still preferred “old Spanish” styles like polka, *raspa* (a Mexican dance), and *cuadrillo* (the French quadrille), but this music was “interspersed at infrequent intervals with selections of modern jazz,” and Aurora Lucero-White wrote in 1947 that at town fiestas “local musicians provide the entertainment playing, now old ballads, now modern jazz tunes.”³⁹²

All the musicians I interviewed mix Spanish and Anglo repertoires and most recall the oldest musicians in their areas playing at least a few Anglo tunes. Even if they do not think of the older repertoire as mixed, there were tunes that would be hard to file in one or the other category, since melodies easily cross linguistic and cultural boundaries and the older fiddlers typically did not bother to use names for the melodies they learned and played. Henry Ortíz, who was born

³⁹¹ Weigle and White, *Lore of New Mexico*, 192; Montaña, *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas*, 210-11.

³⁹² Leonard, Olen, and C. P. Loomis, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: El Cerrito, New Mexico* [1941], reprinted in Cortés, Carlos E. (ed). *The New Mexican Hispano*. New York: Arno Press, 1974, 49; Aurora Lucero-White, *Los Hispanos*. Denver: Sage Books, 1947, 29.

in 1929, recalls that when he was about twelve years old he began accompanying an “old man” named Frankie González who played fiddle, and by the time he was sixteen they were playing at dances and weddings around San José, Rivera, Pecos, and Villanueva. “It was all Spanish music,” he says, but adds:

There was no titles for the polkas, or the *valses*, or the *chótises*, or the *marchas*.³⁹³ Everything was just created in the people’s minds. Where they learned it from I don’t know... The violin player made decisions as to what he was gonna play. Here come somebody and says, “Well, play me a polka.” He would play whatever he wanted to play, and it was a polka. But he had a good variety of polkas, and a good variety of valeses—no repetition, in other words. He had enough music to play the whole night.

While Ortiz characterizes this repertoire as Spanish, he also says it was “just like” the older rural styles played in Anglo communities, “almost the same kind of music.... No vocals, everything was instrumental. Like the hillbillies!”

Ortiz considers this old fiddle repertoire to be the real New Mexico music, and objects to that terminology being used for the Hurricane-influenced style that dominates current radio playlists, but his own relationship to the older and newer styles is complex. Although he grew up accompanying violinists and later recorded accompaniments for Gregorio Rúa, he was also an influential figure in the development of the Northern New Mexico electric guitar style and doubled on saxophone in dance bands, playing “Fats Domino’s stuff and the ‘Yakety Sax.’” In recent years he has recorded electric guitar versions of the fiddle tunes he learned in his teens and given them names that recall their sources—“Redondo Frankie González” and polkas named for villages where he and González used to

³⁹³ Ortiz pronounced “polka” as in English, but the other dances as in Spanish.

play—but he intersperses these local melodies with bilingual versions of “Since I Met You Baby” and “Kiss an Angel Good Morning.”

The twin and dueling forces of tradition and modernity—what one bilingual educator calls “remaining and becoming”³⁹⁴—are often hard to untangle. Roberto Martínez, also born in 1929, tried to preserve and popularize the Northern New Mexico violin repertoire as well as creating a distinctively New Mexican mariachi style based on older local models, but although he grew up in Mora, a small town even further north and less accessible than Ortiz’s home village of San José, he says that the group that played for local dances during his childhood did not include a fiddler. His uncle Flavio Lovato played saxophone, his uncle Gonzalo played drums, a man named Jesse played guitar, and they would bring a blind accordion player named Polo from Las Vegas. “So there was no violin. Saxophone, accordion... Tex-Mex, kind of, but New Mexico style.” His designation of this sound as “Tex-Mex” is probably an anachronism reflecting not how it was thought of in the early 1940s but what he was told by folklorists in later years: “The original ones, way, way back were violin and guitar, and then according to what I’ve heard, the accordion came by way of Texas.” The accordion he remembers Polo playing was a piano accordion, the variety used as a cheaper and more mobile substitute for pianos throughout the United States, rather than the diatonic button accordion favored by tejano and norteno players, and the mix of music he describes does not suggest any particular influence from Texas. The repertoire included “Spanish” tunes, “western” music (the southwestern branch of what became “country and western”), and pop hits like “In the Mood” (“that was one of my uncle’s favorite,” he says, humming a few bars) and “Don’t Sweetheart Me,” a 1944 hit for the accordionist and bandleader

³⁹⁴ Roberts, *Remaining and Becoming*.

Lawrence Welk, which was covered by numerous pop and western artists. He recalls:

Even in the remote towns, you know, Mora, we grew up, Mexican culture and American mixed, because when World War Two started I was probably fourteen, something like that—[he sings] “*There’s the star spangled banner waving somewhere.*” You know, we knew all of those songs. ... I used to listen to Tex Ritter, Gene Autry, all of those, we used to watch those things, and the Lone Ranger, all of those movies.”

Martínez says he was also familiar with Mexican movies of that period. Discussing the tradition of *coplas*, in which two singers duel by improvising verses about each other, he says the first coplas he heard were when Tito Guízar dueled another singer in *El Rancho Grande*: “That was in Mora, and I just loved that because he was singing, and he was a poor guy, and the patron was rich...” Mexican ranchera movies had an obvious appeal to rural, Spanish-speaking kids. As Campa wrote in the 1940s of *El Rancho Grande*’s theme song, “In a land where ranchers constitute almost half of the population, a song such as this takes root immediately.”³⁹⁵ It was not hard for someone growing up in the mountains of New Mexico to identify with the romantic *charros* in the mountains of Jalisco, and Mary Jane Walker writes that many New Mexico musicians recalled that “if they could afford it,” they would watch films over and over to learn favorite songs.³⁹⁶ That caveat is significant, since for kids like Martínez movies were a luxury. He recalls being particularly excited by heroes who were poor like him, for example Pedro Infante, another singing movie star who specialized in working class roles. When I asked about Jorge Negrete, who is frequently paired with

³⁹⁵ Campa, *Spanish-Folk Poetry*, 197.

Infante in histories of golden age cinematic ranchera, he responded, “he’s my wife’s favorite, yeah, but I don’t—I like Jorge Negrete, but to me, Pedro Infante was more down to earth.” To a small-town boy in an environment he describes as “biculture,” Guízar, Infante, and Autry were somewhat similar figures, handsome, heroic singers who fought for the underdog.

Household phonographs were apparently rare in Northern New Mexico: Al Hurricane in Albuquerque remembers learning songs from Mexican recordings, but virtually everyone in the rural north remembers films and radio as their main sources. Walker interviewed a pair of sisters in southern Colorado who recalled learning Lydia Mendoza’s songs “by leaving a paper and pencil by the radio, listening as they worked around the house. Each time a song came on, they would rush to the radio and try to write down a few more lyrics and note the chord changes.”³⁹⁷ Campa, one of the most assiduous folklorists collecting in New Mexico in the early 1940s, wrote that Mexican commercial imports had already largely replaced the older Spanish song traditions:

[T]he current troubadours...are more interested in the songs popularized by radio artists from Mexico and have abandoned almost entirely the songs that the older *cantadores* never failed to sing at dances and social gatherings.... In a few years more, the traditional ballad will no doubt disappear completely from New Mexican tradition, and will be supplanted by the Mexican and South American *canción*.³⁹⁸

Rather than framing this as a cultural loss, Campa took the expansive view of tradition that remains current among New Mexico music fans, describing the

³⁹⁶ Walker, “Family music,” 99.

³⁹⁷ Walker, “Family music,” 107.

³⁹⁸ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 29-30.

popularity of Mexican ranchera as “maintain[ing] a continuous flow of traditions that, to a certain extent, has enriched the Spanish traditions of New Mexico.” In this view, “the radio and the Mexican motion picture,” rather than substituting transnational commercial confections for genuine local traditions, was an extension of earlier Spanish vernacular culture, and the new “awareness of folk music”—meaning ranchera—“served to awaken a desire to sing that, due to the Americanization of New Mexicans, had been on the wane until recently.” He concluded, “The results have been unusually salutary, except that the New Mexican has become too imitative of our southern neighbors and attempts to sing almost exclusively the songs from below the Rio Grande.”³⁹⁹

Campa collected folk songs as a form of “folk-poetry,” so he paid little attention to dance music, and there are few signs that the New Mexico dance repertoire was similarly affected by Mexican trends in this period. To listen to a new song rather than an old one requires no effort, but to dance a new dance one has to learn it and, even if one is eager to make that effort, the radio is not much help. The dance styles that caught on in New Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century seem to have followed broader southwestern trends rather than Mexican fashions. Big band swing was the most important new arrival, and in urban areas that trend included the Latin American rhythms popularized by Xavier Cugat, Pérez Prado, and the Mexican-American orchestras of Beto Villa and Lalo Guerrero—a 1942 advertisement in the *Albuquerque Journal* shows local bandleader Don Lesmen in the puffy-sleeved shirt of a Cuban rumba singer, enthusiastically shaking a pair of maracas.⁴⁰⁰ These more exotic styles seem to

³⁹⁹ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 189-90.

⁴⁰⁰ The kind of shirt Lesmen wore is a nice example of a reimagined tradition, since the fashion seems to have roots in Spanish *zarzuela* and have been adapted in Cuba by theater and nightclub artists dancing rumba and mambo (Ned Sublette, personal communication 9/21/13, and Sublette, *Cuba and its Music*, 238-9).

have had little or no impact in the northern mountain region, and while swing caught on everywhere, old dance rhythms also remained popular and musicians continued to play older tunes. Presumably the balance of old and new varied depending on the crowd, but every band had to play polkas and if some musicians preferred to satisfy that demand with “The Beer Barrel Polka,” others continued to play fiddle tunes from the previous century.

The fact that almost everyone I asked about the dance repertoire of the mid-twentieth century recalled only commercial pop tunes, whether Mexican or Anglo, undoubtedly reflects the popularity of those tunes, but it also reflects the fact that the modern tunes had names. Since older Hispanic musicians thought in terms of rhythms and melodies rather than titles, even someone who would recognize an older tune as a familiar favorite could not include it in a repertoire list. A collection of fiddle pieces transcribed from the playing of Gregorio Ruíz and two other local fiddlers of his generation tends to list the selections generically, with multiple entries titled “El Vals,” “La Polca,” or “La Varsoviana.”⁴⁰¹ This not only reflects the personal practice of the musicians, but the extent to which instrumental music was seen as simply an accompaniment to dancing rather than a thing in itself. Weigle and White write:

The main thing to remember about the folk art of the fiddler in Northern New Mexico is that the musicians’ function is principally to support the dance... The dance always has primacy over the tune, and...the fiddler must subordinate his desire to stray from the melodic line, elaborate upon the tune, improvise, or distort in any other way the danceability of the music. Thus, the

⁴⁰¹ Stark, *Music of the “Bailes,”* v-vi. The more specific titles tend to also be generic: “El Vals de Cadena” or “El Valse de la Escoba,” meaning a melody played for a particular variation of a dance, but not necessarily a particular melody.

músicos almost invariably identified the songs they were about to play only by reference to the dance... An informant would simply say, “Here’s a valse, chótis, cuna, Indita, etc.”

Most of the modern New Mexico repertoire is made up of songs rather than instrumentals, and each piece has a title and can usually be traced to a particular source. Nonetheless, musicians still program their sets to suit the dancers, thinking in terms of rancheras, cumbias, two-steps, and rock ’n’ roll, and still say one of the things that distinguishes them from *tejano* players is their simple, unadorned style. Many of the people I interviewed suggested this has served both to preserve and to limit the music, since as Weigle and White argue, dancers favor familiar songs played in familiar ways rather than innovation. The apparent paradox of calling modern imports “traditional” is thus supported by a broad continuity of social practice, and reflects a desire to highlight that continuity while simultaneously recognizing that the local repertoire of songs, instrumentation, and dances changed dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. By now even waltzes have become rare, though bands continue to have a few in their repertoires to satisfy requests, and with the exception of the polka there is virtually no overlap with the rhythms common in the nineteenth century, which have given way to country two-steps, rock ’n’ roll, and cumbia.

Eva Nuanez, a fiddler born in southern Colorado in 1921, says that the big shift came in 1958—“That’s when they started to dance a lot of different music”—and Sidro García, born in a small town south of Albuquerque in 1940, names the same year. He grew up playing in a family band, Los Garcias, performing rancheras and pop melodies including “In the Mood”, “So Rare,” “Sentimental Journey,” and “San Antonio Rose,” but says it was all strictly instrumental “until, I’d say, 1958 or so that we started singing. And we’d do like

Elvis songs, stuff like that.”

In New Mexico as elsewhere, the arrival of rock 'n' roll is recalled as a musical revolution. Swing had introduced some new instruments and repertoire, but was still played by the same bands that specialized in polkas and waltzes. Rock 'n' roll was not only a new style of music but a new kind of band and a new generation of listeners who to a great extent rejected the sounds of their elders: instead of the old instrumental dance bands, the new models were teenage singers with electric guitars. New Mexico, though, preserved some unique connections to older styles. The New Mexican ethnomusicologist Brenda Romero, who grew up in the northern mountain village of Velarde, writes that her teen years included “all of the trappings of early rock,” but with local variations:

In the mid-1950s, every girl, whose parents could afford it, wore her pink poodle skirt (with multiple petticoats underneath) and black-and-white oxford lace-up shoes.... Public dances were called “sock hops,” as elsewhere in the United States, but something was different: you didn’t only hear top-40 covers but also the popular rancheras and corridos, and the dancing included long lines of couples linked by arms around the waist and moving back and forth in tandem.... Everyone was listening to (among others) Fats Domino, Little Richard, Bobby Darren [sic], Paul Anka, Neal [sic] Sedaka, and of course Buddy Holly and Richie Valens. Even though I don’t remember consciously thinking that Richie Valens was Mexican-American, the sound of his voice and his signature “La bamba” were soul music and brought excitement

to our lives like nothing before.⁴⁰²

The new style was embraced by both Anglos and Hispanics, often performing and dancing together, and especially in the early years guitar instrumentals provided a particularly easy bridge between past and present and across linguistic divides. The Fireballs, one of the pioneering bands in what became known as “surf music,” came out of Raton, New Mexico, and their 1960 instrumental hit, “Bulldog,” is still part of the standard repertoire of Northern New Mexico players. Although none of the group members was Hispanic, lead guitarist George Tomsco says he was inspired to pick up the instrument in 1949 after the Amadeo brothers, a local Hispanic duo, brought electric guitars to his school and performed a blazing version of “Guitar Boogie.” Tomsco says plenty of Hispanics came to the Fireballs’ shows, but he does not recall playing any songs geared specifically to that audience, and the band’s most popular polka at dances was “Under the Double Eagle,” an Austrian military march that had become a country standard. However, they followed “Bulldog” with a single titled “Vaquero” and an LP that pictured them in sombreros and featured a mix of Mexican and pseudo-Mexican tunes including “Tequila,” “El Rancho Grande,” and “La raspa”—and although Tomsco says that the album concept was foisted on them by their producer, Norman Petty, it presumably had something to do with being from New Mexico.⁴⁰³ Other local rockers of this period recall that any band working the New Mexico circuit was expected to play some polkas, whatever the ethnicity of the players, and a couple of Anglos mentioned “El Rancho Grande”

⁴⁰² Romero, Brenda M., “New Mexico and ’Manitos at the Borderlands of Popular Music in Greater Mexico, in Madrid, *Transnational Encounters*, 297.

⁴⁰³ Tomsco cannot remember whether he or Petty named their single “Vaquero”—it is an instrumental with no noticeable Latin or Mexican rhythm, and he says they gave it that title because it sounds like a galloping horse. “La Raspa” is often known by Anglos as “The Mexican Hat Dance,” though that name is also—more appropriately—used for another Mexican melody, “El jarabe tapatío.”

as something they would play if there was a large Hispanic turnout.⁴⁰⁴

While rock 'n' roll crossed ethnic lines, the lines remained. Just as it was important to Italian-Americans that Frankie Avalon and Connie Francis were Italian but non-Italians tended to think of them as generic teen rockers, an Anglo teen who grew up in Albuquerque recalls listening to “the car radio rhythms of Elvis, Tiny Morrie, Ricky Nelson, and the other big-name and local rockers of the day” without any suggestion that he put Morrie in a separate category from Elvis or Ricky.⁴⁰⁵ Everybody shared the mainstream stars and hits, and a few artists erased their ethnicity long enough to be part of that mix, but along with shared favorites like “Bulldog” and “Wipeout,” Hispanic New Mexicans also danced to “El mosquito,” a ranchera-rock instrumental recorded in Albuquerque in 1966 by a guitarist named Eddie Dimas. This remains the most popular instrumental in the New Mexico music repertoire, with another Dimas hit, “El mitote,” running a close second, but it seems to have been virtually unknown on the Anglo scene—when I played Dimas’s recordings for Stan Hirsch, an Anglo guitarist who has been working the local rock and dance band circuit since 1965, he did not recognize them.

The mid-1960s was a key period in the development of the modern New Mexico music style, the moment when Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie, as well as Dimas and a host of less famous or influential artists, chose to switch from being rock 'n' roll musicians who happened to be Hispanic to being Spanish musicians who used rock 'n' roll instrumentation. For most this was a practical choice. Throughout the United States, the second half of the 1960s found rock 'n' roll

⁴⁰⁴ I heard this from Stan Hirsch (who had a band called the Morticians), and Rick Stewart, who recorded surf versions of “El Rancho Grande” and “La del moño colorado,” as well as from Sidro García, who was Hispanic but considered his band, the Sneakers, to be part of the Anglo rather than the Hispanic scene.

dance bands losing ground to deejays playing Motown-style soul recordings.⁴⁰⁶ For many Anglo players, this spelled the end of their musical careers, but the Spanish market provided Hispanic musicians with an alternate path.

At first, the New Mexico Hispanic artists seem to have seen themselves, at least aspirationally, as part of the broader *onda chicana*, alongside Texas artists like Sunny and the Sunliners, Little Joe, and Joe Bravo—the population of New Mexico, even if one includes southern Colorado in the same cultural belt, was tiny compared to that of Texas, and the Texans were also hitting in Arizona, California, and Chicago. The shift to thinking of New Mexico music as a separate style can in retrospect be framed as a logical extension of the way New Mexicans, and northern New Mexicans in particular, had thought of themselves since at least the nineteenth century: as a unique culture, and specifically as very different from Texans. But the evolution from a generalized appreciation for the *onda*—perhaps thinking of Al Hurricane or the Purple Haze as one’s favorite band, but within a scene that included their Texas peers—to thinking of New Mexico music as its own style seems to have been largely driven by radio.

⁴⁰⁵ Gish, Robert Franklin. *Beautiful Swift Fox: Erna Fergusson and the Modern Southwest*. Texas A&M University Press, 1996, x.

⁴⁰⁶ I explore this subject at length in Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll*.

4. New Mexico Music Radio

In 1946 Arthur Campa wrote a short fable illustrating how the New Mexico folksong tradition was being affected by changing times. He imagined two young men in a mountain village harmonizing together “some summer evening when the day’s work is done.” In the past they would have been singing a *romance* or *decima* that had been handed down from generation to generation, but now they had other sources of inspiration: “Over the radio...[they] hear a new Spanish song that appeals to them,” and in the movies they see other young singers like themselves “arrayed in gay charro costume,” inspiring dreams of an adventurous troubadour life. They travel to the city, and soon, although they are working odd jobs and living hand to mouth, “they have sung over the local radio station during the Spanish hour and have received a good deal of encouragement.” They save enough to buy their own charro suits, find work singing at parties and restaurants, and eventually, “Another set of modern troubadours has broken through the chrysalis to emerge fresh and colorful like a butterfly. From now on, the boys from the secluded village of mountainous New Mexico, where on a summer evening they joined others to sing, will be known as *Los Rancheros*.”⁴⁰⁷

Within two or three years of Campa’s publication, Al Hurricane was replicating this fable, learning songs from the radio, singing them on a radio show with his father, and performing in a charro suit in Albuquerque’s Old Town plaza. Through the 1930s and 1940s radio provided not only unprecedented access to music from beyond listeners’ local environments, but also a feedback loop: Mexican movie and recording stars provided models of professionalism, local musicians emulated those models and performed alongside Mexican records on

⁴⁰⁷ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 26-7.

the radio, and other local musicians emulated their predecessors. In this process a new repertoire was introduced and assimilated along with a new concept of professionalism: sounding like a radio or recording artist rather than like the old guys who played for dances in rural villages.

Until the 1940s most music played on the radio in the United States was performed either in broadcast studios or by wire hook-ups from local ballrooms and pretty much any local act could get a shot at the airwaves. Sometimes a radio station would solicit sponsors and insert plugs into various shows throughout the day; sometimes a broker would buy airtime, sell advertising, and hire entertainers; and often the host or producer of each show would find his or her own sponsors, which meant that a local act could get its own show if a local business was ready to foot the bill. This business model meant that most stations did not have anything resembling the cohesive, homogenous playlists of later network broadcasting. Spanish-language broadcasting in the United States was in general not a matter of Spanish-language radio stations, but of Spanish-language radio programs. The first such programs began appearing in the late 1920s, and by 1941 an analysis of foreign-language programming in New York, Arizona, Texas, and California “estimated that 264 hours of Spanish were being broadcast each week by United States broadcasters.”⁴⁰⁸

This study did not say how many stations it included, but if we suppose that a hundred stations had Spanish programs, those 264 hours would be divided into an average of only about two and a half hours of such programming per week on each. Campa’s reference to his village troubadours appearing on “the Spanish hour” is not accidental—that was a common name for weekly shows broadcast on

⁴⁰⁸ Gutiérrez and Reina, *Spanish-Language Radio*, 7.

Saturday or Sunday on stations throughout the Southwest.⁴⁰⁹ Single-act programs like the one Al Hurricane did with his father often lasted only fifteen minutes and even the stations with more substantial Spanish programming typically carried only an hour or two on weekends or on weekdays before daybreak—a generally low period for radio listening, but suited to workers headed to the fields or making long commutes from the barrio to jobs in other parts of town. The 1941 survey did not include New Mexico, but Henry Tafoya had begun broadcasting on Albuquerque’s KGGM in 1933, doing the Spanish program that Al Hurricane woke up to at 5:30 every morning, and soon there were similar programs on stations throughout the state. Further north, Roberto Martínez recalled hearing local artists including his uncle Flavio Lovato and Las Hermanas Padilla playing old tunes like “Redondo largo” and “Polka luz” on a “Spanish hour” broadcast every Saturday by Las Vegas’s KFUN.

The first detailed tabulation of New Mexico Spanish programming that I have found was published by *Broadcasting* magazine in 1966 as part of a special section plugging Spanish radio to advertisers, and it listed thirteen stations in New Mexico with Spanish shows. Two of these stations were exclusively Spanish and a third presented seventy hours of Spanish programming per week, but the others were still only broadcasting from two to eighteen hours a week in Spanish, with an average of about eight and a half hours.⁴¹⁰ This list was by no means comprehensive—it did not include any stations north of Albuquerque, though by this time there was a full-time Spanish station in Española, regular Spanish programming in Taos, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe, and presumably some other

⁴⁰⁹ For example, a memorial website for Esther Borunda Malone (1920-2004) describes her as “very well known as the disc jockey for a daily Spanish hour program on KALG Radio” in Alamogordo (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=12820123>, accessed 9/16/13).

⁴¹⁰ “Spanish Market: A Special Report,” *Broadcasting*, 19 Sept. 1966, 69.

shows on smaller stations—but it is indicative of programming trends at that time, and even today many stations include Spanish programs as a supplement to their regular format: for example, KZRM in Chama advertises itself as “Rocky Mountain Country,” but four afternoons a week it has a three-hour show called *Música De Corazon* featuring New Mexico music and hosted by a deejay who calls himself El Norteño.

One reason southwestern stations did not broadcast more Spanish programming was that there was so much being beamed into the United States by Mexican “border blasters.” There are no reliable statistics for how widely Mexican music was heard over such stations, but a deejay named Juan Lucero told Peter García that when he was growing up in the 1940s in Torreon, fifty miles southeast of Albuquerque, his family regularly tuned in to Spanish language broadcasts from Nogales, Chihuahua, and the Texas border region.⁴¹¹ A survey from the mid-1970s lists 485 Spanish-language radio broadcasters in the United States, plus 35 Mexican stations broadcasting near the border with sales reps in the United States. The survey did not specify how much of the cross-border programming was in Spanish, but of the domestic stations, only eleven percent broadcast more than half the time in Spanish. The percentage in New Mexico was twice the national average, with five majority-Spanish stations out of a total of 24, including all three of the stations listed in Albuquerque.⁴¹²

Versions of these statistics have been repeated in numerous studies of Spanish broadcasting, but it is not clear how reliable they are or how their compilers defined a Spanish program. While many stations in the Southwest insisted on using Mexican or Latin American announcers, some had local announcers who spoke a mix of Spanish and English on the air, and as the

⁴¹¹ Peter García, personal communication, 9/19/13.

majority of music programming shifted from live performances to records in the 1940s and 1950s, many shows included a mix of Mexican and Hispanic artists, along with some English-language country and rock 'n' roll.

The shift to records temporarily curtailed the regional radio feedback loop of the 1930s and 1940s, in which popular Mexican songs were often performed on the air by local artists, potentially nurturing a local approach that differed in some respects from what was being recorded in Mexico City, Monterrey, or Los Angeles. It was one thing for a small-town guitar duo or urban nightclub combo to ask a local announcer to give them a shot on the Spanish Hour or to find a local business that would sponsor them on a fifteen minute program, and quite another to excite the interest of a record label with its eye on a broader market or to come up with the money to make a record oneself. As a result, the artists who did record tended to avoid anything that sounded obviously regional: Al Hurricane got his start singing Mexican songs, but through the early 1960s recorded nothing but rock 'n' roll. The local artists who recorded in Spanish during this period, such as Genoveva Chavez and Benny Martínez's Mariachi del Norte, were equally aware of the broader market, either recording for labels in California or Texas or, if they made their own records, doing their best to sound like the mariachis in movies and on international hits.

As a result, virtually all the records played on Spanish-language programs in New Mexico until at least the mid-1960s were by Mexican, Texan, or Californian artists, and the locals who managed to wedge themselves into the mix did their best to replicate the old feedback loop, sounding like those better-known artists. Alonso Lucero, a popular New Mexico Spanish deejay, told Peter García that as late as the early 1980s his boss at Albuquerque's KXKS refused to let him

⁴¹² Gutiérrez and Reina, *Spanish-Language Radio*, 19-24.

do a program of New Mexico artists because “they have not recorded anything new.” Lucero responded that this was a self-fulfilling argument:

I told him, I says, “Well, if you had a son, or a brother, or a daughter, or maybe you, if you were a musician and you knew that nobody, nobody was going to play your music, or your son’s music, or your brother’s music, would you have them record?”

And he said “No.”

And I told him, “Exactly. These people aren’t gonna record anything if nobody’s gonna play their music. Nobody’s playing their music. We gotta do something for them.”⁴¹³

By that time a few stations were already broadcasting Spanish shows that featured a regionally flavored playlist, and over the next twenty years more and more of these shows came to be framed as specifically playing “New Mexico music.” In this process a different feedback loop emerged: where in the past local artists who wanted to get on Spanish radio had followed current trends in Mexican ranchera, the New Mexico playlists meant it was easier for local artists to get radio play if they explicitly avoided sounding Mexican or Texan. Like Anglo pop and country radio, Spanish-language radio has increasingly been dominated by national networks with playlists established in Los Angeles and formats intended to reflect national trends. A New Mexico artist who hopes to be included in *norteño*, *mariachi*, *balada*, or *tejano* playlists is thus competing with international superstars and, more importantly, with the money and power of international record labels, and has virtually no chance of being heard even on local affiliates, which have less and less control of their own programming. Such artists are faced with a choice: to try to break into the national or international

markets, despite being from a region regarded by those markets as a backwater, or to focus on the local market by recording songs tailored to New Mexico music playlists on locally-owned, non-network stations.

This feedback loop emerged gradually: radio shows could not concentrate on a New Mexico sound until there were enough groups producing records with that sound to fill a playlist, and groups were not tempted to concentrate on that sound until radio programmers started to favor it. Nor were the breadth and limits of that sound obvious at the outset. Al Hurricane and his brothers were the most obvious models, and other frequently-cited names include the Purple Haze, Eddie Dimas, Roberto Griego, Freddie Brown, and Manny and the Casanovas. However, there were also some popular local hits by norteño-style accordion players like Nato Chávez and Max Baca, and local mariachis like Los Reyes de Albuquerque and Mariachi Del Norte remained a prominent part of the mix—indeed, the broad audience for that style led both Hurricane and Griego to balance their guitar-centric sound with occasional mariachi records.

In retrospect New Mexico Spanish deejays of the 1960s and 1970s remember a gradual shift toward a recognizably local sound as recordings by New Mexico artists became increasingly available. However, no one draws a clear line between favoring local artists and favoring identifiably local styles of playing or singing, and it is hard to sort out when either programmers or listeners began thinking of New Mexico music as a distinct style. Most of the people I interviewed agree that the first station to explicitly describe itself as playing “New Mexico music” was Albuquerque’s KANW, but even at this one station the process was slow and recollections are confusing and contradictory.

KANW is now an affiliate of the National Public Radio network, but when

⁴¹³ Alonso Lucero, interviewed by Peter Garcia, Bernallilo, 11/20/97, tape supplied by Peter

it started broadcasting Spanish music it was owned and operated by the Albuquerque Public Schools and was an entirely local operation. Michael Brasher, who joined the station in 1973 and has served as its director ever since, recalls that the station had previously aired only during school hours, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., but shortly after he arrived they expanded their coverage to 6 p.m. At that point they started running a show devoted to “local Spanish artists” from three to six on Friday afternoons, with an announcer named Serjio Herrera. However, after a few weeks they moved the Spanish show to Saturday mornings, and through the 1970s the afternoon programming was devoted to mainstream teen dance music: KANW was known as “Disco 89” (its broadcast frequency is 89.1) and a poster from this period advertises “All Hit Music 3-6 PM.” Weekend programming was the only exception to this format, and included the Spanish show on Saturday mornings, which eventually expanded to include early afternoon, and a Sunday morning classical music program that is still part of the station’s schedule.⁴¹⁴

Herrera announced his show in Spanish and played a lot of Mexican records along with some recordings by local artists. However, he was soon replaced by young locals with quite different tastes. Rick Padilla was a teenager who came to KANW because they had a broadcasting course, and he fit right in with the Disco 89 format: “I wanted to be a rock and roll deejay, as everyone [did], and this was like the disco generation.” His father sang mariachi music and he says he enjoyed that too, but, “I wanted to be a rebel and wanted to do a kid’s way of rock and roll.” He signed up for the station’s first broadcasting class in 1975, hoping for a career in mainstream pop, and recalls that “Michael Brasher and all those folks

Garcia.

said, ‘You know, why don’t you try this Spanish show that we’re trying to get going here in Albuquerque.’ And I said, ‘Well, because I’m brown, I—sure, I guess.’” At that time the show was still announced in Spanish, which Padilla had only spoken occasionally as a child to older relatives, and he says, “I actually had to go back...and kind of relearn the language.” He adds that during his tenure at KANW he “didn’t speak very good Spanish but made it through. People didn’t mind if I and we didn’t speak either English or Spanish: code-switching.”⁴¹⁵ He also recalls helping to shift the Spanish program’s focus from the more “mexicano” show Herrera did, saying, “I took my dad’s old records and played more a New Mexico/tejano format.”

In this period the main Spanish-language station in Albuquerque was KABQ, a commercial station that had started as KVER in the 1940s and changed its call letters in 1953. Alonso Lucero, who was hired as KABQ’s program director in 1970, told Peter García that the station was originally bilingual—meaning it had a mix of English and Spanish programming, not that any individual show mixed languages—and gradually shifted to an all-Spanish format after the name change. A printed weekday schedule from 1954 shows only an “Hora Mexicana” from 3:50 to 5 p.m.⁴¹⁶ and Lucero recalled that by later in that decade KABQ played country music in the mornings, went to Spanish in the afternoon, and returned to English at night. By 1970 he says the station was fully Spanish, playing “rancheras y norteñas,” and after being bought in 1972 by Ed Gomez, a broadcaster from San Antonio, tended to focus on tejano artists and styles. Herman Martínez, whose Alta Vista record label was the most active

⁴¹⁴ This history is based on interviews and email communications with Michael Brasher, Rockin’ Rick Padilla, and Mary Ellen Ipiotis, and information on the KANW website, <http://kanw.publicbroadcasting.net>.

⁴¹⁵ Most of Padilla’s quotations are from our interviews, but this last is from an email communication, 9/23/13.

producer of New Mexico artists in the 1970s and 1980s, says “it was tough to get any airplay” on KABQ and that KANW was the first Albuquerque station that made an effort to promote local artists.

It is hard to determine the mix of music KANW played in that period, because the deejays were mostly young amateurs with varied knowledge and tastes, and often programmed the bulk of their shows out of their personal record collections. In retrospect everyone agrees that the station played an important role in popularizing New Mexico artists and eventually in defining their music as a separate style from tejano, but everyone also recalls a lot of tejano and occasionally other kinds of Mexican and Chicano music being included. Mark Ipiotis, a well-remembered host of KANW’s Spanish program, came to the station in 1983 with dreams of playing his favorite Hispanic artists, “Santana, Tito Puente, Malo, War, Tower of Power, Gloria Estefan [then with Miami Sound Machine], Jose Feliciano, Azteca, etc.” For a while he hosted a Saturday show called “The Latin Magic Hour” that went on at noon following “The Spanish Show,” but after a few years it was cancelled “for supposedly not attracting enough listeners,” and he took over as host of the Spanish Show, assisted by his twin sister María Elena.⁴¹⁷

Mary Ellen Ipiotis (as she calls herself off the air) writes that at that time KANW’s Spanish programming was already focusing on “New Mexico locals like the Hurricane contingency, Baby Gaby, Roberto Griego, Freddie Brown, Purple Haze, Red Wine,” but she and Mark also played “mariachi music...and ranchera, tex mex, i.e. Little Joe y la Familia and [his] brother Johnny Hernandez.” Although the program was called “The Spanish Show,” they spoke

⁴¹⁶ *Albuquerque Journal*, 26 Jan 1954, 22.

“a mixture of Spanglish... I’ve said for years we have the accent spirit & emotion down but our Spanish vocabulary lacks, we of Hispanic descent among other cultural blends. We made a point of pronouncing Spanish surnames and towns as correctly as we could.”⁴¹⁸

Mark Ipiotis was passionate about supporting local artists, but saw them as part of a larger musical world. Along with his radio work, he promoted a Latin Music Festival in Albuquerque, and while it provided a prominent showcase for Hurricane, Griego, and Red Wine, he also brought in outsiders including Little Joe and Ram Herrera from Texas and the national stars José Feliciano and Tower of Power. There were obvious advantages to this broader view: in 1974, a few months after *Billboard* quoted the Denver record store owner describing Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie as playing “New Mexico Music,” the same magazine wrote that “As the leading distributor of the Texas product in New Mexico, Hurricane Enterprises considers itself a part of the Texas scene,” and “the Sanchez’s main concern is obtaining acceptance for Hurricane artists in markets outside his state.”⁴¹⁹ Nor, in subsequent years, did the magazine again refer to New Mexico music as a distinctive style.

Brasher says the Ipiotises referred to what they played as “local music” and he only shifted to the term “New Mexico music” after KANW’s signal was

⁴¹⁷ Ipiotis, Mary Ellen, “Mark and the Music,” blogpost at <http://www.markipiotis.com/2008/05/mark-of-excellence.html>, uploaded 5 May 2008, accessed 9/20/13.

⁴¹⁸ Personal communication, 24 Sep 2013. As noted above, the most common New Mexico standard for “correct” Spanish pronunciation seems to be Mexican media Spanish, but for people like Mary Ellen Ipiotis, who are not fluent Spanish speakers, it may simply mean pronouncing the words the way their Spanish-speaking relatives and neighbors would.

⁴¹⁹ Silva, Lupe, and Charlie Brite, “Latin Label Survey Points Up Vitality,” *Billboard* special Texas supplement, 7 Sep 1974, 18. It is of course possible that the Hurricanes stressed their Texas connections specifically because these reporters were writing about Texas music and they wanted to be included.

upgraded to cover more of the state.⁴²⁰ Both terms seem like somewhat odd choices, since they could potentially include anything from a Top 40 cover band to the Albuquerque Philharmonic, and Brasher says that local country and rock artists still occasionally protest that if the station plays “New Mexico music” they should be added to the playlist. No one seems to recall why a qualifier like Spanish, Hispanic, or Hispano was not added, and when a group of programmers, promoters, and musicians formed an organization to promote the style in 1989, they were more specific, calling it the New Mexico Hispano Music Association. (This association’s name is virtually the only non-academic use I encountered of the term *Hispano*.⁴²¹)

One likely factor was the success of tejano, which had established itself as a distinct genre by the 1980s and increasingly dominated southwestern playlists—the Grammy category established in 1984 for “Mexican-American” recordings was renamed “Mexican-American/Tejano” in 1996, and tejano had its own separate category from 1998 to 2011, after which it was folded into the broader “Regional Mexican or Tejano.” While this success made some New Mexico artists eager to be categorized as tejano, it also spurred resentment and a desire to establish a separate New Mexico identity. (The one time I saw a Texas group perform at a New Mexico music event, the MC pointedly suggested that they had

⁴²⁰ The exact chronology is unclear, since KANW has expanded its signal multiple times over the years. Brasher dated the shift in nomenclature to when they moved their transmitter from the station to Sandia Crest, but that happened before Ipiotis arrived. A further increase was approved by the FCC in 1983, concurrent with Ipiotis joining the station, and it may be that this increase only took effect a few years later (“The History of KANW-FM,” at <http://kanw.publicbroadcasting.net/KANWhistory.html>, accessed 9/25/13.

⁴²¹ The NMHMA’s current president, Casey Gallegos, used *Hispanic* rather than *Hispano* when referring to ethnicity rather than the Association itself, and when I asked why they chose to call the association “Hispano,” his first response did not note this distinction: “Well, we thought, because it *is* Hispanic music, you know, and Hispano could mean a lot of things, because it’s really—we could have said ‘Chicano,’ which would make it more, I think Chicano is a more of a, not a right term, you know, Hispano sounds more proper.” When I specifically asked why they chose Hispano and not Hispanic,” he laughed and answered, “I don’t know, I really have no idea.”

a local connection, introducing them as “All the way from Houston, Texas, inspired by New Mexico’s own Sparx.”⁴²²) An obvious expression of this resentment and desire is that virtually everyone I interviewed defined New Mexico music by noting the ways it differs from tejano. A more subtle expression is that several people mentioned the tejano star Stefani Montiel, daughter of Dwight Sullivan of the New Mexico band Los Chavos, as one of the most successful singers to come out of the New Mexico scene, but referred to her as Stefani Sullivan. When Matthew Martínez of Perfección did this, his wife helped me out by saying, “Stefani Montiel,” and Matthew promptly corrected her: “Stefani Montiel now, but Stefani Sullivan.” The implication is that Montiel used to be New Mexican and her compatriots remember her roots even if she chooses to obscure them.⁴²³

The persistence with which New Mexico music fans, musicians, and programmers define the genre by contrasting it with tejano and Mexican styles suggests both the extent to which it is an expression of regional identity and the extent to which it has often been subsumed within those more widely-known styles. When New Mexico LPs turn up on Ebay, they are routinely listed as Tex-Mex or tejano, and the most commercially successful New Mexico artists—Montiel, Lorenzo Antonio, Sparx—have tailored their sound to broader national and international trends. Radio shows that program New Mexico music are constantly faced with the dilemma of whether they are programming a distinct musical style or just a playlist of regional Spanish-language artists: when I asked Kevin Otero, who joined KANW as a teenager in 1995 and became the station’s program director in 2001, to define what he would include as “New Mexico

⁴²² Daniel Vivian, introducing Las Fenix at the Holy Rosary Fiesta, Albuquerque, 10/6/12.

music,” his answer was complicated and at times somewhat contradictory:

Obviously it should be in Spanish—not necessarily, we do play some English songs, but the style is pretty much what we’re listening for, so it’s gotta fit that New Mexico style, which has more of an emphasis on the guitar, more of an emphasis on the brass, um, there’s somewhat of an accordion influence from Texas and from Mexico, but the traditional—what we consider traditional New Mexico sound is heavy on guitars and trumpets and saxophones...and plus it’s pretty upbeat.

Each caveat came with exceptions: Otero and Brasher both emphasize that English-language songs are an exception to the normal playlist, but one of KANW’s biggest hits of the 2000s was “Forever True” from Lorenzo Antonio’s *Rancheras* CD, and more recently they’ve given a lot of play to his version of “Just Because.” (Otero identified this as a cover of the 1957 R&B hit by Lloyd Price, though Lorenzo’s performance owes an obvious debt to the 1970s tejano version by Augustín Ramírez.) Otero and Brasher both say that country songs, in particular, tend to be accepted by their audience and the station is playing more English and bilingual records than in the past, but both quickly add that they are careful not to overdo it.

When I asked how KANW defines “bilingual”—for example, whether Grupo Mezcal’s “Bueno Bye,” which has a code-switching title, but is otherwise in Spanish would fit the category—Otero said that song would not qualify: “Bilingual we consider English. If there’s English in the song, we consider it bilingual, you know, even if it’s a completely English song we’ll put it in that

⁴²³ Though born Stefani (or Stephanie) Sullivan, Montiel never recorded under that name. Starting her recording career at age nine in 1981, she was at first known as Steffanie, then Stefani, and added the last name Montiel in the 1990s after recording a half-dozen LPs.

bilingual category and protect against that.” That is, for them “bilingual” means not a mixing of languages but a song that includes solid blocks of English—Otero gave the example of Lorenzo Antonio’s latest hit, “No puedo vivir sin tí,” a duet with his sister Veronica that adds a Spanish verse and title to “I’m Leaving it All Up to You,” an English-language oldie from 1963 that hit again in the seventies for Freddy Fender.⁴²⁴

When I asked about Baby Gaby’s “Tipitín,” which is full of Spanish-English code-switching, Otero said they would not put it in the bilingual category, since both the musical style and the Spanglish lyrics are clearly non-Anglo: “that one is considered a Spanish, what I would consider a cumbia.”

Otero said they also avoid playing too much tejano, though he phrased this in a way that avoided the term:

We also take into consideration, I guess we would call them “national songs,” like the Freddy Fender-type things, Texas Tornados—maybe they weren’t hits across the nation, definitely in the Southwest, but we consider those a national-type song and protect against that. So we don’t play the Texas Tornados next to Freddy Fender next to Little Joe next to Ruben Ramos. Because then that sounds a little more Texas than it sounds New Mexico.

Once again, the rule can be bent for local favorites. When I asked about the trend of artists like Darren Cordova recording in San Antonio with Texas sidemen, Otero said, “When we get songs that have that tejano sound we’re definitely more critical,” but added, “Darren maybe not so much, because he’s a

⁴²⁴ “I’m Leaving it All Up to You” was originally recorded by a Texan duo, Dale and Grace, for Huey Meaux, the same producer responsible for Freddy Fender’s defining country and bilingual hits, and remains very popular with Chicano fans throughout the Southwest and West Coast. Lorenzo Antonio’s version, despite its Spanish title, begins with an English verse, and ends with the audience singing along with the familiar English lyrics.

pretty big name in New Mexico music.” Brasher says they are less likely to bend their rules for records that sound like current Mexican ranchera: “If you have something that’s really in a Regional Mexican format, it won’t work for our audience.” A brief exception was made for an artist called El Gringo, but I never heard his more Mexican-sounding songs on KANW and if a local artist recorded a banda album it would not stand a chance. Otero says that for many years they considered Lorenzo Antonio’s recordings too pop or Mexican-sounding, and although Tiny Morrie constantly brought them recordings by Lorenzo and Sparx, they only started playing him regularly after he returned to the local style with his *Rancheras* album, which Otero calls “one of the top five CDs of New Mexico music of all time.” These days they will occasionally play a track by Sparx, but overall Otero says, “Sparx do more mariachi, which also doesn’t fit exactly—though KANW does play mariachi somewhat, it really isn’t the New Mexico style.”

Overall, Otero says the KANW playlist is “pretty tightly programmed”:

I give [the deejays] the freedom to maybe manipulate or change a couple of songs an hour, but other than that... the rules that we’ve developed are in place to provide the best mass appeal in this New Mexico style that we can to the audience.... There’s definitely rules for those songs that don’t fit that traditional sound. I don’t remember specifically, but say a mariachi, we’ll play no more than four an hour. And they cannot play back to back. The tropical sounds, probably only one an hour. And right next to it needs to be a very familiar hit, from years gone by, or a very familiar New Mexico song.

There are also rules governing how the station programs the various kinds of songs they regard as fitting within the core New Mexico genre:

We like to program different textures or styles of the New Mexico music. One of them is the cumbia, the ranchera, we have a waltz, and even the mariachi-type texture. So we try to mix all of those styles together, and not have a block of too many in a row. And we vary the tempos of the songs: we don't want ten fast songs in a row or ten slow songs in a row, which is probably even worse—slow songs are easy to change the button to. So we try to keep it upbeat.

The tight playlist, with deejays announcing tracks they read from a pre-programmed computer, is in keeping with broader pop radio trends and may reflect Brasher's previous background as a teenage deejay playing Top 40 and KANW's early days as Disco 89. However, in a significant difference from mainstream pop stations, Brasher and Otero select which songs on a new album they will consider "the hits," and in the process exercise a lot of control over which new recordings become familiar to the New Mexico music audience. Another significant difference is that the new hits are in regular rotation with songs recorded as many as fifty years ago. Otero's description of the New Mexico sound as "traditional" reflects the fact that like Mexican ranchera or Nashville country its core appeal includes a strong element of nostalgia, but while the top ranchera and country stations focus on current hits that reference older artists and styles, KANW and the other New Mexico music broadcasters function simultaneously as showcases for current artists and as local oldies stations. Listeners expect to hear a lot of familiar songs, sometimes in new versions but often the way they heard them in the past: Otero says KANW currently has "three

or four” records of “La múcura” in its rotation, and will continue to play Al Hurricane’s version from 1970 and Perfección’s from 1991 into the foreseeable future.

Brasher emphasizes the extent to which this playlist is driven by audience response. Fans regularly come to the station, which has its own CD store, and express both their appreciation and their misgivings about what they are hearing. Artists also contact him and Otero with requests and complaints: “If I worked at KRST, the country station, Toby Keith would never call me if I didn’t play his song. He’d never know. Here in town, if we’re not playing somebody’s song, we hear about it.” Listeners call all through the day with dedications and Brasher emphasizes the intimate role these play in the community and how they help guide KANW’s overall approach:

We’re doing first communions, baptisms, and in loving memory of someone who died. So we’re doing really local things, and it all ties in with the music. If you think about the themes of the music we play, they’re things about mom and dad and grandma and grandfather, it’s sort of a family thing.

New Mexico music programmers face the constant challenge of maintaining that emphasis on tradition and family while still attracting new listeners, and KANW has a particular concern because along with being the most widely-broadcast New Mexico music station it is also the state’s main National Public Radio affiliate. They have 96 hours of New Mexico music every week and 55 hours of NPR programs and news, with the remaining 17 hours taken up by a Native American show on Monday evenings, a current pop hits show on Tuesday, and country and classical shows on the weekend. Brasher says that when they started carrying NPR in 1995 the audience would change completely when they

went from one format to the other, but now a substantial audience stays with them through the shift.

The combination of NPR and New Mexico music programming raises the question of how one defines a Hispanic station or format. Virtually all studies of Hispanic broadcasting and listening patterns, whether popular or academic, focus on Spanish-language programming,⁴²⁵ but that is problematic in a state where seventy percent of native-born Hispanics speak only English at home and 96 percent of the Spanish-speakers speak English “well” or “very well.”⁴²⁶ There is no reason to think the KANW listeners who change stations when the New Mexico music is replaced by *Fresh Air* go to other Spanish music stations—if my research is any guide, they are at least as likely to switch to a country station. Ethnicity is no guide to musical tastes, and when Al Hurricane alternates at the Caravan East with the club’s regular C&W group, the West Wind Band, the proportion of Hispanic musicians goes down for the Spanish set (Al has an Anglo trumpeter, while all the members of West Wind are Hispanic) and the proportion of Hispanic dancers on the floor does not change to any noticeable extent. In this context there is no reason to think of a New Mexico station that has Spanish, country, and oldies shows as alternating between Anglo and Hispanic programming, or even necessarily between English and Spanish programming—KFUN in Las Vegas has programs of all three kinds of music hosted by members of the Baca family, and while Loretta Baca, who hosts the country show, is a

⁴²⁵ For example, Charles M. Tatum’s *Chicano Popular Culture: Que Hable el Pueblo* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2001), though ostensibly about the breadth of Chicano popular culture in the United States, devotes its entire discussion of Chicano radio to Spanish-language programming, though its discussion of Chicano film is dominated by English-language productions like *Stand and Deliver* and *La Bamba*.

⁴²⁶ 2012 American Community Survey table, “Nativity by language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5 years and over,” limited by Hispanic ethnicity and New Mexico, at

native Spanish speaker, her son Mike “The Road Runner” Baca, who hosts the “Spanish Program,” is not fluent in the language.

At KANW most of the announcers are volunteers, many are not Hispanic, and although Otero encourages all of them to work on their language skills, some struggle to pronounce even the song titles correctly. “A lot of the announcers will throw a Spanish word or phrase in there,” Otero says. “But we try to keep it mainly in English, with the music in Spanish, and it seems to be doing well for us.” He adds that this mix reflects their audience: “A lot of the listeners who come in to buy music say, ‘I don’t know what the songs are about, but I love that beat, that style of music.’” Some older fans might be expected to want Spanish-language announcers, but when I suggested this possibility to Brasher, his response was emphatic: “In terms of what we hear from the listeners, it’s *never* an issue. I don’t go down the street [and hear], ‘I wish you guys would speak in Spanish.’ I do *not* hear that. *Ever*.”

A standard cliché of language acculturation is that immigrants speak their home language better than their new language, their children speak both but reverse that balance, and by the third generation the “home” language is lost. Studies of Hispanic immigrants in the United States tend to reflect this pattern and in a sense it applies in present-day New Mexico as well—the older musicians I interviewed mostly spoke Spanish as a first language, their children could often get by in the language to some extent, and their grandchildren mostly did not speak it. But the cultural meaning of this shift is very different in a region where the core Spanish-speakers have local ancestry dating back several centuries and their “home” language is a dialect unique to New Mexico. That anomaly is clearly one of the reasons the term “New Mexico music” has caught on despite seeming

so vague, and why to some extent it is appropriate. Country fans and New Mexico music fans both speak English, but a country station in New Mexico as elsewhere will mostly play records by people from other regions, as will a Mexican station, while the New Mexico Hispanic playlists are uniquely local.

The emphasis on local traditions and particularly on personal, family traditions, comes up again and again in discussions of New Mexico music's appeal. When I asked Otero why he thinks people who don't speak Spanish want to listen to songs in that language, he immediately cited family connections, using his own experience as an example:

I think a lot of that has to do with the older generation. Their parents and the grandparents who are, you know, slowly dying now, that's how they spoke and this is the music that they tried to pass on, they would sing it when you're camping, or during the holidays, and—that's how they spoke. My grandparents, both maternally and paternally, spoke Spanish primarily. They did speak English, but when they spoke to each other it was all in Spanish. And I remember listening just to a conversation when an aunt or a cousin was over, they would speak mainly in Spanish, but a couple of times they would throw in an English word. Or they would speak English and throw in Spanish words, and there was a lot of Spanglish... So I think that's part of why, you know, some of these musicians had the same type of upbringing and that's why they still perform in Spanish music but their communication is definitely in English.

Since New Mexico music is generally understood to be intimately

connected with family and a past that listeners consider increasingly distant, part of its appeal is that it is not too modern, slick, or professional. Mary Jane Walker writes of “the ethic/aesthetic of approachability and simplicity in musical performance and style”⁴²⁷ in New Mexico music, and those characteristics were emphasized over and over in my interviews. Artists are expected to act and sound like the members of their audience and to mingle with that audience rather than acting like members of a musical elite. This at times presents a dilemma for radio programmers who appreciate the power of the local, semi-amateur aesthetic but also want to exercise a degree of quality control. Since home recording became common and CD duplication became cheap, New Mexico artists have increasingly recorded and released their own albums, which means not only that established artists control their own product, but that a lot of newcomers, some of whom have rarely or never performed in public, are recording albums in hopes of getting radio play.

Deejays and program directors often complain about local artists bringing in CDs that are out of tune, badly recorded, or otherwise deficient. J.P. Baca recalls a mother who came to see him at KFUN with her son who had recorded a CD that was so amateurish that he simply could not bring himself to put it on the air:

She came and told me off right there, because I wouldn’t play her son’s music, and she wanted to know, “Why aren’t you playing my son’s music?”

I couldn’t lie to her, and finally I had no way other than telling her the truth, and I said, “Ma’am, I don’t want to hurt you or your son’s feelings, but he has to go back and learn a lot of the pronunciations of the words, and then his timing is off, he’s off-

⁴²⁷ Walker, “Family music,” 167.

pitch on many of the songs...”

Baca obviously considers himself to be in a tricky situation and immediately adds:

KFUN has always supported the local artists...we have to support them, because, well, it's Northern New Mexico Spanish music, and...there are some very, very good artists, very good guitarists, very good singers.... We really pride ourselves here at KFUN, and even artists from Albuquerque or somewhere else, they walk in, people that we don't even know and they don't know us, and they bring in their CD, and they say, “You know what? Thank you so much, because this is so unusual. Where I live in Colorado—or wherever, New Mexico—you can't walk into a radio station in Albuquerque and get past the traffic controller or the secretary at the front desk.” You don't walk into the deejay cubicle, where the deejay is announcing, much less do they give you an interview, boom, off the street just like that, like we do here.

Otero points out that KANW is in a different situation because its signal blankets the northern half of the state and “that's a pretty big market to play some iffy-sounding songs.” As a result, “We have a little bit more objective ear, and it's a more critical ear I should say.” As Brasher puts it, “You can't program a radio station for musicians. If we can help local musicians, we sure try hard to do that, but there are some we don't play and we get criticism for that.” He adds that they listen to the criticism and sometimes schedule meetings with musicians who are upset or make suggestions about what an artist could do to make her recordings fit the station's format. “I don't want to discourage them; we need more artists, not

less.”

This puts KANW in a somewhat ambivalent position relative to the other New Mexico stations. When the *Albuquerque Journal* did a story on the station in 2006, it quoted Jerry Dean of Atlantis CDs, the main distributor of New Mexico recordings, saying, “At this stage of the game, they’re our only station.... People tell me, ‘I heard this on KANW, I heard it on KANW.’ We don’t have any other outlet.”⁴²⁸ But when Dean talked to me about the overall state of the music, he suggested that many artists were dependent on the smaller stations: “They’re a little more forgiving in some of the stations up north, like Las Vegas for example, can play local people from Las Vegas.” Herman Martínez of Alta Vista records gives particular credit to KDCE in Española, saying, “The greatest radio station that really helped everybody...was Española, Mr. García, Que Dice. He was the one that really helped us because he would play anybody that was New Mexico, and he would help them.”

KDCE, better known as Que Dice, bills itself as “The Voice of Northern New Mexico,” and its playlist is noticeably different from KANW’s, though with many overlapping selections. Otero describes KDCE as less discerning, saying “not to put them down, but the quality of the music that they pick, in my opinion as a program director, is not as good as KANW’s,” and Darren Cordova, who owns KXMT in Taos, makes a similar criticism. Casey Gallegos, KDCE’s program director and the current president of the New Mexico Hispano Music Association, is naturally miffed at such criticism and responds, “Have you listened to them? We say the same about them.” But when pressed, he agrees that his playlist is looser: “Yeah, we’d like to give everybody a chance—artists that

⁴²⁸ Mayfield, Dan, “KANW Radio Could Move and Play More Than New Mexico Music,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 20 Jan 2006, at <http://www.abqjournal.com/news/metro/426362metro01-20-06.htm>, accessed 9/30/2012.

they won't play over there." He adds, "KANW, you know, some people love them and some people *hate* them, because they have this little group of people, that's all they play...it's Al Hurricane, Tiny Morrie, Sparx, Lorenzo Antonio, a little bit of Darren Cordova."

While KANW is the defining station for New Mexico music in Albuquerque and has by far the largest statewide listenership, KDCE is regarded by many listeners as the defining station for the northern mountain region. Richard García, who started there as a deejay in 1964 and bought the station in 1983, told Peter García:

When I first started here, New Mexico music was not being played anywhere. I mean you couldn't get *anybody* to play it. I used to play the music here, and I used to get criticized by my former boss for playing so much of it.... He wanted me to play mariachis and play this and play that, and you know, I wasn't into that, I was into more of the New Mexico music and I played Al Hurricane, Tiny Morrie, Baby Gaby... The Blue Ventures came in here later... The Purple Haze were around here when Al Hurricane and this station got started, so they got a lot of airplay here too. And from there on it skyrocketed.

Henry Ortíz, who was a deejay on KDCE for several years in the mid-1960s, says that in that period the announcing was "a hundred percent Spanish," and Gallegos says that in the 1980s and 1990s the station had a large Mexican immigrant audience.⁴²⁹ "[We] used to play mostly New Mexican music, but a lot

⁴²⁹ Although census figures show the relative size of the Mexican immigrant population growing substantially in this period, its absolute size seems to have remained quite small. In 1970 the tabulated population of first and second generation immigrants from Mexico in the five northern Hispanic-majority counties was 1,213 (1.1% of the total). By 2000 the population of Mexican born residents of those counties was 10,812 (4.6%), and by 2010 it was 15,309 (6%).

of Mexican music, because the Mexicans would call and request it, and there was no Univision or anything at that time.” He adds that this was tricky: “We would have the New Mexicans complaining that we were playing too many *mojado* songs, is what they call Mexicans here, and the Mexicans complaining that we were playing too many local songs.” KDCE’s deejays do the bulk of their announcing in English, but all are fluently bilingual and often field on-air phone calls in Spanish or smoothly switch language systems. During a call-in discussion about the Española premiere of the movie *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rockin’ Rick started chatting with a caller in Spanish, and when she apologetically switched into English, saying “Sorry, I don’t know how to say this in Spanish,” his response was “Hey, *jándale pues!* Welcome to New Mexico.”

KDCE includes a broad range of music in its New Mexico playlist—I have heard norteño accordion, reggaeton, and Cuarenta y Cinco’s cover of Santana’s “Black Magic Woman”—but in general is more likely to play something with an electric lead guitar than one of Lorenzo Antonio’s pop ballads and features numerous northern artists who are unknown in Albuquerque. The station also occasionally plays older Mexican recordings by favorite artists like Antonio Aguilar and Vicente Fernández, but García has a keen sense of the local market:

Three-quarters of the 2010 immigrant population was concentrated in Santa Fe, and figures are much lower in other areas. However, it is very hard to estimate how accurate the figures are, since a substantial portion of any migrant and/or undocumented Mexican population may have eluded the census takers. In general, the census bureau estimates that they are undercounting the undocumented population by about ten percent, though they also suggest that New Mexico is the only border state without a large population of undocumented immigrants. (According to “Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: 1990 to 2000,” published in 2011 by the Office of Policy and Planning U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, New Mexico had only 0.6% of the US’s “unauthorized” immigrant population, behind not only the other southwestern states, but Maryland and Massachusetts.) Anecdotally, although the census never shows the Mexican-born population of Rio Arriba County as much over 3%, José Merlin Trujillo reports that they were a significant customer base for his music store in Española, the county seat—though he added that this was no longer true by 2012, both because many had left the area and because the economic downturn left the remaining immigrants without disposable income.) Nonetheless, immigrants undoubtedly make up a

When Peter García interviewed him in 1997 he had recently started a second station with a country format and said, “If that doesn’t pan out, then we will figure out another format, maybe a different kind of Spanish to promote in the area.” He shortly switched to a Mexican Regional format, renaming the second station Radio Oso, and with that station targeting the Mexican immigrant population, KDCE was free to concentrate on hardcore native fans.

Gallegos says that some older New Mexican listeners tune in to the Mexican station once in a while, and KSWV (“Que Suave,” or “how smooth”) in Santa Fe seems to be specifically tailoring its playlist to that audience. KSWV is owned by George González, who previously owned KDCE and was himself a bolero singer in a Panchos-style group called the Trio Tipiqueño (which also included Henry Ortíz). In 1998 González told Peter García, “Our main promotion is New Mexico bands, [but] mariachi is very much a [part] of our format. ...when you say New Mexico music, we include mariachi.” Rockin’ Rick, who worked at KSWV for a while, recalls the station as very tightly formatted, with little freedom for the deejays, and describes Gonzáles as “a traditionalist in that he likes the old classic stuff, I mean, mexicano stuff.” In 1998, González said he was also programming country singers “every ten or twelve minutes,” both older artists like Charlie Pride and the current superstar Garth Brooks. I did not hear any country on the station in 2012, but did hear plenty of mariachi and older, romantic Mexican pop ballads and international Spanish stars like Julio Iglesias.

Since the New Mexico music format is not tracked by any of the large demographics firms—Arbitron, for example, tabulates New Mexico music only as

disproportionate percentage of the Spanish-language radio audience, since native-born Hispanics are at least as likely to listen to country or rock stations.

part of a meaninglessly broad grab-bag category it calls “Spanish Variety”⁴³⁰—each station is free to define the genre somewhat differently and to follow a playlist that reflects its owner’s or manager’s perception of local tastes or simply the owner’s personal taste. No one suggested to me that KSWV had a more conservative or Mexican-oriented playlist than KANW or KDCE because it was based in Santa Fe and responding to local demands—everyone cited González’s personal preferences.

One of the distinctive things about the New Mexico radio scene is that most of the stations are owned by local Hispanics with deep roots in their communities and a strong sense that they understand those communities. J.P. Baca in Las Vegas runs two stations: KFUN, a New Mexico music station on which almost all the announcing is done by members of his family; and KLVF, which plays Adult Contemporary music via a satellite feed from the Citadel network in Denver. Though Baca describes the AC format as “pretty much the music that you hear all over the place,” he says both his stations serve local community demand: KLVF was already taking the network feed when he bought it and had a loyal listenership.

In the radio business, you gotta be very careful. When you start messing with a music format, you’re not just messing with the music, you’re messing with the people. Because people told us, “You may be paying the bill to the bank for KFUN, but this is a community station, it’s our station.” So we knew we didn’t want to make too many changes; that throws people off balance.

⁴³⁰ Arbitron notes, of its “Spanish Variety” tabulation: “Each of these stations is distinctive and highly focused on its market, airing music and, in some cases, spoken word programming specifically tailored to community needs” (Arbitron, *Hispanic Radio Today 2011*, at http://www.hispanicformats.com/Archive%20Miscellaneous/hispanic_radio_today_11.pdf, accessed 9/26/13, 77.)

Baca was born in Las Vegas in 1946 and recalls, “I grew up listening to KFUN, we all did. In those days you heard a lot of Mexican music, you heard a lot of Vicente Fernández, Antonio Aguilar, Flor Silvestre...and that’s what we grew up on. At that time KFUN just played Spanish in the morning, with country and later rock ’n’ roll in the afternoon.” He joined the station as a Spanish-language announcer in 1979 and his wife Loretta came on a few years later, working the front desk and doing a country show. They remained with the station except for a hiatus in the 1990s, and bought it in 2006. Since then, J.P. has been doing a community talk show in the morning, Loretta hosts a lunchtime country show, their son Mike “The Road Runner” takes over with New Mexico music for the afternoon, and at five J.P.’s brother Fred does a Spanish-language news broadcast, the only one produced in the region.

J.P. says local Spanish programming has changed since his time as a deejay:

When I was hosting the Spanish program here, I used to mix it up with New Mexico music, Tex-Mex, mariachi, even some romántica, like with Julio Iglesias. Today almost all the stations really, really, really concentrate on Northern New Mexico or New Mexico artists. Sometimes I tell my son, “Mix it up. Throw even some Tex-Mex in sometimes, throw some Little Joe.” And he does. He throws some Little Joe, different artists. “Throw some cumbias in there, and the mariachi music...” I tell him, “Michael, if you just play nothing *but* local Northern New Mexico artists, Spanish music, you have to be very careful, because it sometimes could sound like one long song for an hour.... You have to become more flexible about the music you’re playing, maybe even playing some music that *you* don’t like. But you’re not here to please you.

You're the deejay. You're there to please the audience."

Mike Baca is active in the broader New Mexico music community—he has been a judge on the *15 Grandes* show Tiny Morrie produces each year—and maintains close relationships with local Las Vegas musicians like Preston Garza and Daniel Gallegos, but he also plays some mariachi and norteño. As with the other stations, however, KFUN draws a line at the West Coast banda style that dominates much current Regional Mexican programming. J.P. explains, "It doesn't fit our format and the people in this area don't like banda."

The one New Mexico music station that breaches the banda rule is KXMT in Taos. This might seem surprising, since the station has been owned since 2001 by one of the most popular New Mexico music artists, Darren Cordova. However, along with being a successful bandleader, songwriter, singer, and father of a growing musical dynasty including his son Darren Lee and daughter Dynette, Cordova is also the mayor of Taos and intensely aware of the area's growing Mexican immigrant population.⁴³¹ He advertises his station as "Radio Éxitos," featuring "the best in New Mexico, Regional Mexican, Tejano, and Mariachi music," and estimates that at this point the mix is "fifty percent, or maybe forty percent regional Mexican," with "the other sixty percent divided equally between mariachi, New Mexico, and tejano music."

This mix does not please everybody, and Cordova is very much aware of that fact. He says many of the people advising him at the outset thought he should simply have a Regional Mexican playlist, since that is by far the strongest format in the Southwest, but "that would never fly here in Taos, because I would get accused of catering to only the Mexicans and not catering to our culture." Instead,

⁴³¹ The census figures for Mexican-born taoseños do not suggest a large population (in 2010, only 706 people, or 2.4 percent), but those numbers are probably an undercount and there

he has tried to find “a balance on what people from New Mexico accept, and people from Mexico accept,” as well as attracting some “non-Hispanic people...because our deejays are bilingual, so people say it’s a way to get connected to the culture without getting lost.” Like other program directors, he singles out banda as a flashpoint:

If I play too much of that...a lot of people really criticize me, you know, they’ll come and say ‘What are you playing that Mexican music crap for?’ and stuff. And I’m like, ‘Well, it’s the number one song in the nation,’ you know...? It’s hard, it’s a tough format, but, there again, we have a lot of the Mexican supporters, which are also from New Mexico.

Cordova’s playlist reflects not only what he sees as relevant to his audience but also the range of options in his market. When Richard García in Española was operating Spanish and country stations, his Spanish format mixed Mexican and New Mexico artists, but now that he has a Mexican station he has shifted KDCE to New Mexico programming. By contrast, Cordova balances his Spanish station with three Anglo-style formats: KKIT playing pop-rock, KKTC “True Country,” and KVOT talk radio. KKIT had previously been the local source for Spanish music and Norbie Martínez, whose father was the most popular Spanish-language deejay in Taos in the 1960s, recalls that when he joined it in 1979 the playlist included Spanish, country, rock, and Native American shows.⁴³² At that time the

presumably are also some second- and third-generation Mexican Americans moving north from elsewhere in the state or in the Southwest.

⁴³² Rock, in this context, is synonymous with Anglo rock. I never heard any reference to rock en español, nor did I ever hear any on the radio or see any rock en español recordings in music stores. As a population that tends to speak English better than Spanish and to be far more aware of current US pop trends than of what is being heard in Mexico or Latin America, New Mexican Hispanics overwhelmingly think of rock as part of their “American” culture, including Hispanic artists like Richie Valens and Santana, but not Spanish-language rockers from elsewhere.

Spanish programming was still overwhelmingly Mexican, but Martínez says, “you could see the shift coming...when I started working, I started really pushing more Texas and New Mexico.”

The musical shifts reflect changing local fashions, but their relationship to broader cultural trends is complex. On the one hand Martínez says his father’s show was conducted entirely in Spanish, while he began announcing bilingually and today mostly speaks English on the air. On the other hand, his father was a drummer in a local combo “playing variety, George Benson, Spanish, country, some rock,” while Martínez has devoted himself to mariachi, teaching the style to students in the local middle and high schools. The rise of homegrown mariachis in New Mexico schools and communities has roughly paralleled the rise of New Mexico music as a local radio format, and it is common to find that young New Mexico music players got their start in their school’s mariachi band. During the same period, the old mariachi-based, cinematic ranchera has largely given way to *norteño* and *banda* as the dominant sound of southwestern Spanish radio. That temporal overlap is arguably more coincidental than causal, but mariachi has unquestionably taken on a different meaning for New Mexicans since the 1950s: where it used to be a transnational commercial style associated with Mexican movie stars and had few local players, it now is heard by many people as the sound of their parents and grandparents, which has largely been wiped off the radio by a wave of blaring accordions and brass bands. It would be an exaggeration to say that New Mexicans no longer think of mariachi as Mexican, but the music is now likely to be welcomed as the sound of a broadly Mexican heritage rather than as the sound of modern Mexico—nor is it commonly associated with recent Mexican immigrants.

Though all New Mexico music bands play both rock oldies and Spanish songs, the only Spanish-

Surveying current Spanish music programming in New Mexico, Mexican-oriented stations outnumber those playing New Mexico music. Albuquerque has two Entravision network options, KRZY-FM “Radio José” and KRZY-AM “La Tricolor,” the Univision network’s KKRK “La Kalle” playing “música pop y urbana,” and KLVO “Radio Lobo” in the suburb of Belén. Further south are KKVS “Viva Vista—La más mexicana” in Truth or Consequences; KPZA “La Zeta” in Jal; KALN “El Amigo” in Dexter; KLMA, “The Voice of the Hispanic Community,” playing regional Mexican, norteño, and tejano in Hobbs; and a Spanish religious station, KRUC, in Las Cruces. This presumably reflects the fact that although native-born Hispanics far outnumber the more recent immigrants who favor Mexican stations, they are as likely to listen to country or other English-language pop styles as to any Spanish-language style, so are a less reliable demographic for Spanish-language broadcasters.

All the aforementioned Mexican-oriented stations are in the south and center of the state, and the situation is quite different in the northern mountains: “Radio Oso” in Española and Univision’s KJFA “La Jefa” in Santa Fe play contemporary Mexican Regional, and Cordova’s KXMT in Taos plays a mix of Mexican and New Mexico styles, but in general New Mexico music is the dominant Spanish sound throughout the north.⁴³³ There are a half-dozen stations that concentrate on New Mexico music and others with regular New Mexico shows: Along with the regular afternoon show on Chama’s “Rocky Mountain Country” station, there is

language rock song in the repertoire is Valens’s version of “La Bamba.”

⁴³³ There are also small stations in Chama, Raton, and Hurley that carry Radio Bilingüe, a California-based network formed during the Chicano and farmworkers rights movements of the 1970s and coordinated by Radio Pública Latina. These broadcast a mix of public service programs and music shows featuring tropical, tejano, rock en español, salsa, English language oldies, and Mexican folk and pop styles, but little if any local music, and I never heard them mentioned, nor did I ever hear one while driving around the state—I know of them only from later internet research, and have to conclude that their audience and influence is relatively insignificant in terms of broad listening patterns in the region.

Horas Latinas every afternoon on KSLV, a country station in Monte Vista, Colorado; a Sunday afternoon *Fiesta Musical* featuring “Musica de Nuevo Mexico” on Grand Junction’s community station, KAFM; another Sunday afternoon show, *Cancion Mexicana*, playing a roughly even mix of New Mexico and tejano on Denver’s jazz station, KUVO; and others coming and going every year.

Aside from the tourist centers of Santa Fe and Taos, there are few jobs in the rural north or in southern Colorado to attract recent immigrants, and although native Hispanic listeners are by no means uniformly devoted to local styles, the main competition is English-language country, pop, and rap rather than current Mexican Regional trends. In Española, José Merlin Trujillo says that his record store used to sell an equal balance of Mexican and New Mexico music, but Mexican sales have fallen off to almost nothing. In Las Vegas there are two radio stations with a New Mexico format and three stores that carry New Mexico music but none featuring Mexican styles.

Jerry Dean says that for artists like himself and his father, Al Hurricane, the smaller towns in the north “are what’s keeping the music alive,” in part because there is less competition.

In the big city you have...twenty-five, thirty radio stations that are all playing different stuff, all current stuff, but...like for example in Espanola, you’ve got KDCE keeping the music alive and they’re playing music so more of the kids are listening to that. So our bigger fans are coming from the little towns and wondering, “Wow, you guys are awesome,” where in the bigger towns you start getting taken for granted, you start getting lost.

Rural and small-town listeners are also bucking national trends by

continuing to hear most of their music on the radio. “If your song doesn’t get played on the radio then therefore people don’t know about it and they don’t ask” for it, Dean says. “Because people just listen to the radio.” There have been a couple of attempts to start internet shows playing New Mexico music and some artists and fans have posted videos on YouTube, but, likely due to a combination of the age and economic status of the listenership and the lack of major label involvement, the style has very little on-line presence compared to tejano or Mexican regional. Roberto Griego is the only artist I interviewed who says he makes significant money from downloads and although some bands and singers have Facebook or MySpace pages, many do not. Dean connects the enduring importance of radio to the amount of time listeners spend in their cars: “I think where people really listen to the radio is they get in their car, go to work and listen to the radio. Get off, go to lunch and listen to the radio. Go home, they turn on their radio. So those important times, people are still listening to the radio, including myself.”

Radio continues to play a vital function in defining the New Mexico style, but its importance may be overemphasized not only by programmers but by people like Dean and Merlin, who see the music in terms of record sales. Recordings are an obvious marketing tool for New Mexico bands, as they are for bands in virtually all genres, but there is a noticeable discrepancy between what one hears on New Mexico radio and what is played by live bands. In the 1960s, most bands probably still played a wider range of music than they recorded, but increasingly that balance is being reversed. Many New Mexico music artists have recorded with pop, tejano, or mariachi backing and expect their recordings in all of those styles to be played on New Mexico radio, but at live shows the spectrum of music seems if anything to be narrowing, and the musical language is being

defined in other ways.

5. The Languages of New Mexico Music

The idea that New Mexico music is a unique genre goes along with the idea that New Mexico Spanish (or the local Spanglish mix) is a unique style of speech, and both go along with the idea that there is a unique New Mexico Hispanic history and culture that must be celebrated and preserved because it is widely underappreciated and may be endangered. The languages of New Mexico music, whether spoken or musical, include not only a blend of varied sources and influences but also those intentions and interpretations.

Musicians and promoters consistently point out the uniqueness of New Mexico Spanish, while frequently conveying their awareness that this uniqueness is not appreciated outside the region. Kevin Otero of KANW says, “New Mexico has its own dialect, if you will, especially in Northern New Mexico, there are some words that, you know, if you spoke that way in Mexico or in Spain they would look at you like you were speaking French. I mean, you—I wouldn’t say ‘wrong,’ but it’s different.”

Nick Branchal, a mariachi and New Mexico music artist who has a degree in Spanish, explains that he varies his own speech depending on the situation:

Yo hablo en español con los que—si vienen los mejicanos,
yo hablo como mejicano. Si llega un español hablo como español.
Pero el idioma de nosotros de aquí es nuevomexicano, el español
de Nuevo México.⁴³⁴ And if I’m talking to anybody else that’s
local, I’m not going to speak the language that I use with
somebody else. I use our language.

⁴³⁴ “I speak in Spanish with those who—if Mexicans come, I speak like a Mexican. If a Spaniard comes I speak like a Spaniard. But our language from here is New Mexican, the Spanish of New Mexico.”

Branchal's switch into English halfway through that quotation may have been affected by the fact that he was talking to an Anglo and wanted to emphasize his point and make sure I fully understood him. But it maps neatly with his subject: he speaks Mexican Spanish with Mexicans, Spanish Spanish with Spaniards, and New Mexican Spanish with New Mexicans, who also speak a lot of English. Branchal expressed frustration with people who criticize New Mexican Spanish, characterizing them as ignorant of linguistic history:

Dicen que el idioma de Nuevo México no está correcto. Está mal. Yo no creo eso, ¿eh? Porque esta parte del estado habla diferente. We've held onto the Spanish, some of those Spanish words that were brought here by Spain. And we kept them. They went back, but the language didn't evolve, so we kept words like *asina* and *truje*, you know words like that, that son españoles, no están incorrectas. It might be an old Spanish, but they're not wrong. And who's to say what language is right and what's wrong? Just because it's Spanish and it's—y supone a ser castellano.⁴³⁵

Branchal was specifically talking about Northern New Mexico—"esta parte del estado"—and Roberto Martínez makes the same point: "The Northern New Mexico...we were separated from Mexico, and Mexico progressed or kept on and developed, elevated the language, and we kept the old archaic, like *acequia* and different words." Darren Cordova adds further examples, while noting that

⁴³⁵ Branchal provides his own paraphrase in English of the Spanish phrases in this section: *They say that the language of New Mexico is not correct. That it's bad. I don't believe that, eh? Because this part of the state talks differently. We've held onto the Spanish, some of those Spanish words that were brought here by Spain. And we kept them. They went back, but the language didn't evolve, so we kept words like asina and truje, you know words like that, that are Spanish, they aren't incorrect. It might be an old Spanish, but they're not wrong. And who's to say what language is right and what's wrong? Just because it's Spanish and it's—it's Castilian.*

English is equally regional:

We get criticized as New Mexicans because we don't speak the proper Mexican language and we don't speak the tejano language, their Spanish. We have our own unique language of our own. No different than different non-Hispanic: you go to Alabama there's a different type of English, you go to Texas it's different....

Like for instance if you're going to the Post Office, *el correo*, well here they say *estafeta*,... "*fui pa'l estafeta para...*" A cake, it's *keke* here, and it's *pastel* [in standard Spanish].... Or *apéate del carro*—*apéate*, what is that?... Here in New Mexico it's *apéate del carro*..., in Mexico it's *bájate del carro*. I'll return your call: *te hablo pa'tras*. Well that, to Mexicans, that's "I'll call you backwards." *Te regreso la llamada*. You know? So it's just different ways that you talk.

Many people consider the local speech to be not only different but deficient, and even those who express pride often add a note of defensiveness. Diane Geoffroi Monroe, owner of the Casa de la Música in Las Vegas, says she was trained as a bilingual schoolteacher and appreciates the local dialect, but when she was a child it was consistently disparaged: "They told us that the local Spanish speakers only had the vocabulary of a six-year-old, because we never went beyond that in school. And a lot of it is slang. But it is our own."

Many people who grew up in that school system internalized its standards and continue to characterize the local Spanish as full of mistakes. Henry Ortíz says:

Back in the days growing up, we had a different dialect, or whatever you call it. We had different pronunciations for words....

My mother used the words that weren't—the right pronunciation, in other words. My ancestors, all of my relatives, for example, San José, Ribera, Pecos, Rowe, and all through there, they all learned the way it was taught to them back in those days, you know, the old folks. And they're still doing it. I catch a lot of, pronouncing the wrong...like *fuimos al baile*. We used to say *juimos! Juimos al baile*. Y *nosotros*, we wouldn't say *nosotros: nojotros*. And a lot of words we used the wrong pronunciation for.

Whether framed as errors or signifiers of local pride, such words and pronunciations are presented as evidence of the uniqueness of Northern New Mexico culture. As it happens, all the above examples can also be found in rural Mexico or elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world. *Estafeta* is standard Spanish, often used to mean a courier service rather than a post office, but found in both senses. *Apéate* was used by Cervantes in exactly the sense Cordova uses it—the only difference is that Sancho Panza was telling Don Quijote to get down from a horse rather than out of a car—and similar examples of the term (sometimes spelled *apéyate*) appear in recent writing from Mexico, Spain, and the Dominican Republic.

Wherever they turn up, words like *truje*, *acequia*, and *apéate* tend to be described as regional and archaic, but those descriptions reveal inherent biases. The categorization of some people's speech as archaic is another way of saying that they are less modern than we are, or have better preserved their traditions, and the categorization of their speech as regional is another way of saying they are outside the mainstream. Most of the words used in Cervantes's time are still used by educated speakers in Madrid and thus are not regarded as regional or archaic—though they may be as unfamiliar to people in rural New Mexico as the

local “archaisms” are to the average madrileño. The use of *asina* for *así* is a good example of this, because in Northern New Mexico it is regularly singled out as a local archaism, dictionaries of Mexicanisms frame it as an archaism typical of rural Mexico, and Spanish dictionaries simply list it as colloquial.⁴³⁶ The word is not used by formally educated writers or media figures anywhere, so people outside Spain tend to be unaware that it is still used in Spain and New Mexicans are unaware that it is used in Mexico. But the choice to describe it as “regional” or “archaic” is not simply an expression of such ignorance—Spaniards are equally unaware that the word is used in Mexico or New Mexico, but they regard Spanish as their language and do not regard words they continue to use as archaic, nor if a word is found throughout Spain do they consider it regional.

People often treat academic or media speech as a generalized norm from which their local dialects diverge, and thus frame the aspects of their speech that diverge from that norm as unique to their region or group. This is particularly tempting when one can postulate reasons for such a divergence—in the case of Northern New Mexico, that Castilian archaisms have survived in a remote mountain region since the days of the conquistadors or that the speech of English-speaking neighbors has overlapped into local Spanish. These explanations are unquestionably valid: Spanish arrived in New Mexico with the conquistadors and has survived there, and local Hispanic speech includes plenty of English borrowings. However, when one examines specific examples, they often reveal more complex or puzzling connections: *keke* and *hablar pa'tras* (more commonly *llamar pa'tras*) are clearly borrowings from English (the first a Spanish

⁴³⁶ Cobos, Rúben, *A Dictionary of New Mexico and Southern Colorado Spanish*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 1983, 13, categorizes *asina* as “Col[onial] N.M. Span.”; Santamaria, *Diccionario de mejicanismos*, 90, describes it as “Usado...entre la gente rústica y muy vulgar”; Lara, *Diccionario del español usual en México*, 142, classifies it as “rural”; García-Pelayo y

pronunciation of “cake,” the second a calque of the phrase “to call back”), and could easily be local coinages, but an internet search suggests that *keke* (or *queque*) is equally common in Peru and *llamar pa’tas* is considered equally regional in Puerto Rico.

The point is not that people in Northern New Mexico talk like Peruvians or Puerto Ricans, or even like Texans or northern Mexicans, but that the choice to define a group as having its own dialect is always based on factors other than speech and is less about speech than about defining the group. People in Albuquerque tend to talk about New Mexico music and New Mexico Spanish, while people in Taos or Las Vegas refer to the same music and speech as specifically northern New Mexican—and people in Texas, Arizona, or northern Mexico single out many of the same traits as distinctive to their own local culture or to a broader southwestern or border region.

Because definitions of dialect are definitions of a group, they express not only group pride but group concerns. New Mexico musicians regularly define their style by explaining how it is different from what is played in Texas or Mexico, and their pride is often mingled with a consciousness that this has limited their professional careers. When they talk about New Mexico Spanish, the same concerns routinely surface. While he defends the local dialect as “different” but not “wrong,” Cordova adds that his own speech “tends to skew more toward the Mexico Spanish,” and says he has to adjust his language when he writes song lyrics:

I can’t use the Spanish that we traditionally are used too. But

I can’t also use the direct Mexican Spanish because it’ll get lost...

Spanish people here won’t understand it. So I have to find a word

that kind of meshes in between, that people will understand.

Because if I use too much New Mexico Spanish, then I kind of shut the doors on where my airplay's going to be, because we get played in Utah and Colorado and some of those are a little bit more geared toward Mexican.

Cordova likewise has taken to recording in San Antonio, Texas, using musicians who give his music a broader southwestern flavor while retaining enough of the New Mexico sound to please his core audience.

The analogy of New Mexico music to New Mexico Spanish is far from exact, in part because a lot of people who are proud of the local music are dubious about local speech, considering it “bad Spanish” rather than simply regional. Ernie Montoya voices a common view when he says, “In this area there's a lot of people that speak broken Spanish and broken English—they don't speak one language well.” Henry Ortíz recalls a Mexican-born store owner in Santa Fe who heard him on the radio and tutored him in proper Spanish, correcting his locally acceptable “mispronunciations” and “wrong words.” Norbie Martínez says, “On the radio I try to speak *español correcto*, ¿no?” and when asked what he means by “correct,” specifies Mexican vocabulary and pronunciation. Other people, like Cordova, say they are adapting their speech to particular audiences without necessarily considering one style better than another: Jerry Dean refers to the “mispronunciations” common in New Mexico, but also suggests that this is an outsider's judgment, saying they “may be accepted here in New Mexico, but some of the Mexican immigrants that know the language are going to say, ‘That just sounds utterly ridiculous.’”

Even people who equate local Spanish with local music and are proud of

“fam[iliar]”.

both tend to be upset by a lot of the language on current recordings, not because it is regional but because many young singers do not speak or understand much Spanish, local or otherwise. J.P. Baca says, “It kind of causes me to—woah!—pull back, when I hear some of the New Mexico artists mispronounce simple words, and I tell Mike [his son, who deejays KFUN’s Spanish show], ‘You really shouldn’t play that song, because he’s mispronouncing so many words: it makes him and his music sound bad, and it makes *us* sound bad.’” In a noteworthy conjunction of terminology, José Merlin Trujillo characterizes such speakers as “bilingual,” using the English word in an otherwise Spanish phrase and meaning that they are not fluent Spanish speakers: “Muchos de estos son *bilingual*, por eso no ponen la letra como es. . . . A lot of these guys that sing, they don’t know Spanish—they sing Spanish, they don’t know how to speak Spanish, no saben hablar español.”

This particular form of bilingualism—singing in Spanish, but speaking mostly or exclusively in English—is basic to the current New Mexico music scene, and depending on one’s vantage point can be viewed as either loss or preservation. If one thinks of the younger New Mexico singers as Spanish speakers who can no longer speak their language, they have lost something. However, one can instead think of them as maintaining a linguistic tradition, speaking English in their daily lives but preserving their ancestral language when they sing. Branchal says that one of the main reasons he started his mariachi program in the Taos schools was to familiarize Hispanic students with Spanish: “I wanted the kids to identify with the music, go back to learning the language, so we would work on vocabulary and translate the songs.” He feels singers must not only know the words but also understand them in order to transmit “*el sentimiento de la canción*,” but adds that many singers do not: “They hear something and they

mimic what they *think* they hear, but they don't know what it means. ¿Me entiendes?" For example, "A lot of people were thinking, 'Well, what does it mean, "La múcura está en el suelo, y mamá no puedo con ella"?' People are thinking that there's this big fat girl that's—he can't get her up."⁴³⁷

Many people speak with pride of their children or grandchildren who have a good command of Spanish, but almost always as an exception to the norm and usually mentioning school Spanish classes instead of or in addition to home influences. Nor do most think the situation is likely to improve. When I asked Casey Gallegos at KDCE whether there were any young singers coming up who had native fluency, he answered: "Basically no, and it's been quite a while already, more than twenty years."

Gallegos added that he does not think the disappearance of spoken Spanish is making people less interested in the Spanish-language music he programs, since "it's been in place and it doesn't seem to have affected it." Brasher at KANW agreed, and says that the decreasing Spanish fluency of the New Mexico audience has made pronunciation less of an issue:

One of the criticisms [the musicians] get is, "Well, you don't pronounce the words right," and we say, "Well, in New Mexico that's sort of fine." It works. People like what they do. That's criticism we get from the Spanish speakers...[but] we don't sit and overthink—an artist records a music and people like it, we just play it. I don't know, maybe there were some English songs where they got the words incorrect or they didn't have subject-verb agreement down, and nobody thought much about it...

⁴³⁷ The opening line of "La múcura" translates as: "The earthenware jug is on the floor, mama, I can't manage/lift it." To be fair to the youth of Taos, *múcura* is specific to the northern countries of South America and similarly confusing to most listeners in Mexico and Spain.

Brasher adds that his own Spanish is far from fluent: “I bet I’m typical of a lot of Hispanics... I grew up and my dad spoke it..., it was a code that he could talk with his mom and my mom and he didn’t have all these nine kids listening.”

Virtually all the older New Mexico music performers and presenters I spoke with—those over sixty years old—spoke Spanish as their first language and only began using English when they started school. There was a concerted governmental effort in the mid-twentieth century to make New Mexico Hispanics English-dominant and many recall being scolded or punished for using Spanish in school and raised their children speaking English so as not to put them through the same struggle.

The English-only approach was not universal and some people who grew up in northern villages say their teachers were Spanish-dominant or bilingual and classes were conducted in a mix of languages. Even in the north, though, universal English schooling combined with the power of mass media has prompted a dramatic language shift. Only a small minority of artists and programmers who are under fifty grew up speaking Spanish and I did not interview anyone under thirty who described Spanish as their primary home language as children, nor have most of the people under fifty who grew up in Spanish-speaking households remained Spanish-dominant as adults.⁴³⁸ Many speak regretfully of their lack of fluency and virtually all the younger Spanish-

⁴³⁸ This is a common observation. Shelley Roberts, who worked in a rural high school in northern New Mexico in the 1990s, writes (*Remaining and Becoming*, 26-7): “The parents of the seniors grew up in isolated villages; their children grow up with the outside world slipping readily into homes by satellite dish and cable television.... Parents reached school having spoken only Spanish at home; few of their children speak Spanish fluently.” In 2003, Ysaura Bernal-Enríquez and Enrique Hernández-Chávez wrote (“La enseñanza del español,” 103): “The typical pattern of language learning in the chicano community of New Mexico has been that the older generation (people who are now over 80 years old) is essentially monolingual in Spanish. The intermediate generations (from 60 to 80 years old and from 40 to 60) are bilingual, the younger group English-dominant. The younger generations (less than 40 years old) hardly understand Spanish” (my translation).

speakers who are fluent tell of working to perfect their language outside their homes, whether in school, by spending time in Mexico, or by hanging out with recent immigrants. This is another way in which trends in local language do not map with trends in local music: New Mexico music is defined by its difference from other southwestern and Mexican styles, but although many people say the music is helping to preserve Spanish as a local language, the Spanish it is preserving is not New Mexico Spanish. This is a dilemma inherent in virtually all efforts at cultural preservation: traditions gain strength by being shared by large groups of people, but that sharing involves erasing local particularities. Ysaura Bernal-Enríquez and Eduardo Hernández-Chávez put the problem clearly in the title of an article on the teaching of “heritage Spanish” in New Mexico, posing the question whether such teaching is leading to “revitalization or eradication of the Chicano [that is, local] variety.”⁴³⁹

Virtually all the common Spanish-language songs in the New Mexico repertoire are Mexican or come from elsewhere in the Southwest, and although local musicians have often substantially reworked the rhythm, tempo, and instrumentation of these songs, I have only heard a couple that suggest any influence of local Spanish dialects: “El gavián pollero” was recorded by Pedro Infante in 1947 with the lines, “si tu vuelves mi polla par’ acá,/ yo te doy todito el gallinero,” and in New Mexico the first phrase is sung “si tu vuelves mi polla par’ atrás,” a calque from the English “if you bring my chicken back.” However, the song was recorded by several popular Texas bands in the 1980s with that modification and the New Mexican version may have been learned from those records rather than being a local variant. The one other example I have found is in Cuarenta y Cinco’s version of “No me tengas compación” (sic), in which Ernie

⁴³⁹ Bernal-Enríquez and Hernández-Chávez, “La enseñanza del español.”

Montoya uses the variant verb tense that troubled Al Hurricane, “fuistes” for *fuiste*. This is likewise a song previously recorded in Texas, by Los Stardusters, but they sing “fuiste,” as does Freddie Brown on an earlier New Mexico version with Eddie Dimas, so Montoya’s pronunciation presumably reflects his local speech. (Which said, this pronunciation is common throughout the Spanish speaking world.⁴⁴⁰) Further research would undoubtedly turn up a handful of further examples, but they are rare exceptions to the general rule that song lyrics are performed in “correct” Mexican Spanish—and if anyone pointed these divergences out to the singers, I suspect most would choose to eliminate the “mistakes.”

Whatever their command or variety of Spanish, when I asked New Mexico artists and announcers about their language use, all stressed the importance of English in communicating with their native audience, and the few who speak more than occasional phrases of Spanish in their shows tended to place this in the context of reaching beyond that audience. Darren Cordova says he heard Spanish at home as a child but only became fluent by hanging out with Mexican friends and he provides a carefully balanced description of the current situation:

Spanish is very powerful, and I can do that, and I can carry it, but you also need to know your audience. Because you have a lot of other generations, and it’s really sad that there’s a lot of people with Martínez names, Cordova names, different names, that were brought up with their traditions and roots but they don’t

⁴⁴⁰ A discussion of this verb tense in an online language forum (<http://forum.wordreference.com/showthread.php?t=107220>, accessed 12/2/14) turns up instances from Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and various countries of South America. As one correspondent notes, it is an example of vernacular hypocorrection, in which speakers who are afraid of making common mistakes over-correct, his example being that people who have learned that their elision of the *d* in “ado” verb endings is a mistake sometimes also “correct” *bacalao* (cod) to *bacalado*.

understand Spanish. So you have to find that balance: am I losing my audience...? [When] I'm saying we're going to do this song here, and I say, "Aquí les vamos con una canción, una canción que escribí," I'll be talking to them about "I wrote this song," but then I start seeing some people, like, "What is he saying?"

But yet the good thing is...the good majority of our supporters, understand English...even though [some] talk primarily Spanish, but they know exactly what I'm saying, so you find that balance and you say, "OK, well, I'm not going to lose them completely by talking Spanish, so might as well talk English cause I know they know English too." You know? But there's times where we've played where there's a predominately Mexican crowd, and then I know, "OK, I need to"—then sometimes it becomes a game of what you say in Spanish you have to repeat it in English... Because, being onstage, you read your audience... I can tell if they're getting lost in my Spanish message, if I say a Spanish joke and I'm like, "OK, all this section doesn't really understand..." [Like] if they don't dance and if they're not responding, you change the song.

The choices involved in balancing English and Spanish can be subtle because New Mexico music fans identify with Spanish and appreciate an artist speaking the language even if they don't understand what is said. Audiences often applaud when an artist says a phrase in Spanish, regardless of what she is saying, just as they applaud when an artist mentions their home town or a local sports team. However, the use of Spanish in these instances is applauded because it is foregrounded as a switch out of English and understood as a gesture of solidarity,

which would not be the case if someone came onstage speaking Spanish and continued in that language throughout her set.

To most current New Mexico music fans, as for many native-born Hispanics or Chicanos throughout the United States, the speech style that feels most like “home speech” includes some Spanish words, phrases, and pronunciations but is not primarily Spanish. The only major New Mexico hit in recent years that explicitly uses language to signal its regional affiliation is Grupo Mezcal’s “Bueno Bye,” a country-western style song (that is, played in the tempo of a country two-step) sung entirely in Spanish except for the title phrase, a standard local way of saying goodbye (especially on the telephone), which for many fans is the only part of the lyric they understand and which they sing along with enthusiastically.⁴⁴¹

Given the primacy of English in local speech, it might seem strange that groups like Mezcal continue to compose the vast majority of their songs in Spanish. Jerry Dean included a song on his *New Mexico Music 2012* compilation that he describes as “done in the Spanish form, in the Spanish music...It’s traditional in every way but it’s just one hundred percent English.” The song is titled “New Mexican Rose,” and he says he specifically included it for all the New Mexico music fans who don’t speak Spanish and is puzzled that it has not received much radio play:

I think the radio stations should say, “Hey, you know what?”—If they’re thinking what I’m hearing from other people, saying, “Hey, I like the music but I don’t understand the words.”

⁴⁴¹ As far as I can find, this song has not been recorded by any other New Mexico artists, but it has been covered by at least three artists in Mexico and as a duet by two of the biggest Regional Mexican stars in Los Angeles, Adán Sánchez and Yolanda Pérez. All of these versions change the final

—“Let’s give em something to where they do understand the words, but they can enjoy the music at the same time.” And it’s kind of bringing the English into the Spanish style of music... Trying to broaden the audience... If things stay too small they might just disappear.

This is a linguistic equivalent of the attempt by other New Mexico artists to broaden their audience by using instrumentation more typical of tejano or Mexican Regional styles, and although both efforts are logical, they have the same drawback. By and large, people don’t listen to New Mexico music exclusively or because they dislike other styles—virtually all New Mexico music fans also like country music, and although many performers and deejays told me their listeners do not like tejano styles, some record store owners report otherwise: “The tejano sells with the New Mexico [music], with the New Mexico people,” José Merlin Trujillo says, describing buying patterns in Española. “They love that style... Not the musicians, but the people.” Since most local fans listen to New Mexico music along with rather than instead of other styles, their reason for choosing that music at any given moment is that it suits a particular mood, fits a particular situation, or expresses a particular affiliation. When they are in other moods or situations they listen to other styles and have other performers to choose from: if they want to hear someone who sounds tejano, they can listen to Little Joe or Selena, and when they want to hear someone singing in English they can listen to George Strait or Beyoncé.

New Mexico music does not just happen to be sung in Spanish: the fact that it is in Spanish is what defines it as a Hispanic tradition, and as the language becomes less common in people’s day-to-day speech it simultaneously becomes

words of the first verse from the Spanglish original to “bueno, adiós,” though they retain

more important to them as a signifier of heritage. This is how traditions are defined or invented: a tradition is not something we do constantly and unconsciously, it is something we consciously maintain because we believe it might be lost if we stopped doing it. New Mexico artists and announcers speak English and play English-language country songs and oldies as part of their musical mix, and Mary Jane Walker argues that this is also a defining aspect of the local tradition, writing that “styles as diverse as cumbia..., ranchera..., rock ’n’ roll and country have been reconceptualized under the rubric of New Mexico music.... [C]o-occurrence of diverse styles with past events link these musical indices to place and heritage, [and] by being performed in the same events, diverse styles become indexically linked to each other, thereby becoming a musical corpus.” She specifically equates the roles of ranchera and rock ’n’ roll in defining this corpus, writing:

“Johnny B. Goode” and *ranchera* classics like “El Rancho Grande” have been danced at similar dances for generations...*ranchera* is...included in New Mexico music events and recordings today because of its associations with older generations. Rock ’n’ roll must also be part of musical social events for the event to be inclusive of all generations present because people’s parents and grandparents played, enjoyed and identified with this music too.⁴⁴²

What this analysis leaves out is that styles can be linked to each other in a corpus and yet have very different roles and meanings within that corpus. Although both ranchera and rock ’n’ roll oldies are consistently included in New Mexico music events and signal connections to valued family traditions, that does

“bueno bye” for the title and chorus.

not mean they have equal weight or similar roles in defining the style. In a context of balanced and egalitarian multilingualism, various languages may carry equal weight and have equal significance, but when one language is threatened by another, its use takes on added significance. The fact that New Mexico Hispanics now tend to speak English gives Spanish a meaning for them that it did not have two hundred years ago. The fact that the local ranchera is not popular with one's Anglo neighbors likewise gives it particular meaning, which rock 'n' roll oldies do not share, much as one may love or even prefer them.

The defining significance of Spanish as compared to English in New Mexico music becomes clear when one looks at the bilingual songs and recordings that have become popular on the scene. Many of these songs were originally monolingual and became bilingual only when artists translated some verses to fit the regional market, and without exception they were monolingual in English. Following Freddy Fender's model, numerous country songs are performed locally with verses in Spanish, Lorenzo Antonio added Spanish verses to the R&B hit "Just Because," and the Purple Haze got a big local hit with a bilingual rewrite of the Everly Brothers' "Bye Bye Love." By contrast, I have never heard a Spanish-language song performed by a New Mexico band with even one line translated into English.⁴⁴³ This is particularly striking because in other regions or situations Mexican and Spanish songs have been recorded with English verses, sometimes with great success. The US pop remix of "Macarena" is an obvious example, and Little Joe had a hit with a bilingual rewrite of the ranchera song "Margarita, Margarita." The latter example is particularly telling, because although Little Joe is very popular with New Mexico fans and

⁴⁴² Walker, "Family Music," 72-5.

“Margarita, Margarita” is a New Mexico standard that has been recorded by Cuarenta y Cinco and Jerry Dean, New Mexico musicians sing only the Spanish verses.

New Mexico bands do sometimes inject a bit of English into their cumbias and rancheras—for example, Ernie Montoya yelling “One, two, three, four!” before charging into “La llorona loca,” and interrupting his version of “Traigo mi .45” to whoop: “Vengo bien *loaded*!” and “Loaded to the max!”—but they do this in spoken or shouted asides rather than in song lyrics. This does not seem to be simply a matter of lyrical traditionalism or purism making artists hesitant to change familiar songs. At least a couple of Mexican songs have been altered lyrically for the local market with great success, but rather than making the songs more broadly accessible the alterations made them more specifically local, adding references to places in Northern New Mexico. Where versions of the cumbia “La llorona loca” recorded by Pérez Prado in Mexico City and by Little Joe in Texas continued to situate the story in the original Colombian “calle de Tamalameque,” Cuarenta y Cinco’s instead starts off in “las calles de Española” and situates later verses in nearby locations: “las lomas de Chamita” (Ernie Montoya’s hometown), “las entrañas de El Llano,” “las acequias de Santa Cruz,” “el río de San Juan,” “el bosque de Alcalde,” “los arroyos de Chimayó,” “las sierras de Las Truchas,” “las mesas de Abiquíú,” and “los cañones de Vallecitos.”⁴⁴⁴ Perfección de Chimayó’s

⁴⁴³ “Lo mucho que te quiero” might seem to be an exception, since it is sung first in Spanish, then in an English translation, but that is the way the song was composed and recorded by the Texas duo Rene y Rene.

⁴⁴⁴ Ernie Montoya says he adapted his version from Little Joe’s, and his explication of the lyric is a good example of how borrowings from other regions of Latin America can be recontextualized to fit local understandings of Spanish heritage. Though the song is Colombian, he traces its roots to Spanish mountain folk, specifically a village in the Pyrenees: “The earliest account they can find of it, there was a guy coming along in a wagon and there was a lady walking up the road in a black dress carrying an axe that was, she was kind of bloody, and she was crying...so, the story got around, where they started since she was crying they called her La Llorona...and in that little town they started telling the little kids, ‘You better behave or this,

“El burro norteño” likewise has a previous history, having started as Lalo Guerrero’s parody of José Alfredo Jiménez’s “Corrido del Caballo Blanco.” The original lyrics traced journeys through northwestern Mexico and Al Hurricane recorded Guerrero’s version on his first album, but Perfección’s (originated by another local group, Los López, from Chamisal, who recorded it only on cassette) instead follows the road from Peñasco to Española via Chamisal, Las Trampas, Ojo Sarco, Las Truchas, and Chimayó. The local geographical signifiers give these rewrites an added attraction not only because they appeal to regional pride but because listeners who do not speak Spanish can still recognize the names of familiar towns, and I never heard the non-local lyrics of either song performed live by a New Mexico band.

Spanish lyrics and familiar ranchera melodies have a uniquely important role in New Mexico Music, but that does not negate Walker’s point that the basic repertoire also includes English-language rock ’n’ roll and country hits. José Merlin Trujillo says:

You *need* to do variety. ’Cause people like to dance: rancheras, cumbias, waltz—you name it. You *have* to do it... I mean, if you play nothing but Spanish—you gotta change a little bit. Little bit country, little bit the oldies... All kinds: rock, you name it. We *had* to do that. For people to be on the mood for dance, you need to do that.

There is general agreement that a dance at which a New Mexico band played only Spanish material would be regarded by most fans as unsatisfying.

something, La Llorona’s gonna get you...’ It got here just through tongue, through stories told, and I don’t know if it still exists in Spain or not, but in northern New Mexico it became something like they would tell the little kids, ‘You better behave or don’t go down there, don’t go here, the Llorona’s gonna get you.’”

However, it would be regarded as an unsatisfying evening of New Mexico music, while a dance at which the same band played nothing but oldies or country songs would be regarded as a rock 'n' roll or country dance. This is not simply hypothetical: in the 1950s, Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers played for plenty of rock 'n' roll dances and today artists like Samuel D offer clubs the choice of their country show or their New Mexico music show. At their country or rock shows, as at New Mexico music events, artists may play a variety of rhythms to suit the dancers and, whether the musicians are Anglo or Hispanic, a lot of New Mexico rock 'n' roll and country dances include an occasional ranchera or cumbia—but these are divergences from the evening's dominant style, not what defines that style. No matter how much someone may love “Johnny B Goode” or “The Cowboy Rides Away” or how likely they may be to request those songs at a New Mexico music dance, no one would name those titles if asked to pick their favorite New Mexico song, because no one thinks of those as specifically New Mexico songs, nor do New Mexico bands play those songs in a distinctive way.

Roxy Harris warns of the misunderstandings that result when “academic commentators have directed attention and emphasis to spectacular aspects of the engagement of [minority] youth with popular culture.”⁴⁴⁵ His point is that the South Asian youths he worked with in London tended to listen to roughly the same range of music as their peers from other backgrounds, but many scholars emphasize the special connection of South Asian Londoners with bhangra music because that is what is ethnically distinctive about their listening, and ignore the fact that other kinds of music may be more popular even among the subset of South Asians who enjoy bhangra. Any researcher who studies a particular musical style runs the risk of over-emphasizing the importance of that style in the

⁴⁴⁵ Harris, *New Ethnicities*, 16.

community that enjoys it, since her research tends to intersect the community specifically in the context of this music—I met people because they were involved in New Mexico music, and approached them as someone studying New Mexico music, so naturally our discussions tended to focus on that style. Nonetheless, several people mentioned that their favorite music was country and western—although Ernie Montoya said Spanish songs touch him more deeply than English ones, he added that his car radio is usually tuned to a country station—and when I looked through the record collections of New Mexico musicians, they never consisted predominantly of New Mexico music and often included more country, as well as classic Mexican ranchera.⁴⁴⁶

When I talked with Hispanic New Mexicans in contexts that did not specifically involve New Mexico music, hardly any spontaneously mentioned the style and if I asked about it some expressed dislike rather than affection: the owner of a café and arts center in Española clearly found it somewhat insulting, or at least disappointing, when I told him I was in town for an Al Hurricane show, and urged me to listen to a local flamenco guitarist instead. Even people who like New Mexico music do not necessarily prefer it to other styles: when I asked the men sitting next to me at a Cuarenta y Cinco show at Albuquerque’s Caravan East if they were fans of the band, they said that in general they preferred Tejano—although they were natives of Las Vegas, gave me a list of musicians I should interview there, were talking Spanish with each other, and clearly were very familiar with Cuarenta y Cinco.

That said, researchers are not the only people who “direct attention and

⁴⁴⁶ Diane Geoffroi Monroe, owner of Casa de la Música on the main square in Las Vegas, says that when she was growing up her parents listened mostly to Mexican artists and she only became familiar with northern New Mexico music when she started working in the store, because she herself had always listened to country and western—she whispered the words “country and

emphasis to spectacular aspects” of community practice—community members often do this as well, at least in some situations. Nor is it safe to assume that someone’s favorite music is the music that has the strongest emotional resonance for them. One need not share one’s mother’s musical tastes to have powerful associations with a song one remembers as her favorite—and again, loss or the perception of imminent loss often strengthens such connections: one’s mother’s favorite song might seem merely irritating when she plays it around the house but become heart-wrenchingly meaningful after she is dead. That somewhat melodramatic example has particular bearing on the New Mexico scene because so many fans talk of Spanish music as connecting them not only to their culture and heritage, but specifically to older relatives who spoke the language at home. When I asked Herman Martínez why he thinks the music remains popular despite its listeners’ decreasing use of Spanish, he said, “It’s an up-tempo sound, it’s a good *sound*. There’s a good heritage here, grandpas, grandmas, it was the language they listened to and it’s kept going.”

The distinctiveness of that New Mexico “sound” is not simply its use of Spanish, but it is directly linked to the use of Spanish. While local bands always mix some English-language songs into their sets, I never heard anyone boast that they or any local artist played a country or oldies hit in a distinctive way. When bands play “Let’s Go, Let’s Go,” “The Cowboy Rides Away,” or “Brown-Eyed Girl,” they do their best to sound like the familiar recordings by Richie Valens, George Strait, and Van Morrison. (Although Tiny Morrie recorded a Spanish-language version of “Brown-Eyed Girl” called “Mi primer amor” on one of his most popular LPs of the 1970s, even his brother Al Hurricane sings the original English lyric). By contrast, when people talk about local performances of

western” as if she was confessing a guilty secret, but I found that women in particular often shared

Spanish-language songs, they always stress that the New Mexico versions sound different from the way those songs are played elsewhere. This disparate treatment of Anglo and Spanish material was not inherent in the process of rock 'n' roll "variety" bands developing a concentration on Mexican ranchera. In Texas, when rock 'n' roll bands started concentrating on rancheras they tended to add accordion to their line-up so they would sound more authentically Mexican, just as Mike Laure in Mexico added güiro and conga drums when he started to concentrate on tropical rhythms, and the Texans often make it a point of pride to transform their Anglo material as well as their Mexican material: when Little Joe plays Willie Nelson's "Good Hearted Woman," rather than mimicking Nelson's arrangement he adds a horn section and accordion to make it sound tejano.

One explanation of the disparate New Mexico treatment of English and Spanish songs is that it goes along with broader patterns of affiliation and differentiation: In relation to their Anglo neighbors, Hispanic New Mexicans often want to make the point that they are equally (or more) American, and one way of emphasizing that is to demonstrate a shared taste for and mastery of mainstream country or pop styles—they can sound just like the original country or rock records because they are fully native speakers of those styles. By contrast, in relation to tejanos and recent immigrants from Mexico, Hispanic New Mexicans generally want to make the point that they have their own unique culture and one way of emphasizing that is to demonstrate that even when they play the same songs, they do so in a unique way. To make a linguistic analogy, although virtually all discussions of New Mexico Spanish stress that it is different from the Spanish spoken elsewhere—whether that difference is framed positively or negatively—no one I interviewed pointed out any distinctive traits of New

that taste, even if their husbands were professional New Mexico musicians.

Mexico English.⁴⁴⁷

One could also frame this distinction in terms of what is foregrounded and what is taken for granted. If one thinks of English as what everybody speaks in the United States, Spanish is what makes Hispanics special, and what makes New Mexico Hispanics particularly special is that their Spanish is unique to New Mexico. As Cordova pointed out, English also varies by region and when English-speakers in Maine, Mississippi, or Minnesota want to distinguish themselves regionally they point out how their English is different from book or media English—but New Mexico Hispanics have no need to distinguish their speech from that of the Anglo mainstream by pointing out distinctive uses of English, since they distinguish themselves linguistically by using Spanish. English, in this formulation, is a norm shared with non-Hispanics and non-New Mexicans, and the same goes for country music and rock 'n' roll. The way New Mexico bands play rock and country hits is in keeping with the standard practice of cover bands all over the United States, which make it a point of pride to sound as much as possible like the hit records, duplicating not only general arrangements but specific solos. Many New Mexico musicians have experience playing in such bands and their standard musical education continues to include precise imitations of classic solos—when I interviewed John Montoya, the original guitarist for Cuarenta y Cinco, his twelve-year-old daughter seized a free moment to proudly demonstrate that she could play the drum solo from “Wipe Out,” just like on the original record.

Given their instrumentation, New Mexico bands could not play similarly

⁴⁴⁷ New Mexico English has been far less studied than New Mexico Spanish, and since it has been spoken for much less time it undoubtedly has fewer distinctive characteristics. That said, New Mexicans—and particularly New Mexico Hispanics—do sometimes make fun of local English mannerisms, and at least one comedian, “Lynette la burqueña,” has made a small career out of the speech style (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5Yy0iWVC00>, accessed 12/5/13).

precise covers of Pedro Infante ranchera hits or norteño polkas, so one might argue that their performances of Mexican songs are no more intentionally distinctive than their rock or country performances. When older fiddlers played “In the Mood,” they sounded nothing like Glenn Miller’s big band, and the surf-inflected ranchera could be framed as similarly making the best of the tools at hand—in linguistic terms, speaking a foreign language with a local accent rather than speaking a local dialect. That formulation makes sense when one thinks back to Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers, which was basically a rock ’n’ roll dance combo that also played rancheras. But it makes less sense when one is talking about the hundreds of later bands that have been formed specifically to play a Spanish-language repertoire. New Mexicans could have learned to play accordions, vihuelas, or bajo sextos—indeed, many did and play mariachi or norteño. To extend the linguistic metaphor, they could have perfected their accents, as they did when they learned to play surf guitar solos, but instead they indigenized the language, turning it into a distinctive regional dialect.

It would be an oversimplification to suggest that those two processes are completely distinct: the difference between speaking a foreign language with a local accent and speaking an indigenous local dialect is to some extent just a matter of whether one considers the language one is speaking to be foreign or indigenous. While most fans frame New Mexico Spanish music as a distinctively local tradition, a few continue to stress its connection to Mexico. J.P. Baca suggested that New Mexico fans who disparage regional Mexican music are just displaying their ignorance:

[They] don’t realize that, as faithful as they may be to their Northern New Mexico Spanish music, they don’t realize that, “You know what? If you really studied it, where does your roots in

that music you're playing, where do the roots come from if not from Mexico? If you listen to the lyrics, you'll probably find that you're singing a song that Pedro Infante recorded in the thirties; Vicente Fernández, Antonio Aguilar. You probably don't even *know* that." But they've become very protective of their northern—what the Northern New Mexico artists do is, they'll take a song, but then they change it a little bit, and they adopt it, and they make it Northern New Mexico. But like I say, if they really studied and learned, that— "You know what? That little spirit of the Spanish music that you're really protective of? That spirit started in Mexico."

Defining something as foreign or local can simply be a matter of emphasis. José Merlin Trujillo knows and loves Mexican music, taking pride in the fact that when he recorded in *norteño* style for a Mexican record label no one could tell he was not Mexican, and he shares Baca's familiarity with the Mexican sources of current New Mexico styles. But he frames the relationship in terms of active transformation leading to a new genre: his father and uncles had a band when he was a child and when I asked if they played New Mexico music, he answered, "That's where *we* came from, OK? The music, it's the same music that they were doing, but it was Mexican, Mexican songs that came from Mexico, but the thing is, *we* changed all that. We changed all that, we did it *New Mexico* style."

There are no recordings of the older Trujillos' band, but it seems safe to assume they did not sound Mexican in the sense of playing like a cinematic mariachi or a Monterrey *norteño* group. The distinction is a matter of intention and affiliation: they were doing their best to play the current Mexican hits, while Merlin's generation was choosing to sound *New Mexican*. What exactly that

means has varied from band to band and has never been easy to define in musical terms. Although she is from New Mexico, has been listening to the music all her life, and has interviewed numerous people on the scene, Lillian Gorman writes that her informants often defined the style geographically rather than sonically and neither she nor they found it easy to describe how it differed from other styles, though “fans seem to have no problem identifying the sound when they hear it.”⁴⁴⁸ Walker reaches a similar impasse, writing, “Rather than a genre with clearly definable musical structures, New Mexico music is best termed a style complex or style constellation, which is governed and united by very clear expectations for musical practice.” The specific expectations she singles out are that “music should be approachable, familiar, integrative of all generations, and not too complex,” but she makes no attempt to argue that those expectations are unique to New Mexico.⁴⁴⁹

Many people do single out musical characteristics that define the New Mexico style, in particular that it uses a lot of electric guitar, that New Mexico bands play rancheras faster than musicians elsewhere, and that they avoid complex chords and harmonies. These characteristics are often traced specifically to Al Hurricane’s early recordings. Casey Gallegos says, “Al Hurricane, when he first came out...it was all electric guitar...and rhythm guitar, drums, and bass—that’s what gives it that New Mexico thing. Now, as the years progressed, Purple Haze were a big, big band here and they had brass... Al was the first one [to have brass], and Roberto Griego, of course, but Roberto’s was more of a mariachi thing...The trumpet parts in the New Mexico, even Al’s, it’s very different. It’s not mariachi.” When I suggested the brass might come more out of swing and R&B styles, he concurred: “Yuh, that’s what it was. And then they incorporated it

⁴⁴⁸ Gorman, “*Todos me llaman El Gringo*,” 315.

into the Spanish music.”

Henry Martínez disputes one detail, saying that Manny and the Casanovas were playing rancheras with a horn section before the Hurricanes, and he may be right—photographs from the mid-1950s show the Night Rockers using three or four horns, but Al’s early Spanish recordings were guitar-driven and used at most a single sax. However, everyone agrees that the Hurricanes defined the basic style and electric guitar leads were a particularly important component of it. The Hurricanes’ early ranchera recordings are also notably up-beat: on Al’s *Mi Saxophone* LP they typically are played at around 140 beats per minute (BPMs). And there is a stripped-down simplicity to the early Hurricane style—basically a small rock ’n’ roll combo racing through three-chord polkas—that is utterly distinctive.

The problem is that none of these attributes can be generalized to New Mexico bands overall. The Purple Haze, in particular, are routinely mentioned as one of the most influential groups in the genre and many northern New Mexicans make a case that they helped shape a distinctively northern style in the 1970s that is different from the Albuquerque sound—but those same people mention guitar and fast tempos as a hallmark of the northern sound and Purple Haze never had prominent guitar and played even their fast rancheras (at least on record) at a relatively relaxed 113 to 118 BPMs, a more rapid tempo than average for tejano groups in that period, but nowhere near as fast as the early Hurricane recordings or the norm for later northern groups like Perfección and Cuarenta y Cinco, who tend to play at around 130-135 BPMs and often go above 140.⁴⁵⁰ (For example, Purple Haze’s biggest hit, “Viejo el viento,” was recorded by the tejano pioneer

⁴⁴⁹ Walker, “Family Music,” 76.

Augustin Ramírez at 108 BPMs, their version is at 118 BPMs, and Cuarenta y Cinco's recording is at 126. "Nieves de enero," another song Purple Haze made into a New Mexico ranchera standard—earlier Mexican and tejano versions by Miguel Aceves Mejía and Augustin Ramírez were performed as slow waltzes rather than in ranchera/polka rhythm—was recorded by them at an unusually slow 104 BPMs but by Cuarenta y Cinco at 132.)

The Purple Haze also present an exception to the rule that New Mexico bands favor relatively simple harmonies, since fans consistently highlight their progressive horn arrangements. Ernie Montoya says his high school's stage band played a lot of New Mexico music, but none of Purple Haze's arrangements because the bandleader "didn't want to take the time to teach the horn players the complexity—Purple Haze were thirty, forty years ahead of their time...every horn was playing a different piece, but they were all pieces that complimented each other and they never fell out, and they were so complex that it was hard to play. So nobody really played that, nobody could mimic the Purple Haze, not even the Hurricanes, not even the Sánchez family."

The Hurricanes themselves slowed their tempos after Al's first LP: none of their ranchera hits from the 1970s went over 127 BPMs, and some were as slow as 106. Nor did they consistently feature guitar: some hits, like Tiny Morrie's "El asesino," continued to have electric guitar hooks, but others, like Al Jr.'s "Flor de las flores," used guitars only for backing rhythm behind the horns, and some, like Al's "La suegra y el yerno" and Morrie's "A medios de la noche," lack any prominent guitar sound, substituting an electric keyboard.

None of this contradicts the claim that there is a core New Mexico sound,

⁴⁵⁰ The Blue Ventures, the dominant group in the Española area in the 1980s, who are often mentioned as continuing the legacy of the Purple Haze, played their rancheras even slower—judging by their recordings, they rarely got up to 113 BPMs.

nor does it imply that the descriptions fans and musicians provide are inaccurate.

It only shows that there are plenty of classic New Mexico recordings that diverge from this core sound and the descriptions are not definitional or limiting.

Although guitar-led quartets like *Perfección* and *Cuarenta y Cinco* have a sound that can easily be distinguished from any other style of ranchera, some of the most treasured New Mexico hits of the 1960s and 1970s were recorded by artists who hoped to break into the larger and more profitable tejano market and used instrumental approaches and tempos favored by that market's reigning stars. Fans recognize these hits as distinctively New Mexico recordings because they are familiar records sung by favorite local artists, not because they sound notably different from what was being recorded during the same period in San Antonio or Corpus Christi.

There is nothing unusual about this slippage between what is said to distinguish a genre and what is recognized as part of that genre: no description of the British Invasion style or specifically of the Beatles' style would include a solo voice singing an old-fashioned pop ballad backed by a classical string octet, but "Yesterday" is easily recognized as one of the Beatles' biggest British Invasion hits. The similarity of many defining New Mexico music hits to tejano hits of the same period is acknowledged by everyone who was listening to both styles, and some people describe New Mexico music in ways that imply it is a variant of tejano: Tracing the origins of the New Mexico style, Herman Martínez says, "a lot of it came from Little Joe, Texas. The influence came through there. He was the original, and it just kind of spun off and we picked it up. And later we started to add our own flavor to it." Jerry Dean, who came to the music a generation later, begins his description of the New Mexico style by saying it is "similar to tejano, but without the accordion sound."

However, Martínez also says that tejano has never really caught on in New Mexico: “It’s not too strong here. There’s been a few stations that have come in and played all tejano, and it’s great music, beautiful music, but it wouldn’t go well. For some reason—they would accept Little Joe, but they wouldn’t accept any other—the hardcore tejano music, it just wouldn’t go that well.” Diane Monroe in Las Vegas says her customers avoid anything that even sounds like it might come from Texas: “If it sounds like Tex-Mex, they won’t buy it. I mean, I don’t carry it, but if they think it does, they don’t want Tex-Mex. The people who come here tend to buy Northern New Mexico music.” Steve Leger, who runs a music store two blocks from Monroe’s, says local tastes have become increasingly narrow: “In the seventies, sixties, fifties, their tastes were more broad and open-minded...[including] the big band, the jazz, the Tex-Mex groups out of Texas, the big groups, Sunny Ozuna and Ray Camacho and all of them. They don’t come around here anymore, because the tastes have kind of narrowed into this Northern New Mexico style.” Even people who note continuing links between New Mexico and tejano—for example, the current trend of New Mexico artists recording in San Antonio—tend to express a preference for the local style and to emphasize its difference. Nick Branchal says a lot of artists are still hoping to break into the broader market, so “right now, the music has got a lot of tejano influence...but to me that’s really not the New Mexico sound.”

As with descriptions of local Spanish speech, virtually all descriptions of the New Mexico music style define it relative to what is played elsewhere. It is consistently described as using more guitar and favoring faster tempos than Mexican or Texan ranchera, and of being harmonically simpler and less instrumentally virtuosic than tejano. On average those descriptions are born out by comparisons of recordings in the three styles, particularly if one compares

New Mexico and tejano recordings since the 1980s or New Mexico music to banda. However, it is easy to find exceptions, whether New Mexico records that do not have these attributes or Texan or Mexican records that feature electric guitar, have simple arrangements, or are played faster than most New Mexico recordings. As with linguistic boundaries, genre boundaries tend to be fuzzy and porous, and people assert or defend them for reasons that go beyond language or music. During my research I sometimes suggested that a particular New Mexico recording did not meet someone's genre criteria or that a defining New Mexico music attribute was shared with some Texas or Mexican artists, and in general people would agree that there is a lot of overlap—but many people insisted that they could still hear a difference or that my examples were atypical. This was not a disagreement about facts, it was a disagreement about viewpoint or emphasis: the question is not whether tejano and New Mexico music differ in some ways and overlap in others, it is whether we consider them to be separate languages or dialects of a single style, which is to say, whether we consider New Mexico Hispanic culture to be essentially different from Texan or Mexican culture—and that is a subject about which many New Mexicans have very strong feelings.

In Northern New Mexico those feelings often extend to the southern part of the state, and many people frame musical divisions in ways that reflect this. Northerners often speak specifically of “Northern New Mexico music,” and Ernie Montoya took pains to point out that Al Hurricane and Tiny Morrie are from Dixon and the hot new Albuquerque guitarist A.J. Martínez has family in Velarde: “So you know, a lot of the ones down there, their roots come from up here.” While northerners generally define the north as the mountain region that begins in Santa Fe, Albuquerque musicians seem more inclined to define it as beginning around Albuquerque, or even Socorro, or suggest that they are kind of a middle

ground between north and south. As someone who distributes music throughout the state, Jerry Dean provides a rough geographical guide to what might be considered New Mexico music dialects:

They're not completely separate, they're real close in style but they're just a tad bit different. What I would consider more of a Northern New Mexico style music, you've got bands like Cuarenta y Cinco...they don't use trumpets; over here [in Albuquerque] we tend to use a little bit more trumpets. And up there it seems the music might be played just a little bit faster and a little bit more...maybe a little bit more simple...and a little bit more funky... It's still all the same type of music, still ranchera, still cumbias, but they play it just a tad bit different. Whereas here, I think Al Hurricane has kind of set the standard or maybe a middle ground. But you know, you go down south in New Mexico...like towards Las Cruces...and it starts sounding like tejano music.

If one thinks of these variations as regional dialects, Darren Cordova can be seen as trying to create a musical equivalent of mainstream media speech, broadly New Mexican without being distinctively marked as northern or southern. He records in Texas and uses horns, some accordion, and relatively little guitar, but he is from Taos and northern fans still consider him one of theirs—when I referred to him as sounding tejano, Casey Gallegos immediately corrected me: “Darren uses San Antonio musicians, but he plays New Mexico music... He just has a—some of the songs have a little tejano flavor, but he still does his New Mexico music thing.”

By contrast, if one wants to think in terms of separate languages, Matthew Martínez can be seen as an artist who is bimusical. As the lead singer and bass

player of Perfección he plays “really traditional Northern New Mexico music,” but he has a separate career as a solo recording artist playing what he referred to in our interview as “almost like a crossover between tejano music and New Mexico music,” though the styles on his solo CDs range from tejano to mariachi, norteño, a generic Latin pop sound, pop-rock, piano ballads, and fusions in which mariachi trumpets are backed by R&B keyboard triplets. He describes his solo recordings as groundbreaking, saying that before he made his first CD, *Algo Nuevo* (Something New), no one had succeeded on the local market with an accordion-based sound:

Stations like KANW wouldn’t play that kind of music... When I started out—it was in 2000 when I recorded my first solo CD—and for the first six months nobody would play it. And I was just—I didn’t know what to do, I was very frustrated, I put a lot of work into it, I *knew* it was a good product, I knew it was good. And all of a sudden there was a breakthrough. Somebody started playing it, and it caught on, and before you knew it everybody was playing it. And it was that year, for the first time, that I won Male Vocalist of the Year at the New Mexico Hispano Music awards

Martínez went on to win that award three times in subsequent years, as well as multiple other awards including Best Album, Best Producer, and Conjunto/Norteño Song of the Year. He draws a strict division between his solo career and the music he plays with Perfección, emphasizing that the music he plays with his father and brother is specific to their home region:

There’s quite a bit of difference... For Northern New Mexico music, the guitar is...the main instrument that carries the

group, and it has its own unique style of first and third type of leads [that is, playing leads in parallel thirds], and it's its own unique style, and it has a lot of roots that are just unique to Northern New Mexico... You can go to different states and you'll hear something that sounds similar to tejano music outside of Texas, in California, Chicago, other places, but New Mexico music you won't find anywhere other than New Mexico.

As with Ernie Montoya's description of himself as loving and singing Anglo country music but feeling a deeper connection to Spanish songs, Martínez says he appreciates tejano music and has created a style based on tejano models but is careful to emphasize that New Mexico music is special for him and whatever he plays remains completely New Mexican. When I remarked that he is often mentioned as part of the wave of local artists recording in Texas, he instantly corrected me, saying he records everything in his own studio in Albuquerque and "I didn't want to get musicians from Texas to record for me, because I didn't want it to sound like it was from Texas, I wanted it to sound like it was from New Mexico."

In the same spirit, he insists that his solo work continues to appeal to northern fans, saying:

I know that if I were to do a show here [in the Española area] with my other band, that it would be received really well. Just because the music is really popular from radio. A lot of people here know my music and request it all the time. When we play, Perfección, they come up and ask for one of the songs from my other group and it's a little tough, because I can't play them, 'cause I need an accordion or whatever.

When I saw Perfección play for a dance at the Santa Clara casino in Española, Martínez did perform a song from one of his solo albums and it seemed to go over fine—but without the accordion it sounded like part of Perfección's normal set, and it seems fair to guess that most of the crowd preferred it that way. Familiar as they may be with his radio hits, I doubt the people dancing to Perfección would have been equally happy if he had showed up with the backing musicians he uses for his solo work. Like home speech and street speech, New Mexico radio music and New Mexico dance music are overlapping forms of a local language system that varies according to different situations, and although people may enjoy listening to a wide range of music at home and on the radio, that does not mean they would appreciate the same range at a Northern New Mexico dance. Perfección in particular plays with the stripped down, electric drive of an early 1960s rock 'n' roll combo. At one point in our interview I suggested that if one saw a film of the quartet without being able to hear what it was playing, the players' body language, clothing, and overall presentation—in particular Henry Martínez Jr.'s movements during his guitar solos—would lead most viewers to guess it was a rock band. The family all laughed at this description and Matthew agreed, "He's always rocking out." Then Matthew's wife Janice chimed in:

That's the reason tejano music isn't so accepted here, is that there's a traditional—if you listen to Perfección, Cuarenta y Cinco, the Blue Ventures, it's kind of different, but it's all the same, it's traditional Northern New Mexico music. So when you introduce tejano here, the very traditional people, Hispanic people from here don't accept it.

To someone unfamiliar with the New Mexico scene, it might seem odd that

“the very traditional people” are the ones who want to hear an electric quartet “rocking out” rather than listening to a tejano or norteno group. Janice’s comment also seemed to contradict Matthew’s claim that northerners would be happy with the group he uses for his solo projects. She and Matthew may in fact disagree about local tastes, but it is also possible that Matthew would draw a good crowd in Española, just a somewhat different one than comes to hear Perfección. Different-sounding styles are often accepted by an overlapping audience as part of the same language or genre, although some members of that audience continue to prefer one over the other or one in some situations and the other in others. And even people who consider both styles to be part of the same genre may consider one more definitional or representative of the genre.

Martínez takes pride in the fact that Perfección is one of the most popular “traditional” bands, and also that his solo recordings sound different not only from Perfección’s work but from anything else in the New Mexico canon:

I was going for a unique sound that nobody else has.... If you go to Albuquerque and turn on KANW and you hear that brass come on with the ranchera, it could be Jerry Dean, it could be Gonzalo, Tobias Rene, Lorenzo Miguel, Robbie Jude—it could be any one of them that’s going to come on singing...because they use the same brass section, they use the same guitar player, everything’s basically the same, so the only thing that separates it is only the uniqueness of whatever the voice is gonna be. And one thing that my music does is, once my music comes on, you already know it’s gonna be me.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ Martínez’s characterization of the Albuquerque sound is not exaggerated. Most artists use overlapping horn players, and at the 2011 *15 Grandes* concert, fourteen of the fifteen performers had A.J. Martínez on lead guitar.

Martínez is known as a New Mexico music performer and his recordings get played on New Mexico music radio shows, are displayed in the New Mexico music section of stores, and win New Mexico music awards, so it would make no sense to argue that they fall outside the limits of the genre. On the other hand, the fact that he is often mentioned when people discuss the trend of New Mexico artists recording in Texas suggests that listeners hear something other than New Mexico style in his work. By his own judgment his solo recordings include fusions with styles from elsewhere, do not sound like others in the New Mexico genre, and were not originally accepted as part of the New Mexico canon as defined by KANW. Had he not already been known from *Perfección*, his divergence from standard New Mexico music practices would undoubtedly have made it far more difficult to get his music included in that canon, and a lot of people would probably not consider his solo CDs New Mexico music.⁴⁵² Indeed, although New Mexico fans tend to say they can always tell a New Mexico artist, I suspect that if his solo albums had featured an unknown singer many listeners would have guessed they were made elsewhere.

A language is defined not by its vocabulary, grammar, or accent, but by being shared and recognized by a group of people who define themselves as sharing it. In those terms Martínez's solo work is undoubtedly part of the current New Mexico music genre. But the fact that one recognizes a language as one's own in general terms does not mean it sounds like what one recalls from one's childhood or associates with one's local traditions. I do not have a strong Boston accent, nor do a lot of my friends in Boston, and yet if I hear that strong accent it instantly takes me back to high school and the feeling of being surrounded by kids

⁴⁵² Fans and musicians at times make comments indicating this kind of ambiguity. Describing some recordings by a younger performer, Bryan Olivas, John Montoya said, "I don't

who talked that way. I do not think of that accent as more legitimately Bostonian than mine, but it signals Boston to me in a way my own accent and the accents of most college-educated Bostonians do not. In certain rooms I also notice my own accent shifting toward that speech style, because it goes along with a certain feeling of local camaraderie. It not only sounds like Boston to me, it is how I sound when I feel most Bostonian.

On the radio, New Mexico music fans have always heard a wider variety of music than they heard at local clubs, dance halls, and family events, be it Mexican ranchera, Californian or East Coast rock 'n' roll, or the latest bands from San Antonio. Similarly, New Mexico artists have always recorded in styles they did not play at dances—to take an obvious example, from Al Hurricane and Roberto Griego in the 1960s to Matthew Martínez and Darren Cordova today, New Mexico stars have demonstrated their fealty to older ranchera traditions by occasionally recording with a mariachi. Nonetheless, there is a core style that people expect to hear if they go out dancing to a New Mexico music band, and when I ask them what makes New Mexico music special, that is the style they typically describe. It is not traditional New Mexico music in the sense of sonically resembling what was played in the region before the 1960s, but it is fervently traditional in the sense that it explicitly rejects the sort of innovation and originality Martínez is proud of in his solo work. A “traditional” band may have its own somewhat distinctive repertoire, but maintains a narrowly defined local accent—as Janice said, the bands may be “kind of different, but it’s all the same.” Their music evokes a shared conception of a shared past, and the most popular bands are popular because they explicitly and predictably reflect that conception and provide a visceral connection to that past.

know, to me that’s not New Mexico music, you know? Well, I mean, it’s New Mexico music, but

it's more of a Tex-Mex feel."

6. Core Region, Core Repertoire

My first live experience of New Mexico music was at a fiesta sponsored by Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque on October 6 and 7, 2012, the first weekend of my field research in the state. The fiesta included performances by fifteen bands or solo artists, including Al Hurricane and Al Hurricane Jr., Darren Cordova, Gonzalo, and El Gringo, as well as numerous two- and three-song spots by children and amateurs, and provided a roughly representative survey of current styles and performers. It also gave me some sense of the current audience and dance styles—the most consistent dancers were older people, some apparently in their seventies or eighties, who came at noon and danced into the early evening, and there were also many younger couples, often with children, though most only danced through one or two bands rather than staying the whole day. A few of the oldest dancers were in festive western wear, the men in embroidered cowboy shirts and the women in long skirts or dresses, like the showier dancers of the same generation in country and western dance halls, but most people were in normal street clothes. A few men sported other distinctive looks: long, pointed cowboy boots; large football jerseys; 1950s-era black pachuco shirt, hat, and sunglasses; or cholo tattoos that in a couple of instances covered not only arms but shaved heads. Some of the women wore spike heels and tight skirts. In general, though, the crowd looked like families at a fair rather than people dressed up for dancing or partying (see Figure 5).

All ages seemed to know the basic dance styles—ranchera and cumbia—but the majority of dancers were in their thirties or older. The only band that got a significant proportion of teenagers on the floor was a local *norteño* group, apparently reflecting the growing proportion of Mexican immigrant families in

the parish.⁴⁵³ Daniel Vivian, who booked the entertainment, said that the young Mexican-identified parishioners always lobby for more norteño but he has to be careful because other people did not like that music much: although the norteño band brought out the young dancers, it was the only group in two days that the regular dancers chose to sit out.

⁴⁵³ The 2008-12 census estimate puts the Mexican-born population of the Albuquerque metro region at 55,155 (6.2% of the total population), and Holy Rosary is on the far west side of the city, a particular center of immigrant settlement. When one adds the US-born children of immigrant parents—who seemed to make up the bulk of the young norteño dancers at the fiesta—they could easily constitute a majority of teen-aged parishioners.



Figure 5: People attending the Holy Rosary Fiesta, Albuquerque, 2012.

I was still new to the New Mexico repertoire and did not recognize many songs, but was struck by the fact that virtually every band played “La múcura”—all but three of the dozen groups I heard included it in their sets, sometimes in a medley with another cumbia, “A mover el bote.” The audience clearly had no objections to this repetition, since the song consistently filled the dance floor. “Puño de tierra” was also common, played by at least four bands, two of which tried to get the audience to sing along on the final chorus, though with little success. (Two women sitting near me, who had recognized and applauded several songs from the first notes of instrumental introduction, commented on their inability to sing along, suggesting that they knew the song and wanted to join in, but did not know the lyric.)

Although I could not identify most of the other songs, over the course of the weekend many began to sound familiar, and as I attended more New Mexico music events and interviewed artists and radio programmers I was struck by the ubiquity of a relatively small core repertoire. At the Santa Claran Casino in Española, a young singer named Miguel Timoteo performed between two sets by Perfección de Chimayó, and his set included four songs that Perfección also played: “La múcura,” “Brown-Eyed Girl,” “Volver, volver,” and “Cumbia de San Antone.” All four are local standards, but it still seemed odd to me that a young artist trying to make a name for himself would duplicate much of the set list of the headlining band—especially since “La múcura,” “Volver, volver” and “Brown-Eyed Girl” are selections one, five, and six on Perfección’s *Puros Exitos!* (Greatest Hits) CD.

When I mentioned my surprise at this duplication to Matthew Martínez of Perfección, his immediate response was, “And the reaction from the people was probably just as strong... The funny thing is, even at dances at times, I’ll see that

the same people who were there at the beginning, [who] will already have heard ‘La múcura,’ will ask for it again later on in the night. So they’ll want to hear it again.” His wife Janice pointed out that Perfección is particularly known for “La múcura” and “Brown-Eyed Girl,” so even if another band has already played those songs they have to include them in every show, “and they never get old, because they play it in such a certain way.” I asked whether they were at all annoyed that Timoteo chose to play some of their biggest hits on a show they were headlining and Matthew said, “No. Especially ‘La múcura,’ it’s not, because our style of playing it is so different that it could very well be a different song.”

This explanation may make sense for hardcore fans, but from an outsider’s point of view New Mexico bands play “La múcura” pretty similarly—all the versions derive from Al Hurricane’s or from his version as filtered through Perfección.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, the fact that the performances sound similar, and therefore familiar, is basic to their appeal. When I told John Montoya, the original lead guitarist for Cuarenta y Cinco, that I was surprised to hear certain songs played so frequently, he acknowledged that there is a lot of repetition, but added, “If you don’t play ‘Brown-Eyed Girl,’ you might as well just pack it up and go home, you know? Everybody plays ‘La múcura’ or—” (his son Reyes prompted, “Puño de tierra”) —“‘Calles de San Antone.’ And you know, but those are songs that people want to hear. I mean, yeah, there’s—it’s sacrilege not to play some of these songs, you know?”

Some New Mexico musicians have mixed feelings about the overlaps and repetition in the local repertoire. The hesitations in Montoya’s response suggest

⁴⁵⁴ This is a bone of contention between the Hurricanes and Perfección, since Al recorded the song in the 1970s, but over the years reshaped it in live performance, dropping his original guitar introduction and adding a section in which he inserts out the names of his musicians. Perfección based their recording on this version, which Al had not recorded, and it became a

that he shares this ambivalence, and he and his wife Rose say that when they are on multi-artist programs they try to arrange their sets so they won't do a song the previous band played. However, he seemed more amused than troubled by the situation, saying that he recently had his iPod set to play songs in alphabetical order and found that he had six different versions of "Brown-Eyed Girl," five of them by local bands. He understood why an outsider might be surprised at the extent of such repetition, but added, "it's not a big insult" if when his group has finished "the next band comes up and they play exactly the same set." Like Martínez, he suggested this was OK in part because "everybody's come up with different ways of playing." However, he also noted that everybody has to preserve key parts of the familiar arrangements, in particular the instrumental introduction: "because that's how people would identify it. You know, if you go to a dance, before people get up to dance, if you play a completely different lead they're gonna sit there for a little while and say, 'Well, what song is that?' ... So if I'm gonna pick up a guitar and say, 'Well, let's play "Rumbo al sur,"' you've got to have some identifier to the beginning of that song." Specifically, in that instance, one has to play the instrumental introduction from the Al Hurricane recording. Montoya and Perfección have adapted the Hurricanes' horn arrangement to electric guitar and some later bands may have imitated their guitar versions rather than going back to the Hurricane original, but everybody plays roughly the same "identifier." Any divergence from that basic pattern is likely to be involuntary, due to failure to pick out the original licks exactly as recorded or to technical limitations on the part of particular players.

Familiar songs get people on the dance floor faster and more reliably than unfamiliar songs because they trigger memories of performances that have been

major radio hit. Al then recorded it himself, but Al Jr. continues to feel that Perfección to some

heard and enjoyed in the past. Dancers often react more spontaneously to favorite songs than to favorite bands—at the Holy Rosary fiesta, some artists were clearly more popular than others, in terms of how many fans were watching and applauding, but “La múcura” reliably filled the dance floor no matter who was playing it.

In the 1940s Campa wrote that New Mexico musicians were particularly prone to recycle familiar melodies, adding, “This lack of musical inventiveness is not a new thing here. Years ago, it was noted by American travelers who visited New Mexico in the middle of the past century.”⁴⁵⁵ He added that even when musicians wanted to expand beyond the standard local repertoire they were more likely to adopt songs from Mexican recordings than to compose their own. This remains a fair generalization in terms of what is played at dances, though perhaps less for what is recorded or played on the radio. In the fall of 2012, record store owners in Taos and Española agreed that Grupo Mezcal’s new CD was their biggest recent seller and ascribed this success to the fact that the band members write all their own songs. But at dances the point is not to please listeners with novel or interesting material, it is to get people moving. In this respect the New Mexico scene preserves patterns that were once much more widespread: Montoya’s comment on “Brown-Eyed Girl” is almost exactly what the rock ’n’ roll singer Dale Hawkins told me about a popular East Coast dance standard of the early 1960s: “If you didn’t play ‘Shout’ you might just as well stay home.”⁴⁵⁶

In the 1960s there was often very little overlap between what bands played at dances and what they recorded: everyone played “Shout,” but very few groups bothered to include it on their albums, and the three recordings of the song that

extent appropriated and got credit for his father’s arrangement.

⁴⁵⁵ Campa, *Spanish Folk-Poetry*, 129-30.

⁴⁵⁶ Wald, *How the Beatles*, 221.

had any significant diffusion were aimed at somewhat different markets.⁴⁵⁷ In earlier eras it was far more common for bands to record their versions of the latest hits—as late as the 1950s, any popular hit tended to be available in multiple versions, some relatively distinctive but others very similar to what other bands had recorded. As recording became more central to pop music marketing, particular records were canonized as “the original version” or “the hit version,” and a dichotomy developed in which local working bands played the current hits at dances but tried to come up with original material if they made recordings. To some extent the New Mexico music scene has followed this pattern—radio programmers say they encourage new artists to avoid recording the same old songs—but since the 1990s some of the most popular bands have made their reputations by recycling familiar material on recordings as well as at dances. Five of the first nine songs on Perfección’s *Puros Exitos!* album were previously recorded by Al Hurricane, and two of the others are the ubiquitous “Brown-Eyed Girl” and “Volver, volver.” In most musical environments this would stamp them as a cover band, but I never heard anyone describe Perfección in those terms. On the contrary, while Matthew Martínez acknowledges the band’s sources he also frames their hits as novel contributions to the local repertoire:

“La múcura” would probably be Al Hurricane originally, and then it was our group that recorded it first out here... It was our very first hit, and I think other than Al Hurricane we were the first ones that recorded it out here... Everybody does [“Brown-Eyed Girl”], but I think we probably were the first that recorded that too... “Rosa Maria” is another one that’s kind of considered, we’re

⁴⁵⁷ “Shout” was a hit first for the Isley Brothers in 1959; in 1962 for Joey Dee and the Starlites, the racially mixed band that led the twist craze; and in 1964 for the English singer Lulu,

considered the band for that song. In fact, if you listen to KANW, ours is the one that's always been played there... We actually got it from an old record of Al Hurricane's, from way back in the day. And we remade it. In fact, it was only available on record, and at that time cassettes were the big thing, and I had found an old record, 'cause I had access to a lot of old music, working at KDCE, so I found an old record of it and I was like, "We gotta do this."

The extent to which listeners associate songs with particular artists undoubtedly varies from person to person and song to song. When I asked Casey Gallegos of KDCE if "La múcura" was associated with a particular band, he said, "No, everybody does that," but when I mentioned to John Montoya that I was startled to hear Perfección and Timoteo play so many overlapping selections, he immediately responded, "If Perfección didn't play 'La múcura' it'd be a little weird, you know? Because that was their first single that really made 'em."

In mainstream commercial pop music, a band would typically regard "their first single that really made 'em" as at least to some extent proprietary material. But although New Mexico musicians sometimes frame their repertoire in those terms, taking pride in particular hits and innovations, they more often frame it as part of a broad and deep tradition. Perfección and Cuarenta y Cinco, in particular, are known for playing "traditional Northern New Mexico music," have largely defined themselves in those terms, and have influenced other bands to do the same.

It is somewhat contradictory to single out particular groups as defining the traditional style, since the whole idea of tradition is that it is shared. When I characterized Perfección or Cuarenta y Cinco in those terms to New Mexico

in the first wave of the British Invasion. (Whitburn, Joel, *Top Pop Singles 1955-1990*.)

music fans, including members of those groups, their typical response was to mention names of other bands and performers who are similar. Even when I sought to differentiate their work with specific stylistic examples, local musicians and fans often disputed my categorization: descriptions of the Northern New Mexico style routinely highlight fast tempos and the use of electric guitar rather than horns, and Perfección and Cuarenta y Cinco in particular are distinguished by their prominent guitar leads and the speed of their rancheras. Nonetheless both they and their fans speak of their style as carrying on the tradition of Purple Haze and the Blue Ventures, the most popular Española-area bands of the 1970s, although those bands' recordings featured horn sections or keyboards rather than guitars and played at significantly slower tempos.⁴⁵⁸ Eddie Roybal, another influential local bandleader of that decade, did record at faster tempos (his rancheras average about 130 BPMs, compared to 114 for Purple Haze and 110 for the Blue Ventures) and used lead guitar somewhat more frequently, but although he was a guitarist, keyboards remained the most prominent instrument on his recordings and his tempos were consistently slower than the first Al Hurricane records or many selections recorded by "traditional" northern groups since the 1990s.

It is unclear how common it was for northern dance bands and their fans to characterize their style as "traditional" before the 1990s, but period evidence suggests that they were less wedded to that frame. Album covers from the 1970s position the artists in the mainstream pop-rock styles of their time, with long hair

Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 1991; Wald, *How the Beatles*, 220-21.)

⁴⁵⁸ Purple Haze was led by the Salazar brothers, both of whom were guitarists, and John Montoya insists that their early recordings featured guitar leads, but although both are listed as playing lead and rhythm guitar on their first LP, *Viejo el viento*, it is never the primary instrument and all the prominent instrumental fills are played by horns or keyboards. His memory may indicate that guitars were more prominent in their live performances, though Montoya was too

and psychedelic clothing, and they consistently favored rock nomenclature.

Walker writes that Louis Sánchez led bands called the Comets and the Royal Rockers before forming the Blue Ventures,⁴⁵⁹ and Ernie Montoya of Cuarenta y Cinco says:

You could tell just by the name where did the influence come from, was a rock-type thing, you know wh'I mean? And that was so it would be catchy: if people heard Purple Haze, Blue Ventures—all the bands that came out of that era, like Al Hurricane and the Night Rockers... It was the way to catch the generation that was there into coming to the dances... The people in that generation were taught English and they were taught to think English is where it is, but it came back later on where, in the eighties and in the nineties, where I think people were more proud.

Perfección and Cuarenta y Cinco are probably the most influential northern bands since the 1990s—at least in terms of what is played at dances—and it makes sense to discuss them in tandem because that is how the groups evolved. Ernie Montoya and Henry Martínez Jr. are the same age and began playing music together when they were eleven or twelve. Martínez had learned guitar from his father, Henry Sr., whose parents and uncles had a Beto Villa-style orchestra in the 1940s and who led local bands in the 1960s and 1970s called the Paisanos (when speaking English he says “the Paisanos,” not “los Paisanos”) and the Serenaders. Montoya started “tinkering with the guitar” at about age nine, but says Henry Jr. was much more advanced and “when I met up with [him], that’s when I got a real idea of what I was supposed to be doing. You know, he gave me a real quick

young to have heard them live. Louis Sánchez, leader of the Blue Ventures and father of the other band members, played saxophone in some line-ups of the Purple Haze.

⁴⁵⁹ Walker, “Family Music,” 302.

lesson on what it took to play like what I had been hearing on records and stuff.”

John Montoya and Matthew Martínez are ten years younger than Ernie and Henry Jr., and grew up hearing their brothers. Ernie would play rhythm guitar and sing while Henry played lead, and John says, “Henry was a big part of having to do with the stuff I play, if you listen to what I play and you had listened to what he plays.”

Matthew Martínez learned trumpet and keyboard in school and occasionally sat in with his father and brother, who by that time were playing with a family band from Truchas called Los Martínez (led by three generations of musicians from an unrelated Martínez family). In the late 1980s they formed their own trio playing “New Mexico music, country, and oldies,” and Matthew also formed a high school band called Los Jovenes (The Young Ones) with John Montoya in which he played electric bass and John played lead guitar. A video of the Española Valley High School talent show from 1990 shows Los Jovenes playing a medley that segues from Tiny Morrie’s “Las orillas del mar” into Del Shannon’s 1961 rock ’n’ roll hit “Runaway” and the 1963 surf instrumental “Wipe-Out.”⁴⁶⁰

A year later, Matthew persuaded his parents to buy a sound system rather than hosting his graduation party, and the three Martínezes booked time at John Wagner’s studio in Albuquerque and recorded the first *Perfección de Chimayó* cassette. John had meanwhile been sitting in with Ernie in a band called *Tradición*, led by an older musician named Tony Atencio, and had gradually taken over the lead guitar duties. Atencio retired in 1991 and the Montoyas hired a drummer and bass player, named their group *Cuarenta y Cinco*, and, inspired by the success of *Perfección*’s cassette, recorded their first album, *Y sus cuatro cargadores*. It included a ranchera standard from the 1940s, “Traigo mi .45,”

which provided both the band name and album title: the lyric begins “Traigo mi cuarenta y cinco, con sus cuatro cargadores” (“I carry my .45, with its four clips of ammunition”), and the title is a play on words, since *cargadores* can refer to the four musicians who “carry” the band.⁴⁶¹

Perfección and Cuarenta y Cinco helped lead a turn toward a more stripped-down, rock ’n’ roll-oriented style of New Mexico music, though the musicians typically cast this not as a modern innovation or fusion, but as traditionalism and a return to earlier styles. Matthew Martínez expresses pride in having inspired other local players, while firmly positioning himself in a chain of tradition-bearers:

My dad, his whole story of music, has a lot to do with Northern New Mexico music. And I believe that our music, and his music, has influenced a lot of groups to go out and record. Just as we were influenced by Al Hurricane. Originally, when we recorded our first [cassette]...we recorded about eighty percent of Al Hurricane’s music that we redid. He was our major influence. And I think the way he influenced us, we influenced a lot of groups that are off now recording.

Ernie Montoya suggests the overlap of innovation and traditionalism even more strongly, positioning himself as a groundbreaking revivalist:

When I started back in ninety-two, some of the *big* names, like Al Hurricane and Darren Cordova and these guys told me that the style of music that we were playing would never come back,

⁴⁶⁰ “Espanola Valley High talent show 2,” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTpKnIWmSyI>, accessed 1/24/14.

⁴⁶¹ Although Cuarenta y Cinco’s logo shows a Colt .45 revolver, the favored gun of cowboy movies and lore, the song refers to the Colt M1911 automatic, the standard Mexican army pistol, which was also .45 caliber, but came with multiple clips or magazines.

and I kind of proved them wrong, because I *knew* it would come back, because...when I went anywhere, like to parties or birthday parties or whatever, the first thing people went to the juke box and put in, or the record player or cassette player, was music of that style.

Montoya situates this music as part of a still older tradition, saying, “They played the same stuff back in the fifties and the forties, and the thirties, but it was just done acoustically...technology has moved it along, but it’s still the same music.” He recalls with pleasure a conversation in which the Texan star Freddy Fender told him New Mexico bands sounded “folksy,” meaning “we were caught playing the old style of music.” On the other hand, he also stresses the uniqueness of his sound, saying, “The music that Cuarenta y Cinco’s known for is not something that you hear on anybody else’s CDs. A lot of people try to mimic it, but it’s not the same.” This tension is not simply between traditionalism and innovation, but between Montoya’s pride in his deep connection to local culture and history and his pride in leading what by some measures is the most popular band in Northern New Mexico. Variations of this tension come up again and again in his descriptions of the local style:

It doesn’t take very much, it doesn’t take no rocket science to play New Mexico style music—it’s just a style of music that most people *can’t* play because you kinda gotta grow up doing it, it’s kind of like that hillbilly picking..., you can’t play like that unless you’ve grown up doing that. That’s the kind of way New Mexico music is. It’s not easy to play but it *is* easy to play in the sense that how it’s arranged is easy, but to play it is not easy. People find that out real quick, like, ’cause when they try playing the stuff that we

play, 'cause it's quicker than they think and it's a lot more progressive than they think.

Montoya says his guitar work is based on earlier local styles, but also on “conversions from the trumpets” on recordings by larger bands, and while he consistently stresses his roots in local tradition he also credits the formal training his generation of local players received in high school, speaking of the high quality of his school's “stage band”:

I grew up in a time when probably the transition from the old-style musician, which wasn't schooled, to somebody who was—I'm not schooled in music either, but we had more of a refined type of a, you had better guitar players that came along, so you learned from what they had already refined, you know what I mean? And we just took it to a little different level.

On the other hand, he argues that the northern style is still distinguished by a lack of formal training and this gives northern bands an advantage over their peers in Albuquerque:

The musicians up here are rarely, *rarely* schooled. They're all self-taught, you know, they don't read music, they don't understand music, and the ones over there are schooled musicians. They're better musicians than we are, for sure, you know what I mean? In the sense—musically—but they don't seem to rise to the occasion of being able to produce music consistently that's good like it is here. People love the music from *Northern* New Mexico, I don't—the only thing I can tell you is it comes from the heart.

Once again, the apparent contradiction is less a matter of facts than of emphasis—in both Albuquerque and the north, some musicians are more trained

than others, but the idea of a traditional heartland goes along with an idea of musicians who learn and understand their music in traditional ways. Thus the paradox that Perfección, Cuarenta y Cinco, and the other northern bands of the early 1990s clearly shifted the direction of New Mexico music, but their main influence was an increased focus on traditionalism and canonizing a core repertoire. Previous artists and bands performed popular favorites when they appeared at dances, but when they made records they tended to showcase new or at least relatively unfamiliar material. It is hard to quantify this change, since many recordings of the 1980s were released only on cassette and have not survived, but a survey of LPs and reissue CDs suggests that Perfección's choice to record "about eighty percent of Al Hurricane's music" on their first cassette marked a departure from earlier trends. Montoya made this choice explicit by titling the third Cuarenta y Cinco album *Puras conocidas* (Only Familiar Ones) *vol I*, and following it with volumes II and III. These albums were extremely successful on the local market, and undoubtedly influenced other artists to record similarly tried-and-true material. (At least one, Daniel Lee Gallegos, even adopted the *Puras conocidas* title for his release.) In the process, they helped to define a core New Mexico repertoire. Of the seventeen Spanish-language selections on Cuarenta y Cinco's first two *Puras conocidas* albums, ten have been recorded by at least five other New Mexico bands, and anyone working the regional circuit is expected to be able to perform all but a couple of them.⁴⁶² Many of these songs

⁴⁶² Since many if not most New Mexico recordings since the 1970s have been released by the artists themselves, sold only in local stores and at concerts, and often allowed to go out of print, there is no way to tabulate an exhaustive list of releases, much less of the songs they include. The closest thing to a central repository is the online catalog of CDs available from Atlantisdiscs.com, the largest distributor of New Mexico music. However, some artists do not use Atlantis, and much of what was available on LP or cassette has not been issued on CD. As a result, the numbers I have derived from searching the Atlantis site are just a demonstrable minimum: the fact that the site includes recordings of "Puño de tierra" by twelve different New Mexico artists proves that at least that many exist, but by no means exhausts the actual count.

are also “conocidas” more broadly—“Puño de tierra” seems to be the most recorded song in the local repertoire, with over a dozen versions available, and a quick Spotify search turns up an additional sixty recordings of the song from Mexico and elsewhere in the Southwest.

Cuarenta y Cinco’s English-language selections are less widely recorded by local bands, but that does not mean they are less familiar or ubiquitous—New Mexico bands rarely include more than one or two English songs per album, so they simply don’t get around to recording most of their English language repertoire. The English songs also tend to be associated with specific non-New Mexico artists: New Mexico musicians do not tend to associate “Puño de tierra” with any particular singer before Al Hurricane, although most are probably aware that it originated in Mexico, but everyone knows that “The Cowboy Rides Away” was originally a hit for the Texas country star George Strait. Since the song is associated with Strait, it is not emblematic of local heritage, or at least is linked to local heritage in a different way. The act of singing English-language country hits may be considered part of the local tradition, and that song in particular evokes nostalgia for a shared western rural lifestyle, but it has a known modern provenance and is not considered a New Mexico song. Oldies like “Runaway” and “Johnny B. Goode” evoke yet another kind of local nostalgia, for the dances and generation of the 1950s, and many dancers cannot say who recorded the original hit versions, but they are likewise recognized as generically “American” rather than specifically New Mexican.

Although my understanding of how the core repertoire evolved is necessarily based to a great extent on a survey of recordings—there are no surviving lists of what selections were played at dances in previous eras—it may be a mistake to overemphasize their role, since the experience of most New

Mexico fans has been shaped at least as much by live performances as by records or radio. Walker writes, “In my interviews with fans, not once did anyone pull out a record of their favorite band to talk about recorded songs. Instead, they told me stories about their experiences with the people in those bands at shows and elsewhere.” Some also spoke of the thrill of hearing particular songs on the radio, and she noted that radio requests confirmed “the strong connections that New Mexico music fans had with their local bands’ performances of songs, versus definitive recordings of those same songs.” Indeed, she found that many fans “assumed songs were written by Nuevomexicano groups, even ones by well-known [Mexican] composers like José Alfredo Jiménez.”⁴⁶³

Musicians are typically more knowledgeable about the sources of their material than their fans are, and the people I interviewed tended to be well aware that most songs in the local Spanish repertoire originated with Mexican ranchera artists, but they nonetheless associate those songs with favorite local performers rather than “definitive recordings” from Mexico or Texas. They know Al Hurricane got “Johnny B. Goode” from Chuck Berry’s record and “Brown Eyed Girl” is by Van Morrison, but when it comes to Spanish material they rarely trace it beyond New Mexico. When I asked Henry Sr. and Matthew Martínez of Perfección to identify the artists associated with some familiar songs, they ascribed “Puño de tierra” and “Vestido mojado” to Hurricane, “El asesino” to Tiny Morrie, “Golpe traidor” to Morrie’s wife Gloria Pohl, and “La lamparita” to Eddie Roybal. The only song they associated with a Mexican artist was “Volver, volver,” which Matthew ascribed to Vicente Fernández, and even in that case he quickly added, “He’s not the original, I think the original is probably José Alfredo Jiménez. But for New Mexico music, my dad’s the one who recorded that, in

⁴⁶³ Walker, “Family music,” 330-331.

ninety-two.” This response is particularly revealing because “Volver, volver” is a relatively recent composition, first recorded in 1973 and popularized on both sides of the border by Fernández, but although Martínez is an experienced radio deejay and instantly made this association, he countered it with an assumption that the song must be older and associated with other artists as well. By contrast, although the Martínezes are aware that all the songs I mentioned began as Mexican ranchera hits, their ascriptions to New Mexico artists were not softened with guesses about who might have recorded those songs earlier or elsewhere.

This discrepancy is not just a matter of local pride; it reflects differing relationships to Mexican and New Mexican recordings. In terms of how songs are established in the local canon, Mexican recordings of a familiar song are understood as coming from elsewhere, performed in another style, and thus as raw material for local artists to adapt to the New Mexico style, while New Mexico recordings are understood as representing the local style and repertoire. Ernie Montoya knows that most of his songs were imported from Mexico, but still stresses the process of direct, live transmission, suggesting that these songs are part of a shared local tradition: speaking of *Al Hurricane*, he says, “A lot of the songs, even the songs he has recorded, are songs that he picked up just going around playing for dances, that he heard other people play.”

Montoya extends that idea of “going around” and interacting directly with other people on the scene to all aspects of the local music business:

I know everybody in the area, in Colorado—I can drive up there, and it’s always better to go up there and talk to them personally than to go on the phone, because when you do that then people tend to take it personally, you know what I mean? Even with the music, when I—I don’t do much music distribution

anymore for myself, I do it like two or three time a year, if there's a demand for it—but I'll go to the stores personally. Because people take it personally.

That process has become more difficult in recent years because much of the local music infrastructure has disappeared. Stores and clubs have closed, and although some of the slack is being picked up by internet sales and shows in Native American casinos, everyone concurs that CD sales have plummeted and gigs are harder to find. Montoya was the only person I spoke with who continues to work as much as he would like—in October 2012 his weekends were already booked solidly through the following September and he says he could be working weekdays as well if he wanted—but the majority of his jobs are private functions. He estimates that about half his work is at “traditional weddings,” where they accompany the *marcha* and *entrega de los novios* and provide music for dancing, and the rest is roughly evenly divided between private parties and jobs at nightclubs and casinos. Cuarenta y Cinco also tours more than other New Mexico music bands, traveling to Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and sometimes to Arizona, Nevada, and Texas.

While established bands like Cuarenta y Cinco and Perfección can work fairly regularly and tour outside the state, there are fewer opportunities for young bands and it is hard to see how newer groups will build a reputation that could carry them through to similarly solid, long-term careers. In the 1990s, Española still had a thriving club scene. The most regular venue was the Chamisa Inn, which had New Mexico music four or five nights a week: John Montoya remembers that the club held about 550 people and on Wednesdays, which were “Ladies’ Night,” with women admitted free, “it was five-fifty plus another fifty or sixty people waiting to get in.” There were also weekend gigs at smaller clubs that

held 150 or 200 people, particularly Johnny's Lounge and Red's, a combination lounge, liquor store, and steak restaurant, and Saturday night dances at the Legion Hut. A short way out of town, in Alcalde, the Blue Ventures had their Casa Nova Nite Club—the club is still there, with a sign advertising “Dancing Fri. * Sat. Nites,” but now is open only for private functions and occasional special presentations. There were also clubs in Santa Fe, Las Vegas, and Taos, and back-country roadhouses like the Valley Bar and Lounge in Chamita. A band with its own sound system and some hustle could build a regional reputation by playing clubs and dances, picking up a little cash while building musical and performance skills.

By 2010, that club scene had virtually disappeared, and in the fall of 2012 I found only three clubs in the state that regularly programmed New Mexico bands: the Caravan East in Albuquerque on Saturdays, a new bar called the Midtown Market and Lounge in Arroyo Hondo, near Taos, experimenting with live music once a week, and Darren Cordova's restaurant in Taos, which booked new local bands in a small bar area that might have held fifty customers if packed, but in my experience never had more than a dozen. In the Española area, the only regular live music venues are the casinos, several of which at times feature New Mexico groups—the Santa Claran in downtown Española was hosting New Mexico dances every Thursday, booked by Casey Gallegos of KDCE, and the Ohkay Owingeh, two miles north of town often had New Mexico bands on Friday or Saturday.

The decline in live music venues is not unique to New Mexico—throughout the United States, dancing has increasingly been done to recordings rather than bands ever since the 1950s, and since the 1970s much of the most popular dance music has been created in recording studios and cannot be performed live (except

in the sense that a deejay programming recordings is considered a live performance). Indeed, live dance music has held on better in Northern New Mexico than in many regions. There has nonetheless been a dramatic decline since the 1990s, and most people on the scene attribute this to two causes: the arrival of the casinos and harsher laws against drunk driving.⁴⁶⁴ Ernie Montoya says that when the first casinos opened in the late 1990s they seemed very enthusiastic about New Mexico music, but “ultimately their goal is not to have a dance on Saturday or Friday or Thursday or Wednesday or whatever, their goal is to get you to go in and play the machines and then the tables and stuff. So what they did is that they essentially took over all the music scene, and then...once they saw they had it, they just dropped it.” The two or three casinos that book New Mexico bands currently provide the best-paying public gigs, but they typically do not charge admission for dances, which helped them lure customers from the bars and lounges that provided more regular work. In the same period, the police began cracking down on drunk driving, and everyone agrees that this seriously curtailed clubgoing. Many New Mexico music fans live in small towns or in the country, and a lot of the clubs were roadhouses, so it was normal for people to drive twenty or more miles to a dance and few couples are interested in a long night of dancing without liquid refreshment. This crack-down also helped the casinos drive out the smaller clubs, since most casinos have hotel rooms where customers can stay after a big night.

New Mexico music, along with country and western, still provides more work than other band styles. John Montoya noted that a lot of local kids grew up with heavy metal and might have preferred to play that style—a third brother,

⁴⁶⁴ The first significant casino in Northern New Mexico was the Cities of Gold in Pojoaque, just south of Española, which opened in July, 1995, but the serious incursion of casinos on the local music scene happened in the early 2000s.

Greg, halfway between Ernie and John in age, played guitar in a metal band and John suggests that the harder rock style may have influenced the stripped-down, guitar-heavy sound of Cuarenta y Cinco and Perfección—but the opportunities were not there: “It’s funny now, because a lot of those guys that played metal back in those days are all playing ranchera bands now. Because there’s not a market for the heavy metal stuff too much here.” When John left Cuarenta y Cinco he was replaced by a young guitarist named Steve Garcia who had previously played in a heavy metal group with the band’s new drummer, Archie Maestas, and Maestas says both of them considered New Mexico music old-fashioned, though they were familiar with the style from their parents. They joined Ernie’s band because it was performing more often than any other local group and only grew to appreciate the music after working with him for a while—to the point that when they left Cuarenta y Cinco in 2001 they formed a band called Orgullo, which bills itself as “The Pride Of Northern New Mexico.”

The evolution of teenaged metalheads into adult ranchera musicians is not simply a matter of economic necessity. Many of the people I interviewed, whether or not they play music professionally, describe themselves and their friends tracing a similar arc. Kevin Otero at KANW says the station’s core listenership is “Hispanic male and female, typically over the age of thirty-five,” and when I asked if he thought this was because older listeners were more familiar with the style or because it was better suited to an older audience, he said:

I think this music grows on them, actually. When they’re younger they don’t typically like this music. Some of the young people I’m around don’t really like the New Mexico music and they kind of put it in the category of “that Mexican/Spanish music”... But as their parents listen to it and they hear it, I think as

they get older, they accept it more and find themselves listening more than when they were young. I'm almost a case for that myself: When I was younger, I didn't really care for it. I would hear my mom listening on Saturday morning when she was making breakfast or whatever, and it was OK, I didn't *hate* it, but once I got older I grew to appreciate it.

Michael Brasher suggests that it is natural for kids who love heavy metal or hip-hop to be increasingly attracted to styles like New Mexico music and country and western as they get older: "At some point in Top Forty you always get to a point where you say, OK, my love song won't be 'If you haven't *been* to the ghetto, don't *go* to the ghetto.' You know?"⁴⁶⁵ John and Rose Montoya made the same point, and their twelve-year-old daughter Angelica chimed in to say, "At my school almost everybody listens to rap and hip-hop and all that other stuff, because to kids these days, like little kids and stuff, it's cool—exactly like they said. But mostly, if they get older, once they get older they'll just start transitioning into different kinds of genres."

Several people suggested that listeners are drawn to New Mexico music when they have children of their own and want to connect their family to their culture and heritage: Walker titled her dissertation, "Family music and family bands in New Mexico music," and one of her central themes is that the music reinforces ideas of family and heritage. The concept of heritage music, like the concept of heritage language and the broader concepts of heritage or tradition in general, assumes a relationship to one's past that is important in the present, along with a sense that this connection is in danger of being lost. Someone whose first

⁴⁶⁵ The quotation is from Naughty by Nature's "Everything's Gonna Be Alright" a.k.a. "Ghetto Bastard," though they say, "If you ain't never *been* to the ghetto, don't *come* to the ghetto."

language is Spanish is not referred to as learning or speaking “heritage Spanish,” though the language is typically what their parents and ancestors spoke. The idea of a heritage language is that it is not what one speaks in daily life, but is what one’s family spoke in the past and one has a connection to it for that reason, whether one speaks it or not.

It is common for young people to want to escape their parents’ strictures, including rejecting or downplaying their parents’ definitions of shared culture, and for some of those people to feel very differently when they become parents themselves. For example, it is fairly common for people who rejected their parents’ religious beliefs to nonetheless want their children to grow up with the experience of that religious background. For many New Mexicans, Spanish is an important part of their familial heritage and they would like their children to speak the language, though they may have considered it hick, uncool, or simply unnecessary when they were young and may not speak it themselves. Similarly, they may want their children to be aware of New Mexico music and to know how to dance the traditional styles, though they had little interest in the music when they were younger.

The connection between speaking Spanish and enjoying New Mexico music is not simply an analogy: for many people the music serves at least to some extent as a stand-in for linguistic proficiency. Someone who cannot converse comfortably in Spanish but can dance comfortably to Spanish music maintains a connection to both the music and the language, and it is far easier to maintain that musical connection—to recognize familiar songs, enjoy dancing to them, and feel that they are one’s special music—than to maintain fluency in a language that is rarely spoken in one’s daily life.

The shift from fluency to recognition is inextricably part of any shift from

normal to traditional. What our ancestors did or spoke every day becomes something we recognize as our heritage, and that recognition defines our traditions and heritage. A young Hispanic or Chicana who says “*ándale*” while speaking English is preserving a bit of Spanish linguistic heritage because she recognizes the word as Spanish. In etymological terms, words like *canyon* and *rodeo* also derive from Spanish heritage, but since they are part of normal English speech they are not typically recognized or singled out as Spanish, and if the same speaker uses those words she is not referencing her Hispanic heritage any more than she is referencing German influence when she says “hamburger”—though engaging in rodeo events may well be recognized as regional heritage. In the same way, few if any New Mexicans think of themselves as referencing a Middle European influence when they dance a polka or varsoviana, but both dances are firmly associated with New Mexico Spanish heritage. Where the steps or rhythms originated and how they got to the Southwest may be historically interesting, and if pressed I would guess most people are at least vaguely aware that those dances did not come from Spain, but in terms of personal heritage they are recognized as Spanish.

The increased reliance on a core New Mexico music repertoire fits this shift from fluency to recognition. Al Hurricane and Henry Martínez Sr. could enjoy the wordplay of Lalo Guerrero’s pachuco songs and the romantic lyrics of José Alfredo Jiménez and considered that music theirs although it was not from New Mexico, because it was the music of their generation, was within a continuum of Spanish-language culture, and expressed ideas or sensibilities that were meaningful to them. If they asserted a specifically New Mexican identity in their performance of those songs, it was by playing electric guitars and saxophones rather than accordions or mariachi instruments—by Americanizing and

modernizing the material, asserting a rock 'n' roll identity that differentiated it from Mexican ranchera as well as from the big band swing and rural fiddle tunes of their parents and grandparents. In the 1960s and 1970s this process was part of a wider southwestern movement and few musicians seem to have thought of themselves as forging or preserving a uniquely New Mexican style. They maintained links to their contemporaries in Texas and in Mexican ranchera, going to shows and buying records by Little Joe and Augustín Ramírez, Antonio Aguilar and Cornelio Reyna, and were proud when their records were successful across state or national borders.

Musicians and fans who grew up in the 1990s, by contrast, were far less fluent in Spanish, so conceptions of “their” Spanish music were increasingly shaped by relationships to local bands and artists and to songs familiar from local recordings and radio play. Where previous generations had thought of Mexican ranchera as a natural soundtrack to their Spanish-speaking selves, younger artists and listeners did not recognize contemporary Mexican music as theirs—their connection to Spanish was as a cultural heritage and required a soundtrack that connected them to their ancestral past rather than to contemporary Mexico. For people who do not speak conversational Spanish, dancing or singing along with familiar songs provides a way of fluently communicating in the language, and more than that, of communicating with native proficiency in one’s own local accent. Casey Gallegos says he can always pick out the Mexican immigrants from the locals at a New Mexico dance, because “the way they dance is way different.” As with speech, the affirmation of a local dialect is sometimes phrased as an inability to communicate with someone from a different region: people often spoke of New Mexico Spanish as having words that outsiders cannot understand and when Gallegos talked about New Mexico artists adopting a tejano sound he

said that although some people like that style, “we have a hard time dancing to it.”

None of the older people I interviewed suggested they or their neighbors had any trouble dancing to the music of Antonio Aguilar or Little Joe, nor does anyone on the current scene suggest they have trouble dancing to the music of Chuck Berry or George Strait. The process by which Mexican and tejano music are singled out as problematic goes along with the increasingly narrow definition of a New Mexico style and repertoire. It makes logical sense for Darren Cordova to talk about broadening his appeal by using accordion, or for Jerry Dean to talk about attracting younger listeners by writing songs in English, but to the extent New Mexico music is valued as a symbol of local heritage, it is valued because it resists change and distinguishes Hispanic New Mexicans from everyone else.

In purely pragmatic terms, the decrease in conversational Spanish fluency pushes both artists and listeners to rely increasingly on a limited, familiar repertoire. Someone who is not fluent in Spanish will have some difficulty searching out new Spanish-language material that is suited to his personality and tastes, and still more trouble composing new songs, but can sing songs that have been familiar since childhood with the proficiency of a native speaker—though potentially without knowing what a “múcura” is or while thinking he is singing about a red demon rather than a red hair ribbon. Beyond such pragmatic considerations, familiar songs spark the feeling of recognition that is basic to any conception of tradition or heritage.

The increased reliance on a limited, core repertoire and range of instrumentation at New Mexico dances does not mean that only those songs or instruments are allowed, or that listeners consciously think in those terms. Grupo Mezcal is widely commended for playing original songs, even by listeners who cannot understand the Spanish lyrics. However, I found no sign that their

compositions are becoming part of the local repertoire—the fact that they grew up speaking Spanish and write comfortably in that language is meaningful for their audience as a connection to local heritage, but the songs themselves do not provide that connection. Many fans love Mezcal’s recent compositions, and even if they do not speak Spanish are aware of the meaning of songs like “Se los llevó,” a sentimental lyric about the death of the musicians’ parents, but if another band included one of those songs in a dance set it would not excite the reliable thrill of recognition that comes with the first notes of a familiar Al Hurricane or Tiny Morrie hit.

Any language is a shared system of familiar symbols or signifiers, and anything you share with other people is part of your shared language, because as a common point of reference it is part of your shared vocabulary. Recognizing “La *múcura*” as a familiar song shared by your friends and family gives it meaning despite the fact that virtually no one in New Mexico has ever used the word *múcura* in any other context. Familiar songs also provide the illusion and to some extent the reality of conversational control: many people who cannot form a Spanish sentence can sing familiar Spanish lyrics with the fluency and comprehension of a native speaker.

In more general terms, any conception of heritage or tradition is necessarily conservative, in the literal sense of preserving something. One can frame that in terms of invention, suggesting that the act of preservation is simultaneously a sort of innovation, or in terms of recognition, suggesting that the tradition or heritage was there before one thought of it in those terms and sought to preserve it. But either way one is defining limits, saying “this is where we come from,” “this is what we do,” or “this is what makes us different from other people.” It is the act of setting those limits rather than what one includes within them that separates

what is traditional from what is not: when Ernie Montoya describes his surf-flavored electric guitar style as traditional, he is referencing exactly the same past that folklorists reference when they say traditional New Mexico Spanish music consists of unamplified fiddle tunes, though he interprets his musical connection to that past differently.

Montoya is particularly clear about what does and does not belong in local tradition and draws some lines that might surprise or annoy other people on the current scene—for example, objecting to the shift from high school stage bands that covered Al Hurricane hits to mariachi:

Don't get me wrong, I love mariachi music, but it takes away from—right now, what it's doing, like instead of the high school having a stage band, like when I was there, that played Spanish music from the area, they play mariachi now, which is not from here... And it's beautiful and it's nice that they teach 'em, but it takes a lot of musicians that would normally be people in this area that would play the music from here, takes them over to mariachi.

Roberto Martínez might counter that his mariachi arrangements of Northern New Mexico fiddle tunes preserve a much older and more distinctively local repertoire than Cuarenta y Cinco's electric covers of tejano and Mexican ranchera hits, and a lot of folklorists would agree—it was Martínez's Reyes de Albuquerque, not Al Hurricane or the Blue Ventures, who were invited to represent New Mexico music at the Smithsonian's American Folklife Festival, and in many instances when I mentioned my research to academic experts on New Mexican musical traditions they tried to steer me towards Martínez or other performers who favor acoustic instruments. But Montoya's roots in rural Northern New Mexico are as deep as Martínez's, and the fact that half his work is still at

weddings, where he is hired specifically because he is considered a pillar of the local musical tradition and knows the correct pieces for the various parts of the ceremony, suggests that a lot of people share his conception of regional heritage. Several folklorists pointed out to me that the wedding march played by Montoya and other northern bands is “La marcha de Zacatecas,” which arrived from Mexico in the mid-twentieth century and has largely displaced the previous local *marcha*. That these folklorists formulate the limits of local tradition differently from a lot of musicians and listeners is in keeping with my broader point, which is that they agree about the importance of preserving the tradition of having a live band play a traditional “Marcha de los novios,” but define “traditional” in a way that defines their group—for folklorists, tradition is defined by their knowledge of the past, while for working musicians it is defined by their knowledge of how customers understand that past and choose to reference it in the present.

At present, the familiar repertoire of old favorites played by Cuarenta y Cinco, Perfección, and other small electric combos such as Chimayó Boyzz and Sangre Joven seems to be generally accepted by dancers and listeners as the definitive expression of the Northern New Mexico tradition. Those bands play alongside groups with horns and artists who focus on original compositions, and I never heard anyone suggest that the latter groups were not playing New Mexico music, but when I asked people to define the local tradition, almost everyone focused on electric guitars, fast tempos, and favorite songs. Given the diminishing opportunities for bands to establish themselves through live performance and the dependence on private events like weddings, along with decreasing Spanish skills, it seems likely that this core instrumentation and repertoire will increasingly define the limits of the New Mexico style. What is less clear is whether this conservatism will preserve the style as a vital expression of local tradition or

whether the same decrease in jobs and language skills that is narrowing the limits of local tradition will eventually make the music obsolete.

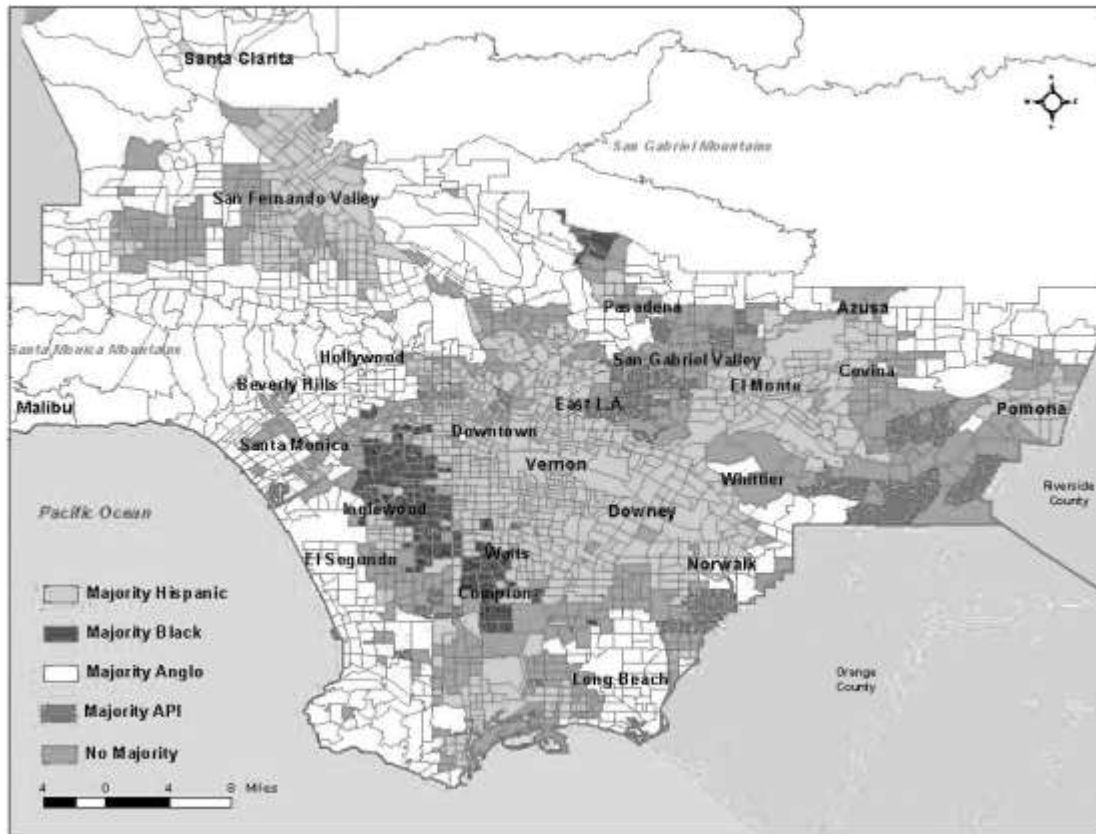
For the time being, the narrowing parameters of New Mexico music seem to have made it stronger than ever. From Las Vegas to Taos to Española, older fans tend to describe the bands of their youth as playing a much wider range of music than the current groups, but without anything like the same support from radio, cultural associations, and awards shows, or any sense that this broader repertoire represented a unique, important regional tradition. Where earlier musicians played “variety,” the current bands play New Mexico music—not Mexican, not Tejano—and in general the pressure is to preserve and canonize the familiar instrumentation and repertoire rather than to expand or innovate. In Ernie Montoya’s words:

People are real traditional here: the culture, the customs.

Especially here: I grew up in Española, which is the heart of Northern New Mexico, and everything emanates from here. You know, the people here are real, are real—I don’t want to say *aggressive*, but they don’t like people coming in and changing anything. You know, that’s kind of why people don’t like Española, because we don’t like any change. You know wh’I mean? People come in and want to change things, and we’re not, we’re not, we’re not gonna let it happen, you know wh’I mean? We like our customs, we like our culture, you know, we like it all. And that’s the way it’s gonna stay.

Section Three: Rapping Ranchera in Mexican Los Angeles

Los Angeles County: Racial/Ethnic Diversity 2000



Data Assembled by Michela Zonta and Paul Ong, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies

Map 2: Used by permission of Paul Ong, Michela Zonta, and the UCLA Lewis Center.

1. Local Background

In 2010 the US census counted a total population of almost ten million people in Los Angeles County, of whom 47% were “of Hispanic or Latino origin.” New Mexico had an almost identical proportion of Hispanic or Latino residents (46%), but the total population of the state was barely two million. Those numbers suggest the potential pitfalls of numeric comparisons, since on the one hand they imply that the population balance is in a way similar, but on the other they suggest very different environments. In terms of musical influence, it is significant that the African American population of New Mexico was only 2%, virtually none of whom were in the northern mountains where New Mexico music is strongest, while the African American population of LA County was just under 9%, has historically been substantially higher, and is largely in neighborhoods overlapping or adjacent to Mexican and Chicano barrios.⁴⁶⁶

Although both regions were at one time Spanish and then Mexican territory, the periods and patterns of Spanish settlement were very different. The New Mexican capital of Santa Fe was established in 1607; the settlement of Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles de Porciúncula (or some variant of that name) was established almost two hundred years later, in 1781. Even after there was an established Spanish or Mexican presence in Southern California, the number of settlers was much smaller and their relationship to local Native populations was very different, in part because unlike the Pueblo communities, which had organized towns and community structures to defend themselves from other Indian tribes long before the Spanish arrived, the preexisting Native communities were less able resist outsiders. In California, local Indians were quickly enslaved

⁴⁶⁶ Censusviewer.com, accessed 9/10/2014.

by incoming settlers and over the next century their presence as separate, distinct communities was to a great extent erased through death and mixture with Mexican and Afromestizo or African American newcomers.

Carey McWilliams described the social structure of Spanish California as similar to the plantation South: “the *gente de razón* were the plantation owners; the Indians were the slaves; and the Mexicans were the California equivalent of ‘poor white trash.’”⁴⁶⁷ His distinction between *gente de razón*—the upper classes—and the “Mexicans” is in some ways perplexing, since both groups came north from Mexico and spoke Spanish, but presumably was at least in part a distinction between settled *californios* and later Mexican immigrants or migrant laborers, and in that sense reflects a division that continues in the twenty-first century: in all periods the Latino population of Los Angeles has included a significant proportion of people who identify as local and also many recent or temporary migrants from Mexico who continue to identify and be identified as Mexican.

The situation in California also differed from New Mexico in terms of the ethnic make-up of the early settler population—historians of the region have often noted that 26 of the 44 original Spanish settlers of Los Angeles were listed as African or *mulato*. Josh Kun and Laura Pulido suggest that this has been overemphasized by recent writers eager to make the point “that Los Angeles has *always* been racially diverse”⁴⁶⁸ and their warning is appropriate—those numbers are rarely cited in any other context. But the fact that there were so many Africans and Afromestizos indicates how patterns of settlement had changed since the first settlers arrived in New Mexico, a handful of Spanish colonists accompanied by

⁴⁶⁷ McWilliams, Carey. *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1948, 90.

hundreds of Indians.

The differences between the two regions were exacerbated by the relative isolation of California until the mid-nineteenth century, the huge boom in Anglo settlement that began with the gold rush of 1849 and continued through the early twentieth century, the dramatic population shifts that began with the wartime industrial boom of the 1940s—including a huge wave of African American arrivals from Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas—and the massive immigration from Mexico and Central America since the 1980s.

In 1850, the United States census listed a total population of about 61,547 for New Mexico and 92,597 for California. By 1880 the New Mexico population had almost doubled to 118,430, but largely thanks to the gold rush the California population had more than nonupled, to 864,686. By 1900 California's population was almost one and a half million, while the population of New Mexico was still under two hundred thousand. The growth of Los Angeles County was even more striking, from 3,530 in 1850 to 33,381 in 1880 and 170,298 in 1900. But the really huge leap came in the early and mid-twentieth century: in 1900 Los Angeles had slightly over 10% of the state's total population, but by 1930 the county's population was over two million and accounted for almost 40% of the state total, a proportion it maintained as the overall state population almost doubled in the 1940s. That proportion would shrink over the second half of the century, but only because the state continued to grow at a dramatic pace—the county population more than doubled between 1950 and 2000, but the state population more than tripled.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ Kun, Josh, and Laura Pulido, eds. *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*. Berkeley: University of California, 2014, 9.

⁴⁶⁹ *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1900*; "Historical Resident Population City & County of Los Angeles, 1850 to 2010," at <http://www.laalmanac.com/population/po02.htm>, accessed 9/10/2014.

While the population of Los Angeles was constantly increasing, its ethnic make-up shifted in more complicated ways. In 1850 Mexicans were in the majority and at the turn of the century Hispanics seem to have still made up about 15% of the county's population, but by 1940 that proportion seems to have fallen to slightly over 2%, with fewer Latinos than African Americans. The Latino population quadrupled in the 1940s and, although the African American population also increased dramatically, by 1950 there were more Latinos than blacks in the county. Most were recent arrivals from Mexico, though many also came west from Texas and elsewhere in the Southwest. In 1970 the county had a Latino population of about one and a quarter million and a black population of three quarters of a million, respectively accounting for roughly 18 and 11 percent of the total population. The African American numbers would grow slightly in the 1970s, but then leveled off and shrank in the 1990s and 2000s, while the Latino numbers have continued to soar, topping two million by 1980, approaching three and a half million in 1990, and over four million by 2000. By that time there were slightly more Asians than African Americans, while Latinos had overtaken white Anglos as the county's single largest ethnic group—if one regards them as a single ethnic group.⁴⁷⁰

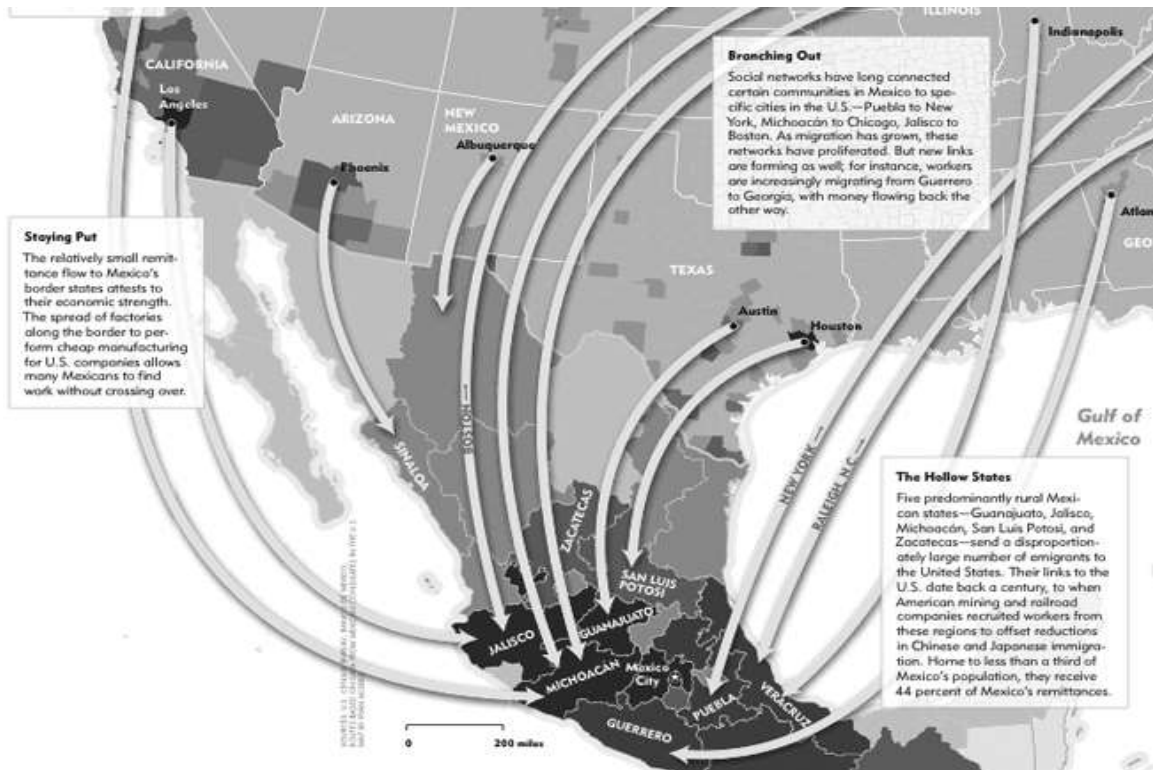
Significant as those numbers may be, the details are, as always, more complicated. Unlike Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, California did not abut any major Mexican population centers until the growth of Tijuana in the later twentieth century, nor was there easy communication between Central Mexico and the country's northwest. As a result, there was relatively little Spanish or Mexican settlement in colonial California and there does not seem to have been a

⁴⁷⁰ Philip J. Ethington, William H. Frey, and Dowell Myers, "The Racial Resegregation

period when a majority of the Mexican population of the Los Angeles area had immediate ancestors whose roots went back more than a generation or two in the region. Most Mexican immigrants to California traveled through El Paso-Juarez or somewhat later through Nogales, and most came from further south, leapfrogging the border region. Whereas New Mexico continues to draw most of its immigrants from neighboring Chihuahua, Los Angeles drew much if not most of its Mexican population from the central and southern states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato, and more recently from Oaxaca. That changed somewhat in the late twentieth century with an important influx from the Pacific states of Sinaloa and secondarily from Baja California, but although they are culturally influential—especially in the music business, where the corrido scene in particular often seems to be dominated by Sinaloans—the numbers of West Coast immigrants are still lower than from the center and south.⁴⁷¹ In musical terms this meant that Los Angeles was much less affected than the rest of the Southwest by the *norteno* boom in the Texas-Tamaulipas-Nuevo León region. The first major *norteno* group to come out of California was Los Tigres del Norte in the 1970s, and even they were Sinaloan immigrants who made their first reputation in northern California and were more influential in Mexico than in Los Angeles. Nor was Los Angeles much affected by *cumbia nortena*. The prominent LA Hispanic orchestras were more in tune with national Mexican trends than northern styles, and with US Latin trends, playing mambo and other tropical rhythms along with swing and boleros.

of Los Angeles County, 1940-2000,” USC Public Research Report, 2001, at http://www.usc.edu/schools/price/research/popdynamics/pdf/2001_Ethington-Frey-Myers_Racial-Resegregation.pdf.

⁴⁷¹ Romo, Ricardo. *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*. Austin: University of Texas, 1983, 33.



Map 3: Patterns of Mexican immigration and remittances. Suggesting which Mexican states have sent the most immigrants north and where those immigrants have tended to settle, with the darkest states on both sides of the border representing peak senders and receivers. It is a rough guide, failing to suggest the large waves of immigration to Los Angeles from Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca, but still indicative. (Reprinted from Matthew Quirk, “The Mexican Connection, *The Atlantic*, April 2007, used by permission.)

To the extent there was a style of music associated specifically with Mexican LA in the mid-twentieth century, it was Pachuco boogie—essentially African American R&B played by Mexican bands with some tropical rhythms and lyrics in a mix of Spanish, English and border caló—but that music never accounted for a major proportion of what local Latinos were listening or dancing to. In general, new immigrants remained aware of current Mexican trends and styles, while those born in Los Angeles listened primarily to African American styles—swing in the 1930s, then blues, jive, R&B, soul, funk, and eventually rap. Many of those styles also crossed the border and became popular in Mexico, and Los Angeles developed a reputation as a center of Mexican hipster culture—Tin Tan, the ultimate Mexico City hipster, regularly claimed in his films to have spent

time in LA—but in that context, Los Angeles was less a real place than a symbol of modernity. Even for Mexicans born and raised there, Los Angeles continued (and continues) to have an ambiguous relationship to any ancestral concept of “home.” However strongly people identify with the city, there is a generalized awareness of older relatives who came from elsewhere and continue to regard the United States as foreign terrain, making for a different sense of geographical affiliation than in Michoacán or Northern New Mexico, where “home” is understood as the place one’s ancestors have occupied consistently for centuries. That does not mean that Angelenos are necessarily less fervent in their devotion to their neighborhood, city, or region, but relatively few have great-grandparents from there or a cohesive sense of local traditions reaching back more than a couple of generations.

The most striking example of this is the way Chicano activists who claim deep roots in the region trace those roots—in all the time I lived and did research in Los Angeles, I never met a Latino who traced family connections in California back to the nineteenth century, but met many who consider themselves indigenous to the region as descendants of Aztec forebears who traveled south from Aztlán, which is often described as having been specifically California rather than the region in present-day Arizona and New Mexico that was previously associated with that mythology. Far from claiming kinship with early *californios*—except, rarely and mythically, with outlaws like Joaquín Murieta and Tiburcio Vazquez—Chicanos in Los Angeles have tended to reject the whole *californio* colonial mystique as an invented Spanish heritage propagated by Anglos to disenfranchise the authentic brown-skinned population, and when they reclaim symbols of local heritage they are far more likely to cite Pachucos, zoot suits, and “oldies” than Spanish hacendados.

This is in part because the “old California” myth was embraced and largely maintained by Anglos in the early twentieth century, both as a way of making the region seem like a romantic tourist destination and as a way of distinguishing themselves from the ongoing flood of new Anglo arrivals from the Midwest, with no acknowledgement that recent Mexican arrivals might have a better claim to that past. Luis Rodriguez recalls the San Gabriel Mission’s annual “Fiesta Days,” with “parades, speeches, carnival rides, directed for the most part at the Anglos who commemorated a past they were never a part of, as if the Mexicans were long dead and mummified, while in the present they’d rather spit on a Mexican than give him the time of day...the *gabachos* put on phony *sombreros*, rode rhinestone-garished horses, and applauded one Hat Dance after another. But at first hint of nightfall, they skulked back to their walled estates in San Marino or Pasadena, to Spanish-style mansions...”⁴⁷² In that situation, the *californio* signifiers came to be identified by many young Chicanos as an equivalent of Jane Hill’s “mock Spanish,” representing Anglo ignorance and contempt rather than personal heritage. While Anglos identified with the “Mexican Hat Dance” as a symbol of their state, Rodriguez “lay back in my garage room listening to scratchy records of Willie Bobo, Thee Midniters, War, and Miles Davis. Sometimes oldies; the ‘Eastside Sound’ revues, old Stax and Atlantic rhythm & blues: Wilson Pickett, Rufus Thomas, Solomon Burke and The Drifters. And of course, Motown.” He notes the cultural links underlined by this musical selection: “For the most part, the Mexicans in and around Los Angeles were economically and socially closest to blacks.” He mentions the tendency of Mexicans to pick up black speech styles, but writes, “For Chicanos this influence lay particularly deep

⁴⁷² Rodriguez, *Always Running*, 87-8.

in music: Mexican rhythms syncopated with blues and ghetto beats.”⁴⁷³

It is not clear what Rodriguez means by “Mexican rhythms” in this sentence—he grew up in a Mexican immigrant household surrounded by records of classic ranchera and more recent tropical orchestras, but his only mention of a specifically Mexican music is a fleeting reference to a local guitarist who “could play anything from Wes Montgomery to Jeff Beck to Delta Blues to raunchy *norteñas*,” and when asked for clarification adds that the only norteño music he recalls hearing was by accident on the radio.⁴⁷⁴ But his list of favorite listening in the late 1960s and early 1970s is a reasonably typical soundtrack of Chicano Los Angeles in that period, and neatly encapsulates a common local conception of heritage. Willie Bobo was a Nuyorican percussionist who released a series of LPs in the 1960s that exemplified the period’s fusion of jazz, funk, pop, and Latin styles and who moved to LA in 1970. For many young Chicanos, Bobo’s Afro-Latin sound both referenced their heritage and was in synch with their current urban experience, and the trail of his influence leads through Carlos Santana, who covered Bobo’s “Evil Ways” on his first LP and reworked Bobo’s “Spanish Grease” as “No One to Depend On,” to Mellow Man Ace, whose breakthrough bilingual rap record, “Mentirosa,” sampled those two Santana tracks, to Cypress Hill, who hired Bobo’s son Eric as a percussionist in the early 1990s.

Moving on through Rodriguez’s list, Thee Midnitters was a Chicano band from East LA that hit in 1965 with a version of “Land of a Thousand Dances,” followed by the romantic ballad “Sad Girl” and the guitar-driven cruising instrumental “Whittier Boulevard,” a reference to the barrio’s main street where lowriders cruised on weekend afternoons. The latter record begins with a voice saying, “Let’s take a trip down Whittier Boulevard,” followed by a honking horn

⁴⁷³ Rodriguez, *Always Running*, 84-5.

and a yell of “*Arriba! Arriba!*” in the voice of the cartoon mouse Speedy Gonzalez—an example of “mock Spanish” being reclaimed and a reminder that negative stereotypes can be embraced and reworked as symbols of pride. Thee Midneters remain local heroes, reforming on a regular basis to play picnics and other events in the Los Angeles region, and are often named as the defining East LA band of the 1960s.

It makes sense that Rodriguez follows the Midneters with War, the defining Los Angeles ghetto/barrio band of the 1970s. Although War had no Latino members in its original line-up—most were African Americans, with Lee Oskar, a Dane, playing harmonica and, on the first couple of albums, vocals by Eric Burdon, one of the stars of the 1960s British Invasion—a previous version of the band had briefly been known as Señor Soul, a name that directly appealed to the local Latino market, and War was adopted by local Mexican American youth as exemplifying their experience to the point that many people recall it as a Chicano band.⁴⁷⁵ Its 1975 hit, “Low Rider,” featuring Oskar’s harmonica, is a defining anthem of local Chicano car culture and the band remains an iconic signifier of Los Angeles and has been one of the most sampled groups by later hip-hop producers. A favorite track in the Chicano community was “The Cisco Kid,” a song celebrating the fictional cowboy who was one of the few heroic Mexican role models on television in the 1950s—though played by Duncan Romero, a Rumanian originally named Vasile Dumitru Couyanos—and another example of a refigured stereotype, with lyrics celebrating both Cisco, the European-featured hero, and his darker, stupider, comic sidekick, Pancho. Other important War hits included “Spill the Wine,” a moody evocation of a stoned afternoon partying in a local park, and the self-explanatory “The World Is a Ghetto.” All the remaining

⁴⁷⁴ Luís Rodríguez, personal communication, 9/23/2014.

artists on Rodriguez's list were African Americans, starting with Miles Davis, an icon of non-white cool whose *Sketches of Spain* and various recordings using Latin themes, with Bobo or other Latinos adding percussion, led into a 1970 tour with Santana. Davis's fusion of jazz with rock instrumentation was a fundamental influence on West Coast Latino bands like Santana, El Chicano, and Malo, and he was also appreciated for his refusal to compromise with the white mainstream, his insistence that both he and his music be accepted on his own terms. The other artists Rodriguez names were R&B or soul singers, major national faces of a style that also had plenty of local exemplars. As for the "Eastside Sound" revues, they were largely made up of Chicano performers doing their best to sound like the current black dance bands and doo-wop groups. The biggest national hitmakers on that scene were Cannibal and the Headhunters, a Mexican-American quartet whose name arguably played on primitivist stereotypes—though Cannibal got his nickname before joining the group, inherited from an elder brother who bit another boy during a fight—but most groups adopted the sorts of names that were standard in that period, regardless of ethnicity: The Premiers, the Blendells, the Escorts, the Jaguars. Some of the artists in these groups would resurface in the 1970s in bands called Tierra and El Chicano, and some were capable of playing Mexican music when required, but it was generally understood that the hip urban sound of this period was African American, even at concerts where all the performers were Anglo or Chicano (see figure 6).

⁴⁷⁵ The members of Akwid, for example, refer to War as a Chicano band.



Figure 6: East Side Revue poster, 1965.

There are numerous stories about the linguistic complexities of playing on the Los Angeles Chicano scene. Richie Valens apparently had to learn the lyrics of “La Bamba” phonetically because he spoke no Spanish, and the record producer Billy Cardenas—who got into the business when Valens’s manager invited him to a session, “I guess because Ritchie was Mexican and I was Mexican”—recalled that he teamed the singer Max Uballez of the Romancers with Benny and Joe Rodriguez to form the Heartbreakers because, “When the Romancers played at wedding dances, they couldn’t play Mexican music, because Max couldn’t sing in Spanish.”⁴⁷⁶ On the other hand, there were musicians who

⁴⁷⁶ Quiñones, Ben. “Naa Na Na Naa: How the West Coast Eastside sound changed rock & roll,” *LA Weekly*, 29 Dec 2005, at <http://www.laweekly.com/2005-12-29/news/naa-na-na-na-naa>, accessed through archive.org, 9/12/2014.

could speak Spanish and nonetheless chose to sing in English because it was the hip language that went with the music they preferred. Carlos Santana recalled that even before moving to the United States in 1961 at age fourteen he lost interest in Mexican styles. He was born in the mountains of Jalisco, the heartland of mariachi, and his father led a mariachi group in Tijuana in which he played violin, but he rejected that music and situated it in his recollections both as archaic and as a foreign, European imposition:

My father first taught me what they teach to Mexicans; because since we were conquered by Europe, they teach you the waltz, polkas. The majority of Mexican music is based in all of that and I didn't like it; because since I grew up in Tijuana and that was where I became aware, I liked the music of that time. I liked Chuck Berry, I liked Little Richard, I liked blues... In Tijuana I spent a lot of time in la calle Revolución saying: "*Song, mister, fifty cents a song.*" I played all those Mexican songs like "Allá en el Rancho Grande," but I had already been bitten by American music... I saw that the music of Mexico was already outdated, and for me the modern music was fresher, cooler.⁴⁷⁷

Josh Kun contrasts the Tijuana of Santana's youth with the city the trumpeter Herb Alpert saw as an Anglo tourist and marketed to the United States, writing: "For Alpert, Tijuana was a city of mariachis; for Tijuana's youth culture, it was a city of aspiring blues and rock musicians."⁴⁷⁸ Santana was inspired not only by the black musicians he heard on the radio, but by the local blues guitarist Javier Bátiz, leader of Los TJs (pronounced as in English, tee-jays)—a name

⁴⁷⁷ Molina, "Carlos Santana," 78-9 (my translation—"fresher, cooler" is an attempt to capture *mas fresca*).

⁴⁷⁸ Kun, "Tijuana Sound," 246.

simultaneously signaling pride in Tijuana and affinity with a modern, English-language sensibility. His experience was rooted in a particular place, but also a time when young musicians and listeners throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Oceania were adopting similar styles as “their” music and starting bands that often had English or bilingual names: like teenagers around the world, Bátiz recalled discovering rock ’n’ roll with his neighborhood peers when they went to see *Blackboard Jungle*.⁴⁷⁹ Growing up in Mexico, Santana had no reason to assert his mexicanidad, and although he had a direct claim to the most iconic *ranchera* heritage, in his recollections he emphasized the cinematic irreality of that connection, saying, “When I go to Autlán, where I was born, it’s like going to a time that’s frozen and hasn’t moved...it seems like a movie of the Sierra Madre.”⁴⁸⁰ His assertion of musical identity was an escape from that archaic irreality, and when he later chose to fuse his love of blues and rock with his ancestral Latin roots, he embraced Afro-Caribbean styles that were equally foreign to the mountains of Jalisco. Nor was he alone: John Storm Roberts writes that virtually all the California Latin-rock groups of the 1970s, though led by Mexican-Americans and at times explicitly blazoning Mexican or Chicano heritage, signaled that heritage musically by playing Caribbean rhythms that would have been as unfamiliar to their grandparents as the Anglo rock elements of their sound and often “depended for their rhythmic underpinnings on an Antillean percussionist, usually a conga player: Cuban Armando Peraza or Newyorican Victor Pantoja with Santana, Pantoja again with Azteca, Francisco Aguabella with Malo.”⁴⁸¹

Santana’s evolution is worth keeping in mind as a counterweight to the

⁴⁷⁹ *Por las Calles y Colonias de Tijuana*, uploaded to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-rW5OYnS8Q>, accessed 9/13/2014.

⁴⁸⁰ Molina, “Carlos Santana,” 77 (my translation).

discourse of assimilation in a north of the border context. For teenagers all over the world, the embrace of rock 'n' roll was in large part an act of rebellion against their parents' boring, adult lives and the conservatism of their cultural past, and to that extent it may be irrelevant whether that past was represented by Jorge Negrete, Maurice Chevalier, Billy Eckstine, or Bing Crosby. At a moment when American teenagers of all regional ancestries and phenotypes were adopting Fats Domino, Little Richard, and the Drifters as their music and viewed this as a break with the past and an assertion of individuality and peer solidarity, we should be wary of discourses that assume Mexican American teenagers were doing something essentially different from their Anglo- or Afro-American peers when they embraced the same artists and styles.

It is also worth questioning and exploring any attempt to divide music into Anglo and Latin styles, since both have owed a great deal to African traditions and were constantly interacting and cross-fertilizing in the Americas in general and Los Angeles in particular. An example often cited in this context is the song "Louie Louie," written by an African American singer, Richard Berry, who was born in Louisiana but raised in South Central Los Angeles. In 1956 he was singing with the Rhythm Rockers, a group consisting mostly of Chicanos, with a couple of white Anglos, led by two brothers, Barry and Rick Rillera, whose father was Filipino and their mother Mexican. The Rilleras had started out playing Hawaiian music, then got into blues, then expanded into the mix of R&B and Latin dance rhythms favored at teen dances in the early 1950s. As Ned Sublette points out, this mix was by no means unique to Los Angeles—the cha-cha-chá craze was at its height and when Bill Haley took the world by storm in the movie *Don't Knock the Rock*, he appeared alongside Tony Martinez's New York Latin

⁴⁸¹ Roberts, *Latin Tinge*, 192.

band, and followed his early hit “Rock Around the Clock” with “Mambo Rock.”⁴⁸² The Rhythm Rockers’ repertoire included a cha-cha-chá by the Cuban pianist René Touzet called “El Loco,” which had a distinctive opening figure that Berry adopted for “Louie Louie,” and Berry recalled that he wanted to use timbales and congas on the recording, but the producer insisted on a more straightforward R&B sound—though the label, a local independent called Flip Records, had released the thoroughly Latin “Mambo Baby Tonight” two years earlier. By contrast, when Ritchie Valens was persuaded by his Anglo producer, Bob Keane, to record “La Bamba,” a Mexican *son jarocho* reworked to fit the current mambo/cha-cha craze, Keane hired the New Orleans drummer Earl Palmer to play a Cuban *clave* rhythm, using a wood block to mimic the authentic Cuban sound of the *claves*, or wooden sticks. Palmer was one of the most recorded drummers in history, often credited with developing the standard rock ’n’ roll beat on his records with Little Richard and others, and had solidified his grasp of Cuban rhythms with a youthful trip to Havana. And to bring that story full circle, the version of “Louie Louie” that hit nationally was recorded in Seattle by a white group, the Kingsmen, who picked it up from a local black singer, Ron Holden, and Holden hit in 1960 with a mid-tempo ballad called “Love You So,” recorded in Seattle with no apparent input from Latin musicians, which used actual *claves*, was released on Keane’s Donna label, and remains a popular Chicano oldie.

There was nothing new about this kind of overlap and interchange. In a previous generation, the central figure in Pachuco boogie, Don Tosti, described his Los Angeles musical milieu in terms that suggest both ethnic and temporal

⁴⁸² Sublette, Ned, “The Kingsmen and the Cha-cha-chá,” in Eric Weisbard, *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 69-94; Reyes and Waldman. *Land of a Thousand Dances*, 15, 29-33.

affinities: “I went to a black teacher. I wanted to play jazz, you know... I’m of Mexican descent, but I don’t play mariachi or ranchera music, or anything like that. It’s not that I don’t like it—I love it. It’s just that I was never interested in it—or exposed to it, let’s say.” Tosti disparaged later youth styles from both sides of the border in linguistically distinct but precisely equivalent terms, describing *musica nortena* as “*mierda*,” and saying, “Now I have to play shit music from Elvis Presley...the people want it, and I have to play it.”⁴⁸³ For urban musicians, dancers, and listeners of Tosti’s generation, whatever their ancestry and whether they lived in the US or Mexico, swing music was the modern mainstream style of their time; for teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s it was rock ’n’ roll; in the 1970s it was funk or disco; in the 1980s and 1990s it was hip-hop. All of those styles can be categorized as originally or essentially African American, but all were adopted by Anglos, Jews, Italians, Latinos, and so on—and all, when they became the music of the past, might be embraced as ancestral heritage styles or rejected as “white,” while new styles would be embraced or rejected as the sound of youth and the present or as “black.”

In Los Angeles, where all but a relatively small minority of the current inhabitants are first, second, or third-generation immigrants from elsewhere—be it Jalisco, Texas, Louisiana, Iowa, or Seoul—identities have been particularly fluid and layered and their definitions and significance have often shifted dramatically in very short periods of time and for reasons that in retrospect may seem odd, contradictory, or capricious. A striking example is the region’s first Chicano rock ’n’ roll sensation, Little Julian Herrera, who hit a couple of years before Valens with a series of romantic R&B ballads—and who was only later revealed to be a Hungarian Jew named Ron Gregory who had run away from his

⁴⁸³ Peña, *Mexican American orchestra*, 172, 178.

home in Massachusetts at age eleven and been adopted by a Mexican woman in East LA. As Anthony Macías points out, Herrera's complicated ethnic identity was compounded by that of his original sponsor, the bandleader Johnny Otis, a Greek American who passed as a light-skinned African American.⁴⁸⁴

Cities have always been sites of personal transformation and places where people from different groups overlap, mix, and come into conflict with one another. In Los Angeles, where neighborhoods are much more spread out than in older cities such as New York and Chicago, identities might be understood quite differently depending on one's neighborhood. A second- or third-generation Mexican American growing up in East LA might have virtually no contact with anyone who was not from a roughly similar background, while Mexican Americans growing up in South Central were constantly overlapping with the neighborhood's African American population. As the hip-hop and radio DJ Julio G recalled, "East Los doesn't really mix with the blacks... But in South Central, it's different. It's like a middle ground. You've got your Blacks and Latinos in the same community."⁴⁸⁵ In some periods, neighborhoods, and situations Mexican immigrants and Chicanos made common cause with African American neighbors; in others they came into conflict or formed varied and shifting alliances. For many Mexicans, African Americans were the only Anglos they knew or related to on a day-to-day basis—and I use the term "Anglo" advisedly, because African American Angelenos have in some situations allied themselves with white nativists to oppose the perceived threat of Latino immigration. (An African American friend of mine recalls her shock on moving into the historically black Crenshaw neighborhood and being greeted by a black neighbor with the

⁴⁸⁴ Macías, Anthony. *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles*. Durham: Duke University, 2008, 183-4.

⁴⁸⁵ Rodriguez, Carlito. "Vamos a Rapiar," *The Source*, March 1998, 156.

comment, “I’m so glad you bought this house rather than one of *them*.”) Perhaps most significantly in the context of rap, many second- or third-generation Mexican Angelenos, even if they perceive African Americans as their enemies, may nonetheless feel culturally closer to those urban enemies than to recent immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, or El Salvador.

In linguistic and musical terms, it is a commonplace that many young Mexican Angelenos have sung and spoken variants of English that tend to be identified as African American. As Rodriguez wrote, “As soon as we understood English, it was usually the Black English we first tried to master.” He immediately adds that the influence went both ways: “Later in the youth authority camps and prisons, blacks used Mexican slang and the *cholo* style; Mexicans imitated the Southside swagger and style—though this didn’t mean at times we didn’t war with one another, such being the state of affairs at the bottom.”⁴⁸⁶

Rodriguez’s qualification suggests the inherent complexity of identifying particular speech or musical styles with particular ethnic or cultural groups—the identifications are never inherent in the speech or music, but are part of a process in which characteristics are isolated as markers of group identities. Numerous writers have noted the influence of African American English on Chicano English in urban communities,⁴⁸⁷ but like the influence of *vaquero* speech on Anglo buckeroos, this can be recognized as a marker of cultural contact and overlap or forgotten as it becomes part of the new community’s own identity, and both the recognition and the forgetting are active processes. I earlier cited Char Ullman’s description of a young undocumented Mexican immigrant named Juan passing for a US-born *cholo* with “a shaved head, baggy pants, and a T-shirt that shouts

⁴⁸⁶ Rodriguez, *Always Running*, 84-5.

‘Chicago Bulls.’” She writes of an incident when some INS agents pulled up where Juan was working and, “With his best Chicano English, he yelled, ‘S’up?’ They waved back. The officers stayed in the car for a while, and drove off.”⁴⁸⁸ Ullman presents this story to show Juan’s understanding and command of local cultural categories and styles, which she characterizes as “cholo” or “Chicano,” but if no other clues were available I doubt many Americans would describe his clothing and language in those terms, since all—notably the choice of the Chicago Bulls as a favorite team—are more widely understood as African American (or by extension hip-hop) signifiers. This does not contradict Ullman’s analysis, but adds another layer of interpretation and indicates the problems inherent in assigning categories to details of speech or behavior.

For Rodriguez and many other Chicano or Mexican Angelenos, African Americans were and are their neighbors and the adoption of black styles seems a natural result of that propinquity. Jessie Morales, a popular corrido singer and pioneer of banda rap, recalls that in his teens he naturally gravitated away from his parents’ ranchera music and towards the teen sounds surrounding him in the neighborhood: “I was in Washington High School, that’s in the heart of South Central, so I was around African Americans—basically that’s all I was around. So I was listening to Eazy-E and everything, but they weren’t going to listen to no Ramón Ayala, you know what I mean?” But the adoption of clothing and speech styles associated with urban African Americans by other Americans of all hues and national backgrounds—and by many other young people around the globe—is sufficiently common that Juan’s choice of t-shirt and vocal inflection in Ullman’s story need not mean that he had ever met an African American or

⁴⁸⁷ Fought, *Chicano English*; Sánchez, *Chicano Discourse*; Penfield, Joyce, and Jacob L. Ornstein-Galicia. *Chicano English: An Ethnic Contact Dialect*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1985.

associated those styles with African Americans. Just as Anglos need not be aware that they are using a Spanish word when they say rodeo, he need not have been conscious of any African American influence when he said “’s’up?”

Associations of speech, clothing, music or other styles with particular groups can be extremely important to the people who make them—whether those people are members of the groups, opposed to the groups, or purport to be objective observers of the groups—irrespective of historical context or accuracy. When Rodriguez noted that black inmates in California prisons picked up Mexican and cholo styles, he was making a point that has become extremely important to fans of Chicano rap: that many street styles associated with African Americans were originally Chicano. Over and over on Chicano rap sites one finds correspondents arguing that the shaved heads, bandanas, and low-rider cars favored by West Coast gangsta rappers, and indeed the whole local West Coast gang culture, were developed in the Chicano community and appropriated by African Americans.⁴⁸⁹ In some instances the historical evidence is solid, in some shaky, but in either case the point being made is that Chicano rappers are not “acting black,” they are representing their own culture. As noted in earlier chapters, this can extend to claiming “oldies” recorded by African American groups as Chicano heritage music, and contradictory as that ascription may seem, it has a solid historical basis because although the records were made by African Americans and may have originally been intended for an African American audience, their marketing as “oldies” was largely for an audience of white and Latino listeners, and in particular for Los Angeles Chicanos. The term “oldies but goodies” was coined by a Los Angeles deejay named Art Laboe in the late 1950s

⁴⁸⁸ Ullman, “English matters,” 242, 244-6.

⁴⁸⁹ E.g. the thread, “BANGING IS A MEXICAN THING BLACKS IMITATE,” at <http://thehoodup.com/board/viewtopic.php?f=23&t=75644>, accessed 10/10/14.

and in 1959 he released the first LP compilation of R&B hits culled from small record labels under that rubric. A year later he released a more specifically local compilation, *Art Laboe's Memories of El Monte*, celebrating the concerts he had been hosting since 1955 at the El Monte Legion Stadium east of Los Angeles. These concerts drew a famously multi-ethnic audience, including white teenagers from the southeastern suburbs and black teens from the city, but the majority of the audience was Mexican American and although the *Memories* LP consists primarily of African American artists, it includes one track by Little Julian Herrera; "Pachuko Hop" by Chuck Higgins, an African American saxophonist whose record has no Latin flavor but was aimed at Pachuco consumers; and "Corrido Rock" by Handsome Jim Balcom, a white Anglo saxophonist who mixed a ranchera melody with rock 'n' roll rhythm and instrumentation. The cover photo shows Laboe in front of a typical El Monte audience including white, black, and Mexican teens—and although many members of the audience are hard to type by ethnicity, one is making it easy by wearing a sombrero (see figure 7).



Figure 7: Art Laboe's *Memories of El Monte* LP, 1960.

It is significant that Laboe developed the nostalgic “oldies” rubric in Los Angeles as a way of marketing recordings that at the time were at most five years old, and also that more than fifty years later his term continues to be associated with those particular songs and others from roughly the next fifteen years. The concepts of generations, ancestors, and traditions in a modern megalopolis where virtually everyone arrived from elsewhere within the last century are necessarily different than in a place where families trace their histories for centuries or millennia. Each new family of immigrants is arriving in a strange world and, for kids in those families, the other kids on the block who arrived five years earlier

and speak English are already a previous generation. For many Chicanos in Los Angeles who speak English as a first language and have known no other environment, it makes more sense to trace their ancestry to previous generations of local Chicanos than to grandparents who came from Jalisco or Michoacán: a “traditional wedding” may involve mariachis and other signifiers of rural Mexico, but it also can involve dressing the wedding party in zoot suits, even if no family members on either side were yet in Los Angeles in the period when such suits were in fashion. There is also no contradiction in associating those suits—fashionable in the 1940s—with records recorded in the 1960s or 1970s. Conceptions of historical heritage often involve anachronisms, such as associating mariachi costumes simultaneously with colonial Mexico and with ranchera songs composed in Mexico City in the mid-twentieth century.

In a situation where new waves of immigrants have constantly arrived and locally-born, non-Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans have always regarded the newcomers as related but also different from themselves—and where the newcomers to particular neighborhoods in particular periods have often come from distinct regions, sometimes speaking different ancestral languages and not necessarily sharing much cultural heritage with previous arrivals from other regions—it makes sense that many people think of their Mexican or Chicano identity in Los Angeles as connected to older, urban, local traditions rather than the traditions of a genetically ancestral homeland. This is one reason the concept of Aztlán has particular power in urban California: For Hispanic kids in rural Arizona or New Mexico there is an obvious connection between the local cowboy or farming past and similar ways of life in nearby Sonora and Chihuahua, so even if their parents or grandparents crossed the national border it is easy for them to feel that their family traditions are ancient and rooted in the region where they

live. For someone raised on the streets of East or South Central Los Angeles, a mountain village in Jalisco may seem as distant and unreal as the setting of a Tarzan movie and it is reasonable—and more satisfying and empowering—for an urban gangbanger or Chicano activist to identify with an Aztec warrior than with a subsistence farmer in rural Oaxaca. Identification with Aztlán as one's ancestral homeland is the flip side of *ni de aquí ni de allá*, the common feeling of being neither from present-day Mexico nor from the present-day United States: one is neither from somewhere else nor from a place shared with Anglos, Asians, and African Americans, but from a mythic ancestral homeland that has since been overrun by foreigners.

The complexities of urban immigrant heritage are different for every group and every individual, but there are also commonalities that cross ethnic lines. Cities are simultaneously sites of meeting and mixture and sites of alienation. My father, growing up Jewish in Brooklyn, passed on a tradition to me that I think of as “Brooklyn Jewish” which includes Yiddish expressions and inflections, Victorian barroom recitations, ragtime, Irish tenor singing, sentimental “old South” lyrics, the foxtrot, and minstrel comedy—but not klezmer music, which he never mentioned or showed any interest in, and which to me is a style associated with a broader Balkan music scene that took off in the 1980s rather than with my own familial past. I grew up with a keen consciousness that some performers were Jewish, including Sophie Tucker, who sang ragtime but also “Eli, Eli,” the Marx Brothers, Lenny Bruce, and Bob Dylan. But although all my grandparents were Jewish immigrants from Central Europe, the Jewish music of the shtetls was never heard in my home or referenced as “our music,” nor do I hear it that way today. To the extent my parents' reactions implied any ancestral association with klezmer, it was as the sound of what they escaped, not of who they were.

There are obvious differences between my family experience and the experiences of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles, but we all construct our heritage in the present, in ways that have more to do with current times and places than with our genetic ancestry. In Mexican Los Angeles that process has included a formulation of “oldies” associated with driving lowrider cars, in which a typical CD would be illustrated with a photograph of a light-skinned Latina but all the music would be recordings of African American singers from the 1950s and 1960s, and a more specific formulation of “Latin oldies,” in which a CD issued by the same company but featuring recordings of Chicano and Spanish Caribbean artists had a cover design based on Jesús Helguera’s “Grandeza Azteca,” painted in 1940 by a Spanish-Mexican painter trained in Madrid as part of a post-revolutionary Mexican construction of a mythic indigenous heritage (see figure 8). Helguera’s paintings of legendary Aztecs and colorful Mexican peasants used models with distinctly European features and drew on familiar European religious and pastoral iconography, but reached Los Angeles on calendars posted in neighborhood businesses to advertise imported Mexican products and thus were both a link to the country Mexican immigrants had left and a marker of the neighborhoods where they settled.



Figure 8: *Lowrider Oldies, Volume 1* (1993) and *Latin Oldies* (1996).

The Aztec imagery became a major influence on the iconography of *chicanismo* in the 1970s. In a typical formulation, a writer for Q-VO magazine describes Helguera's calendars as countering degrading Anglo stereotypes like Speedy Gonzalez and the Frito Bandito, writing, "They reminded us that we are not the foreigners, but descendants of natives."⁴⁹⁰ These images became so associated with the Chicano movement that Tere Romo, describing another Helguera painting, "Amor Indio," which was used as the cover image for the debut album from Malo, a San Francisco group led by Carlos Santana's brother Jorge, writes, "today most people, including some Chicanos think it is a Chicano, rather than Mexican image."⁴⁹¹ Like the refiguring of archaic ranchera imagery in New Mexico, the Aztec imagery became in this process a way of distancing Los Angeles Chicanos not only from Anglos, but also from recent immigrants whose Mexico no longer resembles the mythic terrain of their personal heritage.

The mix of imagery and music in the oldies packages is not contradictory, but rather particular: To advertise recordings made by African Americans in Detroit with a picture of a permed and bottle-blond Latina in a bikini leaning on a lowrider car references a past in which local Latinos adopted modern north-of-the-border hairstyles and drove to the beach in classic cars listening to Motown. Likewise, using Helguera's pseudo-Aztec imagery to advertise a mix of songs that includes Thee Midniters, Santana, El Chicano, and War along with New York-born Cuban/Puerto Rican Ralfi Pagán and Afro-Filipino Joe Bataan references a period when Chicano pride burgeoned alongside a unique regional fusion of blues, soul, and R&B with contemporary Afro-Caribbean styles. And the

⁴⁹⁰ Hernandez, Benjamin Francisco. "Jesus Helguera The Legend," at <http://q-vomagazine.com/jesushelguera.html>, accessed 9/15/2014.

⁴⁹¹ Romo, Tere. "The Chicanization of Mexican Calendar Art," presentation at the Smithsonian conference, "The Interpretation and Representation of Latino Cultures: Research and Museums," 2002, at <http://latino.si.edu/researchandmuseums/presentations/romo.html>.

meanings of those sounds and images continue to change and vary according to regions, neighborhoods, situations, and individual tastes and experiences. Today many young Angelenos describe themselves as Mexican rather than Chicano, and may wear t-shirts with the rubric, “Mexican! Not Latino. Not Hispanic.” But their bedroom walls are still as likely to have a poster of Al Pacino in *Scarface* as a poster of Zapata, or both side by side, and although many of them claim Mexican rather than Chicano as their personal identity, that need not assume a sense of solidarity with recent immigrants—in the sometimes deadly battles between norteño and sureño gangs (a division explored in section 1, chapter 4, which references both a division between northern and southern Californians and between more and less recent immigrants), both sides typically claim Mexican identity. In a study done in the first decade of the twenty-first century and published under the title *I’m Neither Here Nor There*, Patricia Zavella writes, “Whether born in the United States or in Mexico, virtually all research participants identified as Mexican rather than other terms (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano).”⁴⁹² Jessica M. Vasquez, in a contemporary study specifically focusing on third-generation Californians of Mexican ancestry, wrote that her respondents “offered a range of answers from ‘Chicano,’ ‘Hispanic,’ ‘Latino,’ ‘Mexican,’ and ‘Mexican American’ to detailed ratios of their heritage, such as ‘half-Mexican, half-Italian’ or ‘Mexican/Polish/Swedish/Russian/Jewish.’ She suggested that respondents’ choices often reflected their parents’ degree of affiliation with the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and that their relationship to their term “Chicano” varied accordingly: “Those in favor of the term thought of it as an empowering self-definition that implied value and dignity. Those who did not like the term considered it low-class or outdated.”

⁴⁹² Zavella, Patricia. *I’m Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans’ Quotidian Struggles with*

Some of Vasquez's respondents defined the term Chicano in reference to birth status, one young woman explaining, "I definitely consider myself completely culturally Mexican but Chicano is because I was born here." Others rejected it for the same reason, a young man saying, "you're really separating yourself when you're Chicano.... I was born in the United States, so for me I'm Mexican born in the United States...just a Mexican guy. I'm not a Chicano... It's real separatist." In a telling anecdote, Vasquez describes a young woman who grew up in a "majority-Mexican" neighborhood and told her, "When I took Chicano studies [at a majority-Anglo University], that is when I realized, 'Wow, I'm Mexican.'" Vasquez suggests that one reason many of her respondents found "self-referential titles" puzzling is "the false dichotomy they established of 'American' *in contrast to* 'Mexican.'" But she points out that this dichotomy is often reinforced by people within the community, describing a woman born and raised in San Diego who identified as Mexican until she went to a community college where many of her classmates were from Tijuana and switched to calling herself Mexican American: "people started telling me, 'You're not really Mexican. You don't speak Spanish as well as we do and you don't dress the way we do and you don't talk the way we do...' I'm like, 'I'm Mexican,' and they're like, 'No, no you're not.'" ⁴⁹³

The association of Spanish language with Mexican or Chicano identity is common and takes varied and sometimes puzzling forms. Vasquez writes that when she contacted high school administrators seeking young survey participants, although she specifically said she was looking for third-generation Mexican Americans—people born in the United States to parents born in the United States—she was consistently routed to English as a Second Language

programs.⁴⁹⁴ As I noted earlier, researchers have found that both Anglos and Latinos tend to associate indigenous phenotypes with Spanish language skills, an association sometimes made by Mexican Angelenos in a disparaging phrase directed at dark-skinned people who do not speak the language: “cara de nopal y no habla español” (cactus-faced and can’t speak Spanish).⁴⁹⁵ Such stereotyping, whether meant to encourage or discourage Spanish language use, can affect individuals’ social groupings and self-images and lead to them having either positive or negative relationships (or a mix of both) to the language and to more general ethnic identifications. Someone stereotyped as a Mexican immigrant despite being born in the United States may react by affiliating with immigrants or by disaffiliating from immigrants.

Lisa García Bedolla studied attitudes among Los Angeles-area Latinos in the late 1990s to three ballot measures generally perceived as anti-immigrant or anti-Latino, and found that such attitudes varied widely according to economic status, neighborhood, immigration status, and personal identification. She noted that many of her respondents characterized themselves as Mexican American or Hispanic, specifically differentiating both of those categories from immigrant Mexican—she emphasized that although “Hispanic” is used in the United States census for immigrants as well as US-born Latinos, many of her respondents did not understand the term that way—and noted with surprise that although academic terminology favored the term *Chicano*, only seven of the hundred people she interviewed “chose to identify themselves with that term.” She found that many first-generation immigrants associated the term *Latino* with Spanish language use, whereas third-generation and later descendants were “more likely to

⁴⁹³ Vasquez, *Mexican Americans*, 195-7, 142, 226, 218.

⁴⁹⁴ Vasquez, *Mexican Americans*, 249.

⁴⁹⁵ I heard this several times and it is also referenced in García Bedolla, *Fluid Borders*, 77.

define *Latino* as meaning ‘of Mexican descent,’ rarely making direct reference to language ability.” When it came to specific individuals, though, she found more complicated situations. One young woman had been born in Mexico to a Mexican father and a mother who was a third-generation Mexican American but had moved to Mexico temporarily, then was raised in Los Angeles and complained that as someone born in Mexico who spoke little Spanish—in her own description, she couldn’t even pronounce the name of her birth state, Guerrero—she was “shunned by everyone” and teased about being a “whitesican.” Another woman, a fifth generation Mexican American in her fifties, complained that “Some people think I’m snobby because I don’t speak Spanish.” A respondent in her twenties, after noting similar problems with Spanish-speaking peers, added that she tells them: “I was born here, why should I speak Spanish? You should learn English.”⁴⁹⁶

Looking at voting patterns on the three ballot measures, two directed at limiting services to immigrants and ending bilingual education and the third at limiting affirmative action, García noted that support for all three measures was much lower in East Los Angeles than in the relatively middle class suburb of Montebello, but also that the affirmative action proposition “which would have adversely affected all Latinos, immigrant and native born, was supported by much smaller margins in both areas.” To someone less familiar with this situation, the most striking thing about her statistics is that even in East LA, which is almost entirely working class and Latino, the initiatives limiting bilingual education and services to immigrants were supported by almost 30% of voters, and in Montebello by over 40%.⁴⁹⁷

Those numbers presumably reflect at least in part the common immigrant

⁴⁹⁶ García Bedolla, *Fluid Borders*, 78-81.

and minority experience in which older, more settled arrivals feel threatened by newcomers competing for jobs and bringing different customs—in a study similar to García's, Tomás Jiménez reached the opposite conclusion regarding class, suggesting that working class Mexican Americans were actually more hostile to new immigrants than their comfortably middle class contemporaries because they felt more threatened.⁴⁹⁸ But Southern California has also seen a dramatic shift in the composition—and perhaps more importantly the power-base and self-image—of its Latino community. There has always been a mix of older and more recent immigrants, but in the past the older, more acculturated populations of Mexican Americans or Chicanos were assumed to be the local community leaders. If there were rivalries between recent Mexican immigrants and Chicanos, the Chicanos were understood to have more power and represented a local status to which newcomers aspired—even if some newcomers resisted acculturation and resented what they perceived as a loss or rejection of Mexican culture by previous arrivals. In the last few decades this has changed, in part due to a huge new wave of immigration from Mexico and Central America, but also to new communications technologies and a new emphasis on globalization and transnational cooperation and commerce. In the past, Mexican music and movies were imported from Mexico, but now much of the Mexican recording industry is based in Los Angeles and trends that are perceived as specifically Mexican are as likely to flow south from the United States as north from Mexico. The *quebradita* dance style and *tecnobanda* recordings of the 1990s were associated with Pacific Mexico—Nayarit, Sinaloa, Colima, Jalisco—but largely developed by immigrants in Los Angeles, and the *duranguense* craze of the 2000s came out of Chicago. On both

⁴⁹⁷ García Bedolla, *Fluid Borders*, 98-9.

⁴⁹⁸ Jiménez, Tomás R. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California, 2010, 196-7.

sides of the border those musics were associated with Mexico, and indeed with specific regions of Mexico, and understood by many fans to be Mexican rather than Mexican American or Chicano, but the artists and a large proportion of the audiences and record sales were located north of the border. In the same period many Mexican musicians, especially Sinaloan banda and norteño groups, settled in Southern California to be nearer the center of recording and to escape the increasing waves of violence that have swept Mexico. The changing means of musical dissemination have made it easy to have transnational careers and hits—YouTube and cell phone downloads are the main forms of musical consumption for many young people on both sides of the border—and the same technologies have also made it easy for immigrants to maintain links to their friends and family back home. There have also been legal changes: in 1998 Mexico passed a dual citizenship law making it possible for immigrants to retain their Mexican nationality when they became US citizens and for any United States citizen who was born in Mexico or had a parent born there to claim Mexican citizenship.

These changes have made it much easier for immigrants, including second- and third-generation immigrants, to maintain links to Mexico, and the increasing visibility, pride, and power of Mexican-identified, Spanish-speaking Latinos in the region have also encouraged young people to think of themselves as Mexican and recognize current Mexican cultural signifiers as part of their personal heritage. There are no reliable statistics on local listening patterns, but there are plenty of anecdotal examples of people whose parents listened to R&B or Chicano music, but who themselves prefer banda, norteño, or the classic ranchera recordings of José Alfredo Jiménez—though it seems likely that they are still substantially outnumbered by peers who listen to current rap and R&B. There are also plenty of people listening to both ranchera and R&B, in varying mixes and

proportions—for example, young men who listen to hardcore narcocorridos and gangsta rap.

As always, affiliations have been accompanied by reactions, and the rise of an enduringly Mexican-identified population has led some Chicano-identified Californians to regard their own culture as threatened. For musicians in particular, demographic and marketing trends make the choice of affiliation significant and often tricky: the Chicano rap and rock markets include fervent fans, but are tiny compared to either the Anglo markets or the Mexican regional markets. This has made some Chicano artists eager to be filed as simply rappers or rockers, without ethnic markers. Sick Jacken, leader of the rap group Psycho Realm, explained that he and his partners chose not to be pictured on their albums so as not to be typed by marketers:

If we had our picture on the front of our cover, they'd put us in the Chicano section. The fact that you have a group called Psycho Realm, and the cover's just some crazy artwork, they're not going to know what it is. They're just going to put it in the Hip Hop section. That's what I want, I don't want it to be classified as anything but Hip Hop.⁴⁹⁹

Other artists such as Las Voces del Rancho and Jessie Morales grew up speaking English and listening to rap but chose to identify as Mexican, dress in cowboy gear, and record norteño and banda music, and their record companies have often marketed them as if they were Mexican artists—Morales says that when he first performed in Mexico, “that was kind of weird for the people, they thought I was from Sinaloa and I was from LA.” By the early 2000s numerous artists and companies were trying to figure out strategies whereby they could have

it both ways, adopting modern, urban styles and attracting some of the hip-hop and R&B audience while maintaining a specifically Mexican affiliation and a place in the Regional Mexican market. A 2003 article in *Billboard* noted that Regional Mexican sales accounted for 51% of the US Latin market, as opposed to 33% for Latin pop (including everything from romantic *baladas* to rock en español) and 16% for tropical styles (salsa, merengue, bachata, and cumbia), and that many artists and marketers were trying to add elements of rock or rap while remaining within the Regional genre—often largely a matter of retaining the accordion as the most prominent instrumental sound and mixing “urban” rhythms with polka, cumbia norteña, or a version of the merengue-norteño fusion Los Tucanes de Tijuana pioneered in the 1990s.⁵⁰⁰

That use of “urban” in quotation marks, typically understood in a pop-culture context to reference inner-city African Americans, is particularly relevant to the Los Angeles scene, where rap, rock, and R&B are often claimed as Chicano heritage, but equally often claimed in ways that ignore or avoid that connection. It is perfectly logical for a young listener like Jessie Morales to claim Eazy-E and Chalino Sánchez as dual role models, considering both artists symbolic of his roots as someone who identifies globally as Mexican and locally as from South Central, but at the same time to have little interest in any style marked as “Chicano” and consider such styles foreign to his personal and family experience. And it is easy to understand why people who claim Chicano as a term defining pride in dual Mexican and local heritage and have spent much of their lives fighting to win respect for both the term and the heritage feel annoyed or threatened by the rejection of the term by young people who might logically be

⁴⁹⁹ Dante, “Psycho Realm Conducts their Sick Symphonies,” 5/30/06, at http://www.latinrapper.com/psycho_realm_interview.html, accessed 9/16/14.

⁵⁰⁰ Burr, Ramiro, “Fresh Sound, Fresh Looks,” *Billboard*, 19 Jul 2003, LM1, 4.

thought to typify a modern Chicano experience and are heirs to the victories of past Chicano activism. In the rap world, where “keeping it real” is a universal mantra, such differences are often framed in terms of real and fake—someone who likes corridos and African American rap may consider both styles real but distinct from one another and dismiss Chicano or Mexican rap as fake, while someone who likes Chicano rap may feel it is fake for someone of Mexican heritage to align with African American rap or for someone born in Los Angeles to align with regional Mexican styles.

Rap is open to formulations of personal authenticity based on cultural heritage in a way other musical forms are not because it can be framed as rhythmic recitation or rhymed narrative rather than as music and virtually every culture on earth has an analogous lyrical tradition. Banda rappers routinely say their raps are simply a modern form of corrido—Jae-P specifically uses this lineage to stake a prior claim to the genre in relation to African Americans, rapping, “to all you brothers tryin’ to dis our game/ Our corrido’s just like rap an’ it’s been out before you had a name.”⁵⁰¹ In a more direct lineage, Chicano rap fans cite the Chicano movement poets of the 1960s and 1970s, who often came from the same neighborhoods, dealt with the same themes, and used a similar mix of English, Spanish, and caló. Alurista, Tino Villanueva, José Montoya, and Gregorio Barrios were contemporaries of African American writers and reciters aligned with the black power movement such as Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets, who are frequently named as forefathers of rap, and it is equally reasonable to trace Chicano rap back to their bilingual odes to street characters like El Louie,

⁵⁰¹ Brizuela, Byron, and Juan Pablo Huerta, “El Nuevo Sonido,” *Ni de aquí ni de allá*, Univision CD 10168, 2003.

driving his “48 Fleetline, two-tone—/buenas garras and always/rucas...”⁵⁰² I have seen no direct evidence that rappers like Kid Frost or Lil Rob were familiar with the earlier poets, but the Chicano arts movement unquestionably laid much of the foundation for modern formulations of Chicano identity, from poetry and music to murals, Aztec imagery, the United Farm Workers’ eagle logo, and the headbands, moustaches and other streetwear that—however stereotypically or inaccurately—continue to be associated by many people both within and outside the culture with the iconic period of Chicano activism.

Another factor in the adoption and adaptations of rap in Los Angeles is the region’s car-centric culture. Unlike the New Mexico music scene, where fans listen to radio in their cars but typically frame their broader relationship to the music in terms of dances and live performances, in Los Angeles driving is commonly framed not simply as a way of getting from one place to another but as an active statement of local culture and it is common for musical tastes to be described in terms of what people are bumping in their cars: cruising low and slow while listening to oldies or sitting with your buddies in and around a convertible with the radio or CD deck blasting. Kid Frost credited Bay Area Chicanos with pioneering the bass-heavy car stereo sound that is fundamental to West Coast rap:

The lowriders, definitely the Chicanos are the ones that started the big boom system. I mean, everybody knows that they started lowriders and everything: you know it wasn’t a mixed culture, it was Mexicans everything...and it turned into styles where everybody wanted to have a system more louder than the next guy so the amps came in, and once that happened the

⁵⁰² Montoya, José, “El Louie,” in Toni Empringham, ed. *Fiesta en Aztlán: Anthology of*

explosion of the big boom system happened.

Frost postulates a circular pattern of reinforcing influences, where the car culture affected West Coast rap, which in turn reached the Chicano community through the car culture:

Over here in LA the only pedestrians they have is walking
from their car; over here everybody is on the solo creep, everybody
is doing their own thing in their own little world in the car
pumping their music...and that's how the cars came in and more
rap came to be listened to by Mexicans and Chicanos. Before it
was more separated, the blacks listened to rap and Mexicans
listened to the Nancy Martinez, Shannon, you know "Let the
Music Play," they wasn't really listening to hiphop until the
emergence of the gangsta rap.⁵⁰³

It is interesting that Frost names Shannon and Nancy Martinez as the artists Mexicans were listening to before he hit—although their music was marketed as Latin Freestyle and in some cases even as Latin Hip-Hop, neither was Latina (Shannon is African American and Martinez is French-Canadian and only adopted the Spanish name when she started recording freestyle), nor was their music distinctively Latin, though freestyle was particularly popular in urban Latino communities and often made by Latino producers and performers. Mostly produced in New York and secondarily in Miami, freestyle was a dance-pop style that flourished briefly in the mid-1980s and Frost would have been particularly aware of it because that was the period when he was making his name as a rapper, doing featured spots at dance events around Los Angeles, and also because the bass-heavy freestyle sound was favored by lowriders—Thump Records, along

Chicano Poetry. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1982, 58.

with the oldies and Latin oldies collections I cited above, released a multi-volume *Freestyle Explosion* series that included both Shannon and Martinez in volume one, and *Lowrider* magazine recalls the mid-1980s as the period when “the explosion of Freestyle music...turned the Boulevard into a full scale party. Lisa Lisa, Stevie B., The Cover Girls, Sweet Sensation, and many others provided a cruising soundtrack during these years that is still popular today.”⁵⁰⁴

Frost recalls that he was the first rapper to appear at the big lowrider car shows, and before that “they just had regular bands like El Chicano.”⁵⁰⁵ But in a musical culture defined by what is played in cars, live performances may serve a separate function and involve quite different music from what one bumps in one’s ride—someone could appreciate seeing El Chicano onstage as exemplars of ethnic pride and ten minutes later be bumping East Coast freestyle out of his car windows as his own performance of that same pride. When Frost began appearing at the shows he was followed by other Chicano rappers, but the fact that fans appreciated what a rapper was doing onstage did not mean that they necessarily listened to his music in other contexts. Someone who thinks of oldies as his personal soundtrack of ethnic, family, or neighborhood affiliation may appreciate a rapper signaling the same affiliation by rapping in caló-inflected English over an old Brenton Wood or Mary Wells track, but not think of himself as a rap fan or listen to rap recordings.

⁵⁰³ Cross, *It’s Not About a Salary*, 192.

⁵⁰⁴ “Lowrider Magazine in 1985-1988,”

http://www.lowridermagazine.com/features/1205_lrm_lowrider_magazine_in_1985_1988, uploaded 3/20/2012, accessed 9/16/2014. This list of artists suggests the mix of Latino and non-Latino (in particular African-American) performers in freestyle: Lisa Lisa was Puerto Rican; Stevie B (Steven Bernard Hill) apparently was African American; one of the three original Cover Girls was Puerto Rican, the other two were apparently African American; the three original Sweet Sensations were all Latinas. (I write “apparently” because these artists have Anglo names and I can find no evidence that they had Latino heritage. However, biographical materials for all of them are scanty, and some may be partially Latino.)

⁵⁰⁵ Cross, *It’s Not About a Salary*, 190.

The following chapters explore how the first commercially successful Chicano rappers chose to signal or not signal group affiliations in the 1990s, and then the wave of Mexican-identified rappers that appeared in the early 2000s, but I would emphasize that neither group represented anything like a mainstream of Los Angeles Chicano or Mexican musical tastes. As Frost said, “over here...everybody is doing their own thing in their own little world,” and that is true not only for people in cars but also for the thousands of young women organizing private parties in their homes and listening to house or banda music, for the fervent devotees of Chicano punk rock getting together in tiny clubs, and for all the kids listening at home in their bedrooms or carrying their musical worlds around on Walkmans, boom boxes, and eventually mp3 players and cell phones. The closest thing to a unified scene was radio, and there was never a time when the Los Angeles radio stations most popular with Chicanos or Mexicans focused on local artists. Mexican music stations like KBUE, “La Que Buena,” gave important boosts to local banda, norteño, and banda rap performers, but always devoted the bulk of their play to international ranchera stars and presented themselves as the voice of a binational, transnational, or multinational immigrant audience. As for Chicano rap, it only occasionally got any major radio play, almost always as part of a broader mix dominated by African American performers. Like Cannibal and the Headhunters or Thee Midnites in the 1960s, the most commercially successful Chicano rappers work in a field defined by African American performers and many Chicano fans have thought of black voices as speaking for them, whether those voices were smooth ballad singers or tough gangsta rappers and despite any racial frictions in personal street interactions. KDAY, the first major rap station in Los Angeles—and by some reports the first 24-hour rap station anywhere—featured a deejay crew known as

the Mixmasters, led by Tony G, a heavy metal drummer who got into deejaying around 1984. To most listeners Tony G was a straight-ahead hip-hop deejay, but the G stood for Gonzalez and although his family background was Cuban he recalls that his first gig as a deejay was alternating with mariachis at a quinceañera.⁵⁰⁶ The KDAY crew also included a couple of Chicano DJs who became important local figures, Julio G and Ralph M, and an Afro-Honduran, Hen Gee. Around 1997, Tony G and Julio G began programming the “High Energy” show, featuring Latin dance music, and Tony G told Brian Cross:

When that started everything got mixed in, black and brown.

All the Hispanic groups, DJs and girl groups, would come in and do an hour-long mix.... Hispanics would never have started listening to the station unless they started hearing themselves on there. And on Friday nights the blacks would come to the Hispanic clubs and everybody got along just fine. That was big.⁵⁰⁷

“Latin dance music” in this instance meant freestyle, which was often marked as a Latin style—at least within Latino communities—though the artists were a mix of Latinos, African Americans, and other ethnicities (white Anglo, Italian American, French Canadian) and only one or two prominent figures had Mexican connections.⁵⁰⁸ Nor was KDAY thought of as a Latin station—program

⁵⁰⁶ Quiñones, Ben, “Julio G. Is for Real,” *LA Weekly*, 8 Dec 2005, at <http://www.laweekly.com/2005-12-08/music/julio-g-is-for-real>, accessed 5/7/2012; “Dj Tony G Interview on Clubben.com,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdeJDJaTm0Y>, uploaded 8 Feb 2011, accessed 9/17/14; “DJ Tony G,” at <http://www.namm.org/library/oral-history/dj-tony-g>, accessed 9/17/14.

⁵⁰⁷ Coleman, Brian, “1580 KDAY—And the Beat Goes On,” unpublished version of article published in edited form in *URB* magazine, 2005, courtesy of Brian Coleman.

⁵⁰⁸ Greg Mack, KDAY’s program director, describes the show as intended for “a large Latin crowd that liked groups like The Cover Girls, Trinere, and Exposé” (Sanchez, Tim, “Exclusive: Greg Mack Breaks Down The History of 1580 KDAY,” 30 Dec 2013, at <http://allhiphop.com/2013/12/30/exclusive-greg-mack-breaks-down-the-history-of-1580-kday>, accessed 9/17/14). The Cover Girls was originally a trio with two Anglos and a Nuyorican, though later line-ups had more Latinas. Trinere Veronica Farrington is from Miami and has African ancestry, but an extensive internet search does not turn up any suggestion that she is Latina.

director Greg Mack was African American, the vast majority of the music played on the station was straight-up rap and R&B, and even most of the Latino DJs at the station are best known for their associations with African American gangsta rappers like Ice T and Eazy E. Judging by the recollections of local rappers and DJs, freestyle provided a connection between previous pop styles and rap for a significant portion of the Chicano or Mexican audience, as befit its marketing as “Latin hip-hop,”⁵⁰⁹ but it is also a striking example of how slippery and complicated such ethnic marketing terminology can be: the Latino ethnicity of freestyle performers was generally obscured—most were marketed with individual or group names that gave no clue to their ancestry, often in groups with non-Latino members, and Raquel Rivera writes that the singer George García was “persuaded by his label to launch his freestyle career as George LaMond, for his last name was considered a commercial drawback”⁵¹⁰—but in the same period the French-Canadian Nancy Martin-Quirion adopted the name Martinez.

There is very little research on Mexican, Latino, or Chicano audience tastes, as separate from the reception of music specifically targeted at those audiences—that is, there is some limited demographic research on who is buying Latin music, but no research on what music Latinos buy—and one must always be wary of assuming an inaccurate degree of overlap between performers’ intentions to represent or reach a particular audience and that audience’s actual range of tastes or listening habits. The following chapters trace some efforts by performers and

Exposé was comprised of an Italian immigrant, a blond Anglo from New York, and a Chicana, Jeannette Jurado, from Southern California. I have not found a single discussion of freestyle that addresses or even mentions the issue of artists having Latino ancestry.

⁵⁰⁹ A *Los Angeles Times* story on the Cover Girls provided the description, “Whereas rap-oriented hip-hop is hard, rugged and muscular, Latin hip-hop is a female-dominated style characterized by the seductive vocal softness of artists like Lisa Lisa, Brenda K. Starr and Exposé.” (Johnson, Connie, “The Cover Girls--Singled Out for That Supreme Look,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Feb 1988, at http://articles.latimes.com/1988-02-20/entertainment/ca-11320_1_cover-girls, accessed 9/17/14.)

marketers in the Los Angeles area to create music targeted at Chicano and Mexican audiences, but when I refer to “Chicano rap listeners” or “the banda rap audience” I do not mean to imply that most of the people listening to either style would identify themselves that way or have listened exclusively or even primarily to either style. I am looking at how some rappers who identified as Chicano or Mexican signaled ethnic affiliations and how that signaling changed over roughly fifteen years between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. I believe those choices reflected and may to some extent have influenced shifting perceptions of identity in local communities and some distinctive aspects of those communities. But unlike New Mexico music, which is a relatively stable form with a relatively small and cohesive core audience, the styles and artists covered in this section were created to a great extent by individuals or small groups of associates trying to find audiences for new musical approaches, with varying success. In broad terms they can be described as representing a regional style or group of styles, but in particular terms they represent varied attempts to attract, satisfy, and represent varied, variously defined, shifting, non-cohesive, and at times inimical constituencies.

Another major difference between the rap styles explored in the next chapters and the New Mexico scene is the extent to which the Chicano and Mexican rap scenes have been dominated not only by male artists but by male consumers. Although there are female rap fans, they are very much a minority, and the music is overwhelmingly marketed to young men. The Chicano rap scene does have some female constituency, and there are a few popular female artists including Ms. Krazie and Ms. Sancha, but although Ms. Krazie has recorded hard-edged raps like “Im’a Rule The World” that suggest outreach to that constituency

⁵¹⁰ Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 91.

and a tough female empowerment attitude, a more typical example of how women are marketed in the genre is Ms. Sancha's album title, *Taking It Doggy Style*. This problem is in no way unique to the Chicano scene, and although it is more true of some kinds of rap than others, I have never been to a rap show where women accounted for anything like half the audience, and it is common to go to shows where there are few if any women—for example a club show including Chicano, black, and Asian rappers I attended in downtown Los Angeles where a black comedian took the stage partway through and started his act by yelling: "What is this, a damn sausage party? Who forgot to bring the bitches?" At that moment there were roughly a hundred men in the room and two women, both apparently companions of performers. There is obviously much more that could be written about women's relationship to rap, and to Chicano or Mexican rap in particular, but in this relatively cursory study the main point I would emphasize is that the scenes are overwhelmingly male—which also means that they are overwhelmingly made up of men in their teens or early twenties, and that most of those men listen to other kinds of music when they want to be in social situations that include significant proportions of women.

2. Chicano Rap: The First Ten Years

Latinos have been involved in hip-hop since its earliest days as a New York street style, and played a particularly influential role in the music's expansion to Southern California. The centrality of this role has rarely been stressed, since it tends to be subsumed into broader discussions of Latinos on the national scene, but the situation in Southern California was numerically, culturally, and commercially very different from in New York. There were many Latinos involved in early New York hip-hop, mostly but not exclusively as dancers and graffiti taggers—DJ Charlie Chase of the Cold Crush Crew is the most famous exception, later joined by rappers including Big Pun and the Dominican 2 in a Room, who reformed as the accordion-powered and Spanish-speaking rap crew Fulanito. But it is fairly common to tell the story of New York hip-hop without including any Latino deejays and rappers, and while such narratives leave out some talented artists and fail to give a full picture of the scene's ethnic reach, they can nonetheless provide a cohesive and reasonably accurate picture of how it developed. By contrast the story of hip-hop in Southern California inextricably includes Latinos in key roles from the outset, as DJs, rappers, producers, label owners, and radio programmers, and it is virtually impossible to discuss any aspect of the scene's early history without including them. By the 1990s the region was also developing a separate Chicano rap scene that at times overlapped the broader West Coast or national scenes but developed its own fan base, labels, venues, and media.

To a great extent, hip-hop skills were brought to Los Angeles by Latinos who moved there from the northeast. Eric "Evil E" Garcia, who produced all the early hits of Ice-T, the breakout West Coast rapper and originator of the SoCal

gangsta style, was Afro-Honduran and moved to LA from Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in the early 1980s with his brother Henry "Hen Gee" or "Henry G," a member of KDAY's Mixmasters with whom he recorded as the Spin Masters alongside Ice-T and the Chicano rapper Kid Frost (Arturo Molina Jr.). Evil E explained that he and his brother "were doin' NY beats and brought them to LA,"⁵¹¹ and Hen Gee explained that at first "we actually capitalized on the Latino community, that's where we moved into when we moved in LA. And then we just dominated that whole scene. Then we met Kid Frost, and then we needed to meet Ice-T, because we heard he was the only rapper really on the West Coast." The brothers hooked up with Ice-T and became associated with Electrobeat records, founded by another East Coast native, Dave Storrs, and a mysterious figure called DJ Pebo whom Hen Gee recalled meeting "through the Latino loop."⁵¹² They had all been hanging out at one of the first Los Angeles hip-hop clubs, Radiotron, founded in 1983 by yet another New York Latino, a choreographer from the Bronx named David Guzman, and owned by someone named Carmelo Alvarez. Electrobeat's first release, in 1984, was Kid Frost's "Rough Cut," shortly followed by the Spin Masters' "Brothers."



Figure 9: The Electrobeat Records crew: Evil E, Kid Frost, Dave Storrs, Ice T, and Henry G., c. 1984.

⁵¹¹ Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 184.

Important as “the Latino loop” was to the early Los Angeles hip-hop scene, it is also significant that none of these artists chose to present themselves on records as Latino, nor do all of them seem to consider that identity relevant to their careers. Although Hen Gee has often spoken of his Latino background and there is an early video of the Spin Masters performing at Bell High School and rapping a verse in Spanish,⁵¹³ Evil E has consistently presented himself as African American and I have not found a single interview in which he makes any reference to his Latino heritage or any association with Latino artists. Most people, if asked to pick out the Latinos in the Electrobeat Records crew (see figure 9) would be likely to choose Ice-T ahead of the Garcias, who phenotypically show no signs of American *mestizaje*. Nor was it an accident that Mellow Man Ace, a phenotypically African immigrant from Cuba, became the breakthrough bilingual rapper—though it is likewise no accident that he appeared on the West Coast aiming largely at a Chicano market rather than in New York. This is a convoluted history and while the ethnic backgrounds and phenotypes of the performers were often relevant, the ethnic affiliations, prejudices, and self-images of marketers and listeners also mattered, and the various interpretations did not always map neatly on one another.

Although Kid Frost recorded a couple of singles in 1984 and 1985, the first Chicano rapper to appear on a prominent release was Krazy Dee (Damon Trujillo), and the fact that this appearance has not been mentioned in any scholarly writing on Latino rap is indicative both of the complexities of this story and the agendas that have often been involved in its telling. Trujillo was an admittedly minor figure, but nonetheless significant because he recorded as one of

⁵¹² Schuetze, Stefan, “Hen Gee interview,” <https://soundcloud.com/sandro-de-gaetani/interview-henry-g-spin-master>, 6/2006, accessed 9/22/14.

the original members of the defining gangsta rap crew, NWA, and in fact was the first-named composer on the group's first recording, "Panic Zone," in 1987. Since the group's acronym stands for Niggaz with Attitude, Trujillo's presence might seem odd—he has no apparent African ancestry—but he argued that the term is not ethnic:

People say that, "Hey, well, you ain't no nigga," and it's like, you don't understand the definition behind NWA. It was Niggaz With Attitude, a nigga is a homie, you know what I mean? So when we came up with that name they were like "Yo, Dee, whatcha think?" and I was like "I don't give a fuck, I'm just as much of a nigga as you motherfuckers."

Trujillo has said he originally wrote "Panic Zone" as "Hispanic Zone" but the group's producer vetoed that title: "Dre and I were talking about it and he was like 'Nobody's gonna buy a song called "Hispanic Zone"'...and I was like, 'Yeah, well, maybe,' and I thought about it and I was like, 'Yeah, that makes sense overall.'"⁵¹⁴

In marketing terms it is easy to understand why a group called Niggaz With Attitude would not have wanted to make their debut with a track titled "Hispanic Zone," but they played up Trujillo's ethnicity on "Dope Man," one of the two other tracks from that first EP. It begins with a skit in which Trujillo tries to trade a fake gold chain for drugs and is dismissed with the comment, "Y'all Mexicans always come with this shit." Later, he adopts a comically-accented Mexican character, singing (to what sounds like a calypso melody), "Yo, mister Dope Man,

⁵¹³ "The Spin Masters Hen G & Evil E,"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0c68TOPLAA>, uploaded 9/1/09, accessed 9/23/2014.

⁵¹⁴ Cizmar, Martin. "Krazy D: What Happened After *N.W.A. and the Posse?*,"

http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/uponsun/2010/03/krazy_d_what_happened_after_nw.ph

you think you're slick/ You sold crack to my *seester*, and now she's sick/ If she happens to die because of your drug/ I'm putting in your *culo* a thirty-eight slug."

Five years later, Proper Dos would sample that final phrase in "M.F.M."

(Motherfucking Mexicans), the first rap on their debut album, which positioned them as a Mexican response to NWA and asserted a separate but equal claim to urban gangsta authenticity.

A frequently repeated trope of rap analysis is that African American is the default mode for hip-hop culture: the iconic rapper is black and male, and then there are Latino rappers, Chicano rappers, white rappers, female rappers, and rappers from other regions of the world. This often remains true even in situations where African Americans are rare—Anthony Kwame Harrison, writing about the largely white, middle class "underground" rap scene in San Francisco, noted that as an African American he was assumed to have superior knowledge, skills, and an automatic degree of authenticity even though he barely knew how to rap.⁵¹⁵ Chicano and Latino rappers have often suggested that when it comes to reaching a broad national market they are at a disadvantage and have tended to frame the problem as being in a genre dominated by black artists. Since white consumers account for the majority of rap sales, this can to some extent be fitted into a broader pattern in which white Americans have historically positioned blacks as their familiar "other," especially as regards popular music, associating African roots with musical authenticity and positioning primitive, exciting, or dangerous blackness as the seductive doppelganger of boring whiteness. The image of Los Angeles in rap marketing has consistently implied that African Americans dominate "the hood," obscuring the reality that by now they are outnumbered

22 Mar 2010, accessed 9/22/14.

⁵¹⁵ Harrison, Anthony Kwame. *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification*. Philadelphia: Temple University, 2009.

five-to-one by Latinos.⁵¹⁶ Given the demographic reality that many neighborhoods that have historically been African American—Watts, Compton, South Central—are increasingly majority-Latino, it is not surprising that some African American Angelenos have treated music as a stand-in for geography and treated rap as similarly threatened turf. Kid Frost recalled being told “Rap’s not for Mexicans, it’s for blacks,” and Ives of *Delinquent Habits* describes African American rappers having the attitude that “rap is their music and we’re trying to take it away.”⁵¹⁷

Non-African-American rappers around the world have been faced with two conflicting ideals of authenticity: the genre-based authenticity of sounding African American versus the personal authenticity of representing their own backgrounds, neighborhoods, and experiences. Chicano gangbangers from South Central Los Angeles are to some extent in a special position, coming from the same neighborhoods and speaking a form of English resembling that of the most iconic African American gangstas, but the history of local Mexican rap suggests that they face the same conflict, though manifested more subtly. For one thing, most rappers have dreams of breaking out of the local market and on a national level rap fans are largely unaware of urban Chicano culture and tend to type Chicanos either as part of a broader Latino category or as a variety of “Mexican,” meaning not a hardcore street gangbanger but a little brown immigrant.⁵¹⁸ The

⁵¹⁶ The movie *Crash*, released in 2004, perfectly captures the common ethnic fantasy of Los Angeles: though touted as a brutally honest exploration of the city’s racial tensions, it featured three major black characters, three whites, one Chicano, one Asian, and one Arab—a singularly unrepresentative mix for a city that is roughly half Latino and less than ten percent African American.

⁵¹⁷ Ali, “Latin Class,” 67; Corona, “Representations of Ethnicity,” 88.

⁵¹⁸ An interesting example of an East Coast writer failing to grant Chicano rappers their own, local street authenticity is Raquel Rivera’s study of Puerto Ricans in hip-hop, which argues forcibly against folding Latinos into a single group, but argues that the “niggafied” hip-hop identity of Chicano rappers comes “through their association with New York Caribbean Latinos” (Rivera, *New York Ricans*, 107).

most common Mexican stereotype in the United States—when it is not of invading hordes from south of the border—is still a variation of the old African American minstrel stereotype: a lazy fellow with a goofy smile, drooping moustache, and wide sombrero whose musical signifiers are mariachis in funny costumes playing hopelessly unhip music. When Proper Dos proclaimed in “Mexican Power” that that they were “back with a new rap/ To show those who thought that/All we could do is dance around a motherfuckin’ hat,”⁵¹⁹ one might wonder how many of their listeners were even aware of the Mexican Hat Dance, much less had internalized it as an image of Mexican culture. But if the specifics were unfamiliar to some Anglos, the archaism of the stereotype is still very real—at Tufts University in 2012, a chain restaurant had a table in the Student Union advertising a Cinco de Mayo special for which it had renamed the holiday “Cinco de Moustache,” with a poster of cheerful gringos in fake moustaches and sombreros. Nor does it seem irrelevant that Delinquent Habits’ “Tres Delinquentes,” the first national rap hit to include specifically Mexican (as opposed to urban Chicano) signifiers, used a sample of Herb Alpert’s Tijuana Brass—an Anglo simulacrum of Mexican music—and its video was a comical hodge-podge of a tourist trip south of the border, a spaghetti western, and footage of bullfights and mariachis.

A striking thing about Chicano rap throughout the 1990s was the absence of any sampling of or references to contemporary Mexican music. Aside from explicitly political groups like Aztlán Underground, the few Chicano rappers who chose to reference Mexico (as opposed to Chicano/Mexican California) tended to do so with the same comic stereotypes used by Anglos: exaggerated Speedy Gonzalez accents, references to tacos, beans, and tequila, and “Mexican” music

⁵¹⁹ Proper Dos, “Mexican Power,” Skanless/Rhino Records, 1992.

that was in fact Herb Alpert, pseudo-flamenco, or the frat-party standard “Tequila.” Such referents may in part have reflected a consciousness of non-Latino norms and markets, but also suggest that many Chicano rappers have tended to think of modern Mexico and Mexican music as separate from their personal identities, or at least the aspects of their identities that belong in rap, and that when they identify themselves as Mexican that reflects a local urban identity rather than a connection with the modern nation across the border. Chicano DJs and producers have tended to use samples that reflect their affinity with the broader hip-hop genre and when they choose to represent their own ethnic backgrounds, the signifiers have overwhelmingly been from the United States: sometimes samples of Chicano-associated bands like Santana, El Chicano, or War, but more commonly R&B oldies. The seminal Los Angeles Chicano DJ Julio G described learning to scratch by experimenting with his parents’ Vicente Fernández and Javier Solís records—“straight ranchera music, the kind nobody would ever think of mixing”⁵²⁰—but that was because he considered those records expendable, not because he had any intention of playing them in public, and not a single Chicano hip-hop deejay or producer seems to have sampled any ranchera or Mexican regional music before the turn of the millennium.

The absence of Mexican music does not mean that Mexican American rappers were in any sense denying, avoiding, or obscuring their musical and cultural identities—on the contrary, Kid Frost was probably typical of many of his peers when he recalled that although his father was into Santana, El Chicano, and Willie Bobo, as well as “Vicente Fernández, Lola Beltran, and different Mexican singers like that,” he “grew up off rock, just like all of us... We grew up off the Eagles, Aerosmith, Steely Dan, and Boz Scaggs..., Steve Miller, Boston. You’d

⁵²⁰ Quiñones, Ben. “Julio G. Is for Real,” *LA Weekly*, 8 Dec 2005, at

kick back and you'd listen to Fleetwood Mac."⁵²¹ In a pop-culture marketplace in which musical styles that read as obviously Mexican have tended to be regarded as archaic, corny, and unhip not only by Anglos (black and white alike), but by many young Chicanos, there is no reason those styles would be considered signifiers of a modern urban identity. The musical language of Chicano rap closely mirrors the spoken language: just as the lyrics are in English with obvious African American influence, a Chicano accent, and occasional words of *caló* or Spanish, the music is a mix of the same tracks sampled by African American DJs with some distinctively Chicano favorites and occasional reminders of flamenco or north-of-the-border urban Latin styles.

A handful of politically conscious Chicano hip-hop groups—the most popular was Aztlán Underground and others include Fifth Sun and El Vuh—have attempted a musical analog to the foregrounded use of Nahuatl in poems by Chicano movement writers since the 1970s, using traditional Aztec/Mexica flutes, pre-Colombian imagery, and occasional Nahuatl words. This reflects a broader trend in international hip-hop—Tony Mitchell describes groups “reconstructing the ‘roots’ of local histories, as in the use of local dialects in Italy and the Basque Country and indigenous rhetorical and linguistic practices in Aotearoa-New Zealand”⁵²²—and such efforts can signal meaningful affinities even if the rappers or their fans have only a symbolic relationship to the languages. But the affinity being signaled, though grounded in a mythic Mexican past, has even less connection to modern Mexico than rock or oldies—both styles that remain popular in Mexico as well as the United States—and in any case these groups

<http://www.laweekly.com/2005-12-08/music/julio-g-is-for-real/>, accessed 5/17/2012.

⁵²¹ Kid Frost interview, “Founders of Latin Hip Hop Pt 5,”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho0RRAYZs9E>.

⁵²² Mitchell, Tony. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2001, 32.

represent a miniscule fraction of the Chicano rap scene, though one that has received significant academic attention as an extension of the Chicano movement's agit-prop tradition.⁵²³

The complexities of representing Chicano identity on the rap scene are exemplified by the evolution from early artists who blended into a scene regarded as essentially African American to a foregrounding first of Latino and then of specifically Chicano identities. The first explicitly Latino rap hit on the national scene was Mellow Man Ace's "Mentiroso" in 1989 and it is significant that although he came out of Los Angeles, he was one of the very few Afro-Latinos on the local scene. Born Ulpiano Sergio Reyes in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, he came to the United States with his family in 1971, at age four, and lived in Miami and New Jersey before settling in South Gate, the neighborhood just north of Compton in southeast Los Angeles. He and his older brother Senen, who took the name Sen Dog and was a founding member of the group Cypress Hill, were apparently regarded as oddities in the local teen scene: "We were the only dark-skinned Latin kids in the ESL classes, so we'd get into a lot of fights with the Latino kids. They didn't understand, 'How can you be black and speak Spanish?'" As for the Chicano students who spoke English as a first language, he recalled, "You gotta fight against Mexican kids 'cause you're black and speak Spanish better than they do."⁵²⁴ Linda Flores Ohlsson notes that Ace's Spanish remains distinctively Cuban with no obvious Mexican inflections and his English is the standard African American English of urban Los Angeles, and suggests that due to his African phenotype he may have mixed more with African American kids than

⁵²³ E.g., Corona, "Representations of Ethnicity"; McFarland, *Chicano Rap*; Pulido, "Knowledge—the Fifth Element."

⁵²⁴ Ritter and Sherman, *Heroes*; Dante, "Interview with Mellow Man Ace" at <http://www.latinrapper.com/featurednews7.html>, accessed 9/19/14.

with Chicanos,⁵²⁵ but the reality of LA is that many Chicanos do not speak Spanish and judging by video footage of the Reyes brothers in their neighborhood, which seems to be mostly Chicano, the linguistic divide was more probably between Cuban Spanish spoken at home and a mix of African American and Chicano English on the street.

The Reyes brothers got into hip-hop in the early 1980s as break dancers, after an Italian American teenager from New York brought “Rapper’s Delight” to school and demonstrated pop-locking, and got into rapping around the middle of the decade. Their first DJ was Julio G, but as he got into radio they hooked up with another New York émigré of mixed Italian and Norwegian background who took the name DJ Muggs and a Cuban-Mexican rapper, Louis Freese, who took the name B-Real. This would become the core of Cypress Hill, but Muggs first worked with two African American brothers as 7A3, and while recording a track with them for the film *Colors* he mentioned that he had a friend who could rap in Spanish. The result was that Mellow Man Ace recorded a song called “El mas pingón,” which was shortly released on the Delicious Vinyl label. Though the lyric was entirely Spanish, it was originally released with an English title, “Do This (Spanish Flavor),” suggesting the company was hoping for play as a novelty from Anglophone radio and party DJs, and Ace apparently regarded the track as a one-off gimmick and continued to write his other raps in English. However, it brought him to the attention of Tony G, the Cuban American DJ who led the KDAY Mixmasters. Tony G got him a contract with Capitol/EMI and suggested another approach geared to the local Chicano market. As Ace recalled:

He goes, ‘You’re gonna rap English and Spanish, just like

⁵²⁵ Ohlson, Linda Flores. “Soy el brother de dos lenguas...”: El cambio de código en la música popular contemporánea de los hispanos en los Estados Unidos.” PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008, 213.

the Mexicans do in the neighborhood, your next-door neighbors.

You know how they say, “Voy to the store to get la leche.” I was like, ‘Yeah, I hear that every day.’ He goes, ‘That’s how you’re gonna rap the song.’”⁵²⁶

It is notable that these Cuban Americans regarded code-switching as a Mexican trait—since language-mixing is equally common in Latino New York, it suggests that their personal experience of Latino communities was in Los Angeles among Mexican Americans rather than during their early youth in the east and that their own families remained outsiders there and viewed the street-level language-mixing as something their Mexican neighbors did. As a further Chicano signifier, Tony G selected Santana’s “Evil Ways”—a record Ace says he hated—as the main backing sample for the code-switching lyric. Given these linguistic and musical links to a perceived Chicano rap market, Tony G’s choice to produce Ace rather than Kid Frost, who was Chicano and already had a strong local reputation, is somewhat surprising. One reason may be that he thought Ace was a better rapper: he later recalled, “Mellow’s [record] was easy ’cause he had a lot of flow, he had a lot of style.” Two other likely reasons are that Ace had demonstrated an ability to rap in Spanish while Frost was rapping only in English and that Ace was easier to market to the broad rap market because he was phenotypically black.

According to Tony G, Capitol was hesitant about Spanish or bilingual rap, so they first released a single of Ace rapping in English: “They told me that the world wasn’t ready for Latin rap” he recalled, adding that he disagreed: “I was like, ‘You’re wrong, man, there’s a lot of Latinos in the United States, there’s a

⁵²⁶ Ritter and Sherman, *Heroes*.

lot of Latinos worldwide.”⁵²⁷ The video of “Mentirosa” was clearly aimed at that broader Latino market, featuring Ace and an equally Afro-Caribbean-looking girlfriend, with nothing but the Santana sample to suggest it came out of California rather than New York or Miami. Ace’s Spanish was distinctively Caribbean: though the lyric is full of African American street slang, the only word of Spanish slang is “relambía,” which is common in the islands but seems to be completely unknown in Mexican or Chicano speech.

When Ace’s first album appeared in 1989, it was titled *Escape from Havana* and included several Spanish-language tracks. The first, “Rap Guancó”—a title referencing the Cuban guaguancó rhythm—was rapped alternately in Spanish and English and included a section of regional shout-outs to Puerto Rico, Cuba, Santo Domingo, El Salvador, and a shout of “Give some to Mexico, down there in TJ!” It may be coincidence that the Mexican shout-out was in English while the shout-outs to Cuba and Puerto Rico were in Spanish, but also seems to reflect Ace’s experience of which communities he related to in each language.

That year saw the first wave of internationally marketed Spanish-language rap hits, led by two novelty dance records, “Mi abuela” by the Puerto Rican Wilfredo y la Ganga and “Mamá yo te quiero” by Jorge Fonseca, also known as Qué Pasa, a Venezuelan based in Los Angeles but marketed almost entirely in Latin America. The Mexican music journalist Toño Carrizosa listed these as the singles that brought *rap en español* to the Mexican market, and although he follows the genre through 1991 with Gerardo’s “Rico Suave” and El General’s proto-reggaeton, “Muévelo”, he does not mention Ace or any of the Chicano rappers who appeared in those years, suggesting that even in Mexico Spanish-language rap was experienced as a fun international dance style rather than as part

⁵²⁷ Ritter and Sherman, *Heroes*.

of the US street genre and remained separate from the bilingual rap being marketed in Los Angeles and the rest of the United States.⁵²⁸

The single that established a specifically Chicano rap style appeared in 1990 and was another Tony G production: Kid Frost's "La Raza" was rapped in English ornamented with phrases of Spanish and caló over a sample of El Chicano's "Viva Tirado," and framed explicitly as a statement of Chicano pride—the first verse ends, "Some of you don't know what's happening, que pasa/ It's not for you anyway, 'cause this is for the raza." Its language is explored more fully in this section's final chapter, but for the moment I would underline the lyric's foregrounding of regional and ethnic specificity, with Frost referring to himself and his group as vatos, cholos, Aztec, Chicano, "brown and proud," homeboys, camaradas, and "the raza." At the same time, the album that included this single was titled more broadly, *Hispanic Causing Panic*, and included only one other track with substantial Spanish, "Ya Estuvo." Another track, "Come Together," established a pan-Latin perspective in its first verse, addressing an "alliance of Latinos from LA to Manhattan," but otherwise was a generalized plea for solidarity across racial lines, never stating Frost's ethnicity and including African American voices. This implication of racial harmony was countered on the next track, "Smoke," which had only one word of Spanish, in a line setting Frost off from African American critics: "Hey, yo, amigo, I know your ego won't let you listen to my lyrics 'cause I ain't no brother." The title track contained the only mention of Mexico or Mexicans, and the setting was a comical stereotype, a thickly accented hustler saying, "Welcome to *Méjico*, señor, war are you goeen?" Then came a hard rock guitar lick and Frost representing Latin Alliance as his tribe and describing himself as a "Hispanic causing panic" over a scratched

⁵²⁸ Carrizosa, *Onda grupera*, 238-9.

sample of a voice saying “Me-Me-Mexican” and, in accented Spanish, “Wha hoppen?” That track also included a reworking of the hip-hop phrase “word to the mother” as “word to the madre,” and at the very end the comic voice returned to say, “Ey, war the hail you think yur goeen?”

Otherwise the album was straightforward gangsta rap with no notably Latino signifiers, and the musical choices were even less explicit, most of them sampling the standard range of R&B, funk, and in one case Black Sabbath. “La Raza” and “Ya Estuvo” are the only tracks with music that anyone would associate with Chicano culture, and both are recognizable as such only to insiders: the blues harmonica on “Ya Estuvo” is in the smooth, single-note style of War’s Lee Oskar, and El Chicano’s “Viva Tirado” is a jazz-rock-Afro-Latin cruising standard in the Santana tradition. (The piece was composed and originally recorded by an African American jazz composer, Gerald Wilson, in honor of a Tijuana bullfighter he admired, and El Chicano had called themselves the VIPs and considered themselves a mainstream R&B group until their Armenian American producer, Eddie Davis, renamed them over their objections—in lead singer Erzi Arvisu’s words: “I felt that the name Chicano was harsh.... We didn’t want to be characterized as revolutionaries.” Indeed, they at first refused to appear as El Chicano, and Davis briefly hired other musicians as stand-ins, though they changed their mind when the record became a hit.⁵²⁹) Frost was accompanied on some tracks by an African American rapper and producer, Will Roc (William Griffin), and one song, “In the City,” found them driving through East Los Angeles, talking English to each other and being threatened and shot at by “cholos” with heavy Mexican accents. As in the “Welcome to *Méjico*” opening, a voice asks, “War do yu theenk yur goeen?” and Will asks, “Where you got me

⁵²⁹ Molina, *Chicano Soul*, 117-18.

at?” Frost reassures him: “We on the East Side, man, it’s cool, gon’ go kick it in my neighborhood.” Then Will spots “a car full of cholos” and Frost yells, “Duck, Will, it’s a drive-by!” followed by a rattle of gunfire leading into the opening beats and a Mexican voice saying, “¿Sabes qué, loco?” Frost raps his lyric entirely in English, punctuated by the stereotypically accented Mexican voices questioning or threatening him and Will.

All of this suggests that Frost, who had been recording English-language rap since the 1980s, often in partnership with Ice-T, was testing a Chicano stance on “La Raza,” but also keeping his options open by devoting most of his disc to gangsta rap performances that could pass for African American or at least as the voice of a special Chicano who was down with the black community. *Hispanic Causing Panic* had some national success, but Frost was clearly wary of the ethnic label, telling *Spin* magazine, “I want to see the stereotypes done away with. I’m tired of being labeled as a Chicano rapper.” At the same time, the magazine reported that he was organizing a pan-Latino project called the Latin Alliance, with rappers from Nicaragua, Spain, Puerto Rico, and Brazil.⁵³⁰ (In the end the Latin Alliance included Frost, Mellow Man Ace, a French/Mexican American rapper named ALT, and a half-dozen unknowns including a couple of Nuyoricans, and lasted for only one album.)

All of these choices have to be placed in the context not only of Frost’s personal concept of identity but of his and his producers’ concepts of the national and international rap market. By 1990 there were a handful of successful white rap acts—The Beastie Boys, Everlast, 3rd Base, and Vanilla Ice—but all were dogged by criticism that they were cultural appropriators. Latinos were potentially in a position to be a sort of bridge ethnicity on the hip-hop market, authentically

⁵³⁰ Erlich, Dimitri, and Elizabeth Hanly, “Spanish Fly,” *Spin*, Oct 1990, 16.

non-white but not as threatening as black, and that position was explicitly claimed in the name of the first Chicano group to hit after Frost: A Lighter Shade of Brown. Their debut album, 1990s *Brown & Proud*, was the strongest statement of Latino pride and specifically of Mexican and Chicano identity and pride on a rap album up to that point. The title track opened with a brass band playing the Mexican national anthem, claimed Aztec, *mexicano*, Latino, Chicano, and Hispanic identities, and described their language as “Spanglish—a bit of Spanish combined with English.” Unlike Ace’s and Frost’s albums, they maintained this identity throughout: song titles included “El Varrio,” “Pancho Villa,” “Poquito Soul,” “T.J. Nights,” and “Latin Active,” as well as the War tribute, “Spill that Wine,” and all had at least a few words of caló or Spanish. “El Varrio,” the album’s second track, attempted to position them specifically as a Mexican American equivalent to NWA, starting, “My side of the road is like Compton” (as in NWA’s “Straight out of Compton”), sampling that group’s “Gangsta, Gangsta,” and echoing one of Ice Cube’s classic lines, “Stop the violence? No, I ain’t no role model.” Their choices of musical samples underlined a local Chicano identification, in particular on the album’s most popular single, “On a Sunday Afternoon,” which opened with a dedication to “all the homies” by the oldies radio deejay Dick “Huggy Boy” Hugg, referred to the group as sitting in the park “just jammin’ the oldie tunes,” and was built on samples of the Young Rascals’ “Groovin’ (On a Sunday Afternoon)” and Tommy James and the Shondells’ “Crystal Blue Persuasion” (a particularly popular Chicano rap sample, also used by Frost and Proper Dos, due to a guitar riff that sounds vaguely flamenco). They underlined a specifically Mexican identity with a biographical rap about Pancho Villa and by singing an a cappella chorus of “La Cucaracha,” but on other tracks distanced themselves from that identity, following “La Cucaracha” with “T.J.

Nights,” their first single, which was about going down to Tijuana to party and positioned the United States as “home” to the point that they stop at MacDonald’s for food before crossing the border and describe Mexico as a fantasy party site: “crossing the border is like crossing the rainbow.” Despite the geographical location, that track’s musical samples were from the Eagles and Wild Cherry, with no hint of Mexican music.

The following year, 1991, found Frost trying out his pan-Latin collaboration, *Latin Alliance*, featuring Mellow Man Ace, a rapper known as A.L.T. (Alvin Trivette, a.k.a. Another Latin Timebomb) who claimed Mexican and French heritage, and a half-dozen otherwise unknown rappers, including the New York Puerto Rican Markski and Rayski Rockswell and others whose national heritages are hard to trace.⁵³¹ The only single from this effort was Frost’s “Low Rider (On the Boulevard),” a collaboration with War featuring a remake of their cruising classic, “Low Rider.” The album attempted to build on the Chicano pride message of “La Raza” with appeals to Latino political sensibilities, featuring a track titled “Latinos Unidos (United Latins)” and “What Is an American?,” a rap by A.L.T. that directly addressed Mexican immigration, but at the same time described immigrants in the third person and US citizens in the first:

If they get caught then they give ’em the boot
Now who’s gonna wash our cars and pick our fruit?
Not the man that comes in the boat
And yo, not an American, quote, unquote.

The album attracted decent press attention and was hailed by some Latino scholars as a milestone, Ed Morales calling it “a defining moment in the creation

⁵³¹ I can find literally no other mention of any of the other performers on this disc, and Raquel Rivera (*New York Ricans*, 94) is my only alternate source for Markski and Rayski.

of a nationwide bilingual hip-hop aesthetic.”⁵³² However, it did not sell well and in terms of the later rap scene its main effect seems to have been to discourage future attempts to situate rappers as spokesmen for pan-Latino pride. Frost provided a doleful post mortem, telling Brian Cross, “we tried to bring everybody together but no one accepted it because everybody’s superior: the Dominicans don’t get along with the Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans don’t get along with Cubans who don’t get along with Mexicans and the list goes on and on.”⁵³³

As if to underline the message that Latino identity in rap could be an asset but needed to be handled carefully, the big news on the Los Angeles rap scene that year was the debut album from Cypress Hill, led by Ace’s brother Sen Dog and their high school friend, the Cuban/Chicano B-Real, which sold over two million copies in the United States and also did very well abroad. Although both the group’s rappers were Latino, there was no photo of them on the cover, few of the album’s tracks included any signifiers of their ethnicity, and B-Real described their appeal as coming from a unique musical combination of West Coast “gangsta shit” with “East Coast beats” provided by their New York-born Italian/Norwegian DJ, Muggs. Their first single, “How I Could Just Kill a Man,” included one line with a couple of Spanish words, “taking out some putos, acting kind of loco,” but the overall message was that they were hardcore gangsta rappers who used particularly complex, layered samples—Muggs recalls that their original working title for the song was “Trigga Happy Nigga.” Their second single, “Hand on the Pump,” sampled a popular oldie, “Duke of Earl,” but that song is widely known outside the Chicano community and the lyrics contained no Spanish and referred to both the rappers and their enemies as “niggas.”

The *Cypress Hill* album did include two tracks that firmly positioned them

⁵³² Morales, *Latin Beat*, 337.

as Latino, but these were programmed at the end of the disc as tracks 13 and 15. The strategy seems to have been to establish them as an innovative but ethnically “normal”—that is, black or white—hip-hop group, then point out their distinctive Latin flavor. Their third single, “Latin Lingo,” was an explicit showcase of “Spanglish,” performed by Sen Dog as a self-described “funky bilingual,” with shout-outs to Frost and Ace and many Spanish words and phrases, as well as several words of *caló* (*chingón*, *vatos*, *jainas*) and a reference to Mellow Man Ace’s “El mas pingón.” The group’s linguistic positioning exemplifies the commercial shift of that period: they got a major label contract shortly after Ace’s success in 1989 and B-Real told Brian Coleman, “What really got us signed to Columbia were the songs in Spanish... The record company wanted to capitalize on the Latin market. Even though it was smaller back then, they wanted us to give it a shot. We wasn’t trying to force the issue, but it was fine with us.”⁵³⁴ This suggests that the inclusion of explicitly Spanish or Latino tracks was as much the record company’s idea as theirs, and the fact that those tracks were programmed at the end of the disc suggests that by 1991 it was less clear that this was a good marketing strategy. Ace, Frost, Lighter Shade of Brown, and Latin Alliance had proved both the appeal of Latino rap and its limitations, and when Brian Cross interviewed Cypress Hill shortly after their debut and asked if they considered their work “a Latin thing,” Sen Dog carefully positioned them outside that model:

A lot of the groups out here are like pro one culture and shit, like Kid Frost—he caters just to the Latin, ’cause that’s his thing. If you ask me—I’ll tell you that [Frost] is a sucka and he can’t represent my thing, that’s where we step in. We feel you can all be down with your own, but not when it comes to the music; you all

⁵³³ Cross, *It’s Not About a Salary*, 194.

got to be together.

Muggs, their DJ, added: “We feel the niggas, the Mexicans, the Chinese, white kids, it don’t matter.” And B-Real chimed in, “If you went to the show the other day you would have seen so many Asians you would have flipped, so for me it’s not about colors.”⁵³⁵ The group’s later albums included at most one track each with Spanish or *caló* words, with the exception of 1999’s *Los grandes éxitos en español*, a disc aimed specifically at the Spanish-language market on which they remade their most popular tracks in Spanish versions. Although some Anglo hip-hop magazines saw this as a return to their roots—*CMJ* referred to them as “reinterpret[ing] their most well known anthems in their native tongue”⁵³⁶—the Latin media saw it as outreach by an English-language group to the Latin market. They shared that year’s *Billboard* Latin Music award for Best Hip Hop Album with the Mexican Molotov and the New York Dominican Fulanito, both Spanish-language groups, and the magazine described their release as their Latin market debut without noting either their ethnicity or their status as pioneering Latinos in mainstream hip-hop.⁵³⁷ That was in *Billboard*’s special Latin Music section, and the main section of the same issue included a long article on the group’s latest English language release, headlined “Cypress Hill Columbia Set Bridges Genres,” but the genres being bridged were hip-hop and rock, and it did not describe them as Latino, only mentioning in passing that they had also released a “U.S. Latin market-targeted” disc.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ Coleman, *Check the Technique*, 122, 130.

⁵³⁵ Cross, *It’s Not About a Salary*, 238.

⁵³⁶ *CMJ*, 12/27/99, 26, cited in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_grandes_%C3%A9xitos_en_espa%C3%B1ol, accessed 9/29/2014.

⁵³⁷ “And the Award Goes To...,” *Billboard* Latin Music special section, 29 Apr 2000, LM8, LM18.

⁵³⁸ Kenon, Marci, “Cypress Hill Columbia Set Bridges Genres,” *Billboard*, 29 Apr 2000, 52.

One of the paradoxes for any group seeking broad national (or international) popularity is that a unique identity can set one apart and be a selling point at the outset, but in the long run people tend to want to identify directly with the artists they embrace, so although non-Latinos may find it cool that a group is Latino, they also want to feel that the group is like them. When I first became aware of Cypress Hill, they were described to me as a multi-ethnic group with one black, one white, and one Chicano or Latino member (the person describing them wasn't sure), and that may have been a tribute to their popularity—the fact that they were reaching such a large audience led fans to characterize them as representing a similar ethnic breadth.

By contrast, Kid Frost had his one major national hit with “La Raza” and was solidly typed as Chicano. His next album, *East Side Story*, was a more cohesive presentation than *Hispanic Causing Panic*, portraying him throughout as a Chicano gangbanger and using more R&B oldies to give it a distinctive barrio sound. It differed from the first album by having no tracks with full verses or even full lines in Spanish and also by being more generally socially conscious—“La Raza” and Latin Alliance had established Frost as a rapper with social messages and he followed that trajectory with “Raza Unite” and “Another Firme Rola (Bad Cause I’m Brown),” as well as a song countering gang violence, “No More Wars.” The biggest hit was “No Sunshine,” a mordant description of life in prison over a remake of Bill Withers’s 1971 soul ballad “Ain’t No Sunshine,” which was the theme song for Edward James Olmos’s bleak film about Chicano gang life, *American Me*. A late track, “Throwing Q-Vo’s,” consists of shout-outs to other artists and groups, starting with a mix of Frost’s voice saying “Chicano, Ch-chicano...” blended occasionally with “*méjicano*,” and countered occasionally by another voice saying “Haven’t I told you not to use that word?” The list of artists

he saluted included Mellow Man Ace, Cypress Hill, and Latin Alliance, but also the white Anglo group Third Base, the African Americans Ice-T, Ice Cube, Edo G, and Eazy-E's Ruthless Records group, the multiracial British pop-R&B-rap group Massive Attack, "all the OG low riders out there," *Low Rider* magazine, and "all the raza in *Califas, Arizona, Tejas, Nuevo Mejico, Colorado*, and anywhere else you find the brownskins!"

Frost's message was a mix of strong local and ethnic pride with broader expressions of solidarity with national and international rap scenes. He was positioning himself as a tough urban rapper who represented his own place and identity and also had a message for all rap fans. That fitted his new linguistic approach: using less Spanish, in the sense of avoiding full verses or phrases that the broad audience might not understand, but also more Spanish, in the sense that every rap now included at least a few words of *caló*. This linguistic approach could also be framed as settling into his own identity: rather than rapping most of his material in African American English without Chicano signifiers or attempting a fluent Spanish that was not his normal speech, he was rapping in his normal Chicano English. Or, in a third interpretation, it could be framed as a reaction to the other Chicano gangsta rappers who began recording in the wake of his first success and tried to position themselves as more authentic voices of the Los Angeles streets.

Rap marketing, and gangsta rap marketing in particular, has consistently sought to balance a commitment to "keeping it real," in the sense of representing the authentic experience of young urbanites in tough neighborhoods, and at the same time making that experience accessible to a broad audience—and from early on there were some artists who emphasized their street authenticity by distancing themselves from their more broadly successful peers. By 1992, along with the

Chicano or Latino rappers signed by major labels—Mellow Man Ace, Frost, Cypress Hill, Lighter Shade of Brown, and A.L.T.—there were some Southern California Chicano rappers releasing singles or albums on small, local labels with limited distribution. Since they had no way to compete in the national marketplace, it made sense for these artists to narrow and strengthen their local and ethnic identifications, positioning themselves as less broadly popular but more authentic.

The first Chicano rap group to take this approach and create an enduring career was Proper Dos, a duo from Santa Monica consisting of rapper Frank V (Villareal) and producer Ernie G (Gonzalez), who recorded on the local Skanless label and titled their first CD *Mexican Power*. As Frank V told Lorraine Ali in 1993:

We came out on the independent label Skanless because I wasn't gonna be caught up in people telling me, "Don't say Mexican, say brown, so you can appeal to everybody." I just straight out said, "Mexican Power!" I knew that would limit a lot of record sales, but it was about time somebody would say it, 'cause people were beating around the bush.⁵³⁹

Four years later, he was still insisting on this point, telling Caprice Antoinette Corona that Proper Dos chose to be more ethnically specific than previous rappers:

We're not saying "brown," we're not saying "*la raza*," we're saying "Mexican." And we knew that was gonna limit us, but just being the hard head that I am, I said, "We're gonna come out doing it like that. So what?" Like crossing over to get into the

⁵³⁹ Ali, "Latin Class," 69.

mainstream, I don't know, I can't bring myself to do that.⁵⁴⁰

Despite the uniformity of these declarations, at other points in the Corona interview Frank V seemed to suggest he would prefer just to be known as a rapper, without signifying ethnicity. When Ernie G expressed frustration at being typed as a Latino rap act, Frank V chimed in: "We can't lie, I can't sit here and fool everybody, and be like, [with sarcasm], 'I'm just an artist,' because I know damn well life ain't like that." He also suggested they were ready to soften their stance, saying, "We are trying to tone down on some of the newer stuff. Try to become more universal... I wanna blow up, I wanna be successful, but I'm not gonna overdo it. I'm gonna stay true to everybody." As an example of what they would not do, he said:

See, we can't come like Cypress Hill, you know, they're like, "Nigga this," one song they're "niggas" and one song they're "eses" and "vatos." I mean, that's cool for them, I'm not gonna knock 'em, I mean they're like what, three, four million albums in? But that's them. I'm not gonna, we're definitely not gonna follow them.⁵⁴¹

On their debut CD, Proper Dos put their ethnic affiliation aggressively up front, opening with a skit that positioned them as Mexican equivalents and opponents of NWA. The defining Los Angeles gangsta rap crew had opened their 1988 track "Gangsta Gangsta" with a skit that began with a Chicano voice complaining, "Aw shit, man, them *pinche* black gangsters are at it again. I wonder who they fucked up tonight?" Eazy-E and his boys responded with a shout of "You, motherfucker!" followed by a burst of automatic weapons fire, then a murmured, "Got 'em." Proper Dos opened their album with a sample of this skit,

⁵⁴⁰ Corona, "Representations of Ethnicity," 68.

but on top of the shout of “You, motherfucker,” they came back with “Fuck you, puto! *You*, motherfucker!” and the gunfire was followed by Ernie G asking, “Hey, Frank, did you get him?” The implication was that Mexicans could hold their own with black gangbangers on the same streets and Frank V told Corona, “A lot of people would come up and shake my hand, a lot of Mexicans would be like, ‘Ey, that was bad,’ ’cause you know, it made people feel good.”⁵⁴²

The CD’s next track, “M.F.M.” (Motherfucking Mexicans), was a ferocious declaration of street toughness and ethnic pride. It started with a burst of *caló*: “Simón! Y para tí frijole-eatin’ cabrón! Saiclón, pelón, chingón! And all that! The loco cholo went solo!” The lyric claims Mexican and (far less frequently) Chicano identity and threatens that rather than beating on other Mexicans Frank V is ready to head to “a rich neighborhood” and beat or kill “the motherfuckers that try to keep the raza down,” specifically mentioning Caucasians and Asians. The backing track samples Krazy Dee’s “I’ll put it in your culo, a thirty-eight slug” from the first NWA single, and Frank V reworks Ice Cube’s claim to be “the nigga you love to hate” by rapping “I’m the kind of Mexican that you hate.” On another track, “Aquí para Frank V,” he attacks Eazy E as “the curly-headed faggot that tried to disgrace my race”—and though he didn’t include a name, he was clear in interviews, saying, “He made comments about Mexicans and I felt it was my job to call it out.”⁵⁴³

Although Proper Dos consistently represented “Mexican” as their identity, this affiliation was once again framed in terms of local ethnicity in Los Angeles, not as a connection to the country or culture across the border. Linguistically, Frank V consistently used Chicano English, including some *caló* in every lyric,

⁵⁴¹ Corona, “Representations of Ethnicity,” 68, 70, 72.

⁵⁴² Corona, “Representations of Ethnicity,” 71.

but no Spanish verses and very few Spanish phrases. His Spanish at times showed pocho inflections, as when he pronounces *siclón* with an [ai] diphthong in the first syllable like the English *cyclone*, and in his frequent references to himself as “the loco cholo,” where a Spanish-speaker would say “el cholo loco.” (Though both are possible, he is presumably calling himself a crazy cholo, not a cholo crazy person.) Most of the musical samples are funk and R&B, including prominent use of classic oldies: the album’s first single, “Firme Hina”—an Anglophone spelling of the caló word *jaina*, or girlfriend—is rapped over Brenton Wood’s “Oogum Boogum Song.” The only reference to Mexican music is a mention of the “Mexican Hat Dance” as a gringo stereotype, and the only use of music other than oldies as an ethnic signifier is at the end of “M.F.M.” where Frank V’s final declaration of Mexican solidarity is underlined with a generically Spanish sample of flamenco guitar.

Proper Dos were at the forefront of a new kind of Chicano rap, designed to appeal specifically to an ethnic and regional market, using caló throughout and positioning themselves as opposed simultaneously to black gangbangers and white or Asian authority figures. Their language choices represented not only an ethnic and regional affiliation but a performative display of street knowledge and authenticity, as when Frank V broke out of the rhythmic rap flow to explain:

Chingo de jura fuckin’ swooped on us in the *parque*,
 something like ten carloads. Them *placas* was deep. They found a
cuete in my *ranfla*—fool was trying to pin a murder on me, *ese*,
 saying I was a prime suspect in a drive-by, homes. I might do a
 little *tiempo*, but you know, fuck it. Two beans in a bucket, *ese*,
¿que no?

⁵⁴³ “Frank V - Still Representing Mexican Power!” at

This kind of performative Chicano gangsta English would become the standard language of Chicano rap, and although many scholars characterize it as code-switching,⁵⁴⁴ it is more accurately framed as an equivalent of the exaggerated black gangbanger English used by groups like NWA, using *jaina* as a counterpart to *bitch*, *puto* to *faggot*, *vato* to *homie*, and *cuete* or *fusca* to *gat* or *piece*. This rap style at times includes standard Spanish words, but most of the non-Anglo elements are *caló*, some are specific to California—in local terms *Califas*—and at least one word has made it over into standard black rap usage, “loc” from *loco*. The message in this speech style is not that the rappers are bilingual and switching between codes, but that they have their own way of talking, which is as distinctive, tough, and locally authentic as the speech of their black neighbors and counterparts. In 1994 a group called Brownside made this point explicitly by teaming up with Eazy-E and remaking NWA’s career-defining “Boyz in the Hood” as “Vatos in the Barrio,” with a direct verse-by-verse translation from black to Chicano slang, including matching cultural signifiers:

Boyz-N-the-Hood:

Chased him up the street to call a truce
 The silly mothafucka pull out a deuce-deuce
 Little did he know I had a loaded twelve gauge
 One sucka dead, LA Times front page...
 They greet me with a 40 and I start drinking
 And from the 8-ball my breath started stinking...

Vatos ‘N the Varrío:

Chase him up the calle to call a truce

The silly pendejo pulled out a deuce-deuce
 Little did he know I had a sawed off twelve gauge
 One puto dead, LA Times front page...
 They gave me a Corona and I started drinking
 And from the pisto my breath started stinking

Not everyone was pleased with the emergence of this style. Mellow Man Ace complained that Frost had begun mixing “cholo shit into hip-hop and everybody out here ain’t down with that shit.”⁵⁴⁵ When Corona interviewed a young local group called Fifth Sun that was trying to create socially conscious Xicano rap in the tradition of Aztlán Underground—they insisted on “Xicano” as the historically correct spelling and used words of Nahuatl in their lyrics—they distanced themselves from the Chicano rap mainstream by parodying its language: “When I think of Chicano rap, I think of ‘*Órale, vato*, in the *voló*.’” However, it was intended as an in-group style, setting off the artists that pursued it from their peers who appeared to be pursuing national success rather than representing the Chicano community, and a significant local audience welcomed that approach. This audience was never a majority even among local Chicanos who were rap fans—Steve Yano, the owner of Skanless Records, told Corona that although Proper Dos were selling fairly well around Southern California, most young Latino fans were still listening to African American rap and more likely to “buy an Ice Cube CD than a Proper Dos CD.” But one of the advantages of a recording-based genre is that it can reach a substantial audience even if that audience is relatively dispersed.

⁵⁴⁴ E.g., Perez Torres, *Mestizaje*, 90; McFarland, *Chicano Rap*, 54; Hernandez, Jonathan C., “Machismo: The Role of Chicano Rap in the Construction of the Latino Identity,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2(20), Oct 2012, 101.

⁵⁴⁵ Ro, Ronin. *Gangsta: Merchandizing the Rhymes of Violence*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1996, 16.

The centrality of recording is basic to the history of rap as a major pop style, which means it developed and needs to be studied and understood differently from musical styles based on live performance. Unlike the New Mexico music artists, who perform a shared, standard repertoire and are in demand at parties, dances, and weddings, rappers are expected to perform their own compositions and to come up with new material on a regular basis, and in most cases their careers are independent of their live performance skills and reach an audience mainly through recordings, which require collaborations with record labels and producers. Some groups, such as Cypress Hill, have made strong careers as live performers, but others have rarely if ever appeared onstage and it is common to meet devoted rap fans who have never seen their favorite artists or groups in person. In a live tradition like the New Mexico scene, an artist can make his or her mark by having the promotional skills to book gigs, showing up on time, playing well, and having a good rapport with the audience, and there is no strong pressure to be different or innovative. In rap there is constant pressure to come up with something new and for an unknown artist one of the most common ways of distinguishing oneself, especially in the gangsta genre, has been to be harder, tougher, more authentically criminal, or more graphically violent or obscene than previous performers.

NWA was one of the first acts to break nationally by being extravagantly outrageous—the use of “Niggaz” in their name combined with a track called “Fuck tha Police”—and although their defining lyrics were written by Ice Cube and their beats created by Dr. Dre, the group member who is most often mentioned as an idol and model by young Angeleno fans and rappers is Eazy-E, whose reputation as a high-powered dope dealer gave them their street credibility. Brownside presented themselves as friends of Eazy, who produced their early

recordings, and they framed this as a street rather than musical connection, telling Julio G in a mock radio interview on their debut CD, “Nah, homes, I don’t consider ourselves being rappers. We’re gangbangers *trying* to be rappers. We’re not rappers trying to be gangbangers, like some other *bitches* out there.”⁵⁴⁶ Like black gangsta rappers, Chicano rappers have often associated themselves with specific neighborhoods or gangs—in “Vatos ‘N the Varrio,” Brownside describe themselves as “throwing up the one-three” (XIII, the number for the letter M, representing the main Southern California gang, the Mexican Mafia), while the most popular Chicano gangsta crew in Northern California, Darkroom Familia, aggressively promote their allegiance with the Norteño gang Nuestra Familia (represented by XIV for the letter N) and rap about killing “scrapas,” a slur for Sureños.

Violence and criminality are not the only standards of street credibility, however, and before artists began signaling gang affiliations the early wave of Chicano rappers set themselves off from one another with language that suggested they were more authentic representatives of Chicano street culture. When Proper Dos presented themselves as rejecting the terms “Latin” and “Raza” in favor of “Mexican,” they framed this as rejecting the mainstream compromises that more famous Chicano rappers were making, and their lyrical choices were similarly framed as representing local speech and normal street style as opposed to the market-driven choices made by national artists like Mellow Man Ace, Frost, and Cypress Hill. Judging by the later work of all those rappers, and by the choices of virtually all later artists in what by the mid-1990s was established as a separate Chicano rap genre with its own record labels, magazines, web sites, and marketing channels, there was a general agreement in this community that the

⁵⁴⁶ Brownside, *Eastside Drama*, East Town Records CD 51242-2, 1997.

authentic language of Chicano rap was not the bilingual switching that Ace and Frost used on some early tracks, but a consistent *caló*-inflected English.

It is important to distinguish this Chicano speech style from bilingual code-switching because the contrast is aligned with musical choices and situational identifications. As a music identified with Chicano urban gang style, Chicano rap is couched in the language young Chicanos used when they perform that identity—as opposed to the English they might use at school or work and the Spanish they might use at home or when hanging with friends in Mexican immigrant contexts. Some Chicano rap artists are classically bilingual, in the sense of being able to converse fluently in variants of English and variants of Spanish, while others speak only variants of English. Similarly, some listen to Chicano rap and other US musical styles and also to Mexican music, while others listen only to US styles. In the context of Chicano rap, though, all perform the latter identity, rapping in Chicano English over US musical tracks. For many this is a matter of “keeping it real” in a personal sense—Kid Frost rapped Spanish verses on his first CD, but he is not fluent in the language and he has regularly described his musical tastes as rap, soul, R&B, and rock. Other artists have recorded Chicano rap as one of their possible identities—Juvenile Style, a brother duo that recorded two Chicano rap albums in the early 1990s, performed consistently in Chicano English over mixes of R&B, but both brothers were born in Mexico, are fluent in Spanish, and later became pioneers of *banda* rap, renaming themselves Akwid and rapping in Spanish over *ranchera* tracks. In a third option, Jessie Morales records *ranchera* as El Original de la Sierra but has also attempted an English-language rap career and in that context chose to use black rather than Chicano English, bringing African American rappers into the studio to coach him on his pronunciation and flow. I will discuss Morales at

greater length in the next chapter, but would note here that he adopted a parallel strategy for his ranchera recordings, since he is a native Angeleno and had to work equally hard to get an authentic Sinaloan accent for his ranchera performances.

The early history of Chicano rap is thus a history not only of individual Chicanos discovering or claiming their own voices, but of a mix of artists, producers, and marketers, some Chicano and others Cuban, African American, Anglo, or Asian (Steve Yano, the head of Skanless Records, is Japanese American), experimenting with various ways of signaling a Latino or Chicano identity, and eventually settling on a unified style that became recognized as Chicano rap and associated with particular musical and linguistic choices. Whether individual performers choose to identify as Chicano, Mexican, brown, Raza, or otherwise, this style is generally known as Chicano rap and by the late 1990s it was solidly associated with particular lifestyle and fashion choices—essentially the cholo gangbanger stereotype, with occasional salutes to older pachuco styles. The basic look is shaved head, ornate tattoos, and football jerseys, sleeveless t-shirts, or Pendleton shirts, and a survey of CD covers shows notable uniformity (see figure 10).



Figure 10: Chicano rap CD covers.

The artist who in my experience is most often mentioned as exemplifying this style is Lil Rob, a rapper from San Diego who made his CD debut in 1997 with *Crazy Life*—an English calque of the common Chicano term for gangbanging, “la vida loca.” Rob presents himself as an exemplar of the cholo style, with intricate tattoos on his muscled forearms, a shaved head, moustache and skinny goatee, usually wearing sunglasses, a bandana or old-fashioned pachuco hat, with a t-shirt, Pendleton, or football jersey. His debut featured cinematically violent lyrics spiced with caló and sampled a rich variety of R&B oldies, reaching back from Zapp’s 1982 harmonica-driven “Doo Wa Ditty” to the Moonglows’ 1954 doo-wop ballad, “Sincerely,” whose sweet a cappella vocals underpinned a rap titled “Soy Chingón,” in which he portrayed himself committing an escalating series of crimes including theft, rape, and murder. Other samples included Barbara Lynn, the Dells, the Larks, the Bar-Kays, the Isley Brothers, and the Emotions—all African-Americans—as well as Sunny and the

Sunliners and the 1970s Chicano band Malo, and Rob's language includes *caló*, standard Spanish words, and black street terms. For example, "Soy Chingón" begins with him instructing a friend to "throw on some fuckin' oldies, ese," then we hear the Moonglows' a cappella harmonies, over which he raps: "Simón, I'm ready, ese, estoy listo/ Sí, out of marijuana, say, pass to the pisto." The lyric's non-standard-English vocabulary includes a mix of Anglo and Chicano street slang: *órale*, *ranfla*, *kick back*, *homie*, *capping*, *hood*, *endo*, *putos*, *barrio*, *shank*, *cantón*, *tag up*, *vatos*, *cuete*, *spray*, *leva*, *fusca*, *homeboy*, *bust off*, *jaina*, *bone*, *ranker*, *firme*, *dedo*, *puro pedo*, *jura*, *bitch*, *pull rat*, *gunning*, *sabes*, and *homes*. He also provides a nice example of a street calque, calling a cowardly male a "little girl," a phrase that in Anglo rap I have only found in reference to women, but that directly translates the common *caló* term *chavala*.

The Chicano rap style performed by Lil Rob and his peers is intended for an in-group, and makes no attempt to appeal to outside listeners—and in this respect "outside listeners" includes Chicanos who do not identify as *cholo* or with the regional gang culture. California gangs have increasingly been dominated by leadership from within the state's prison system, which is rigidly segregated by ethnicity and geography: the four main affiliations are African American, white (represented by Aryan Nation), *norteno* (represented by *Nuestra Familia*), and *sureño* (represented by Mexican Mafia), and prison authorities avoid mixing inmates from these groups with one another.⁵⁴⁷ As its name indicates, gangsta rap is directly connected to gang culture and it is common to find stores that have

⁵⁴⁷ The specifics of these groups have varied over the years—in the 1990s, the African American Crips and Bloods were at war and had to be segregated, and a 2014 article in the *Atlantic* says that although the California prison system now considers blacks a single group under the leadership of the Black Guerrilla Family, the white and *norteno* gangs are currently divided, Aryan Nation being threatened by an offshoot called Nazi Lowriders and *Nuestra Familia* by an offshoot called Northern Structure (Graeme Wood, "How Gangs Took Over Prisons," *Atlantic*, 16

large sections of Chicano rap filing it separately from mainstream rap, with groups like Psycho Realm, Cypress Hill, and Fundoobiest typically in the mainstream section alongside African American and white rappers, rather than in the Chicano bins. There are also many CD sellers, especially in the “swap meets” (the western term for flea markets), who carry ranchera, Mexican pop, and Chicano rap, but no mainstream rap—not simply because of consumer tastes, but because ranchera and Chicano rap are carried by the same distributors, and those distributors do not have relationships with the labels that issue mainstream rap recordings.

The fact that the Chicano rap genre has its own clothing styles, speech style, musical style, record labels, distribution networks, websites, and so on does not mean that its listeners necessarily identify purely with that genre. It represents an identity type and just as the same CD dealer may have a ranchera section and a Chicano rap section, some listeners may dress in cowboy gear to go to a ranchera show and cholo gear to go to a rap show—or, in some instances the reverse: when I was doing research in Sinaloa in the late 1990s, I met a young man who dressed in cholo gear to attend ranchera shows in Mazatlán, indicating that he was an urbanite based in the United States and just visiting, but said he wore cowboy gear to go to similar shows in Los Angeles as a display of Mexican pride. I heard of young men similarly choosing to play ranchera while cruising the streets of Los Angeles but rap while cruising in Mexican towns, in both cases to indicate their difference from less worldly or bicultural peers.

Since Chicano rap is identified with a specifically urban, US, cholo gangbanger identity, it makes sense that it would take English as its base language, and also that some Mexican American rappers have chosen to distance

themselves from that style and signal other local or transnational identities. Given the huge influx of immigrants from Mexico to Southern California in the 1980s and 1990s and the early experiments with bilingual rap lyrics, it seems odd that none of those rappers chose to try rapping over Mexican musical samples—especially in the mid-1990s when Los Angeles was swept by the *tecnobanda* craze, which mixed ranchera with synthesizers and other electronic instrumentation and *norteño* groups like Los Tucanes de Tijuana and Grupo Exterminador recorded dance tracks influenced by disco and house music. However, given the generalized association of rap with American and in particular with African American urban culture and the association of even the *tecnobanda* and modern *norteño* styles with rural Mexican traditions—no matter how synthesized the Mexican-identified dance music became, dancers continued to wear cowboy gear—the lack of musical overlap may have actually been encouraged by the degree of audience overlap. Lupillo and Jenni Rivera grew up in Long Beach listening to a mix of ranchera and gangsta rap, and described the 1990s boom in violent Mexican corridos as similar to what was happening in rap with NWA, but when I asked if they thought it would make sense to mix ranchera and rap or to do gangsta rap in Spanish, they responded that most people wanted “real” rap and “real” ranchera, and would consider mixtures of those styles inauthentic. In Jenni’s words:

I figure people that buy music, if they’re gonna listen to Spanish music they’re gonna listen to the real thing. I mean, Spanish rap is modern, but it’s not real. So, they like to listen to *norteño*, to la banda, anything that has the original sound to it. The

authentic stuff.⁵⁴⁸

This opinion seems to have been shared by almost everyone in the Mexican and Chicano music industries. By the later 1990s there were a couple of rap groups in Mexico that were rapping in Spanish and having fair success there, in Spain and other areas of Latin America, and even getting decent sales in the United States, but they were little more inclined to use ranchera samples than their Chicano counterparts. There was only one significant group that attempted to rap over recognizably Mexican samples, and their choices and presentation suggest the mix of intentions and possibilities involved in mixing rap with ranchera.

Delinquent Habits released their first album in 1996, executive produced by Cypress Hill's Sen Dog, and most of the tracks sounded like mainstream hip-hop in the Cypress Hill mode with occasional words of *caló*. However, the opening track and first single, "Tres Delinquentes," was specifically intended to sound Mexican. Ives, one of the group's two rappers, told Corona "we are the first rappers to ever make it with a mariachi hook," adding that their DJ, OG Style, "used these samples because his father used to listen to mariachi music all the time." Ives explained that they were trying to signal Latino ethnicity while avoiding the standard Chicano rap approach, and specifically distanced their work from Frost and Lighter Shade of Brown, saying Frost in particular "screwed up hiphop for us... 'La Raza' was marketable but...extremely limiting and exclusive, pigeonholing the Latino audience and alienating others...it was obviously a commercial gimmick." As for Delinquent Habits' approach:

We wanted to be known as a Latino-oriented group because that's important to us. We wanted to represent but what we didn't want was to be pigeonholed. Like, we didn't just want to be known

⁵⁴⁸ Interview by author, June 2000.

as a car show group... We wanted to break those stereotypes.⁵⁴⁹

Ives's comments are interesting for a couple of reasons: First, he frames the group and himself as Latino but his name is Ivan Martin, he describes his ancestry as French, Italian, and Spanish, and he raps as "el Huero Loco," "the crazy white guy." OG Style is Mexican American, but the group's other rapper, David Thomas, uses the name Kemo the Blaxican, and describes himself as "half black, half Mexican."⁵⁵⁰ Second, the "mariachi hook" which set their debut single apart from previous Latin rap ventures was a sample of "The Lonely Bull" by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, a band of Los Angeles studio musicians with no Latino members. Josh Kun writes that the Mexican-born, US-based performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña described this track as "mariachi rap," but "in fact, the 'mariachi' in question is not mariachi at all. The horns and guitars that begin over the song's breakbeats belong not to a mariachi ensemble from Veracruz, but to notorious border kitschmeisters Herb Alpert and The Tijuana Brass."⁵⁵¹ The Chicano literary scholar Rafael Pérez-Torres similarly wrote that the track "invokes a simulacrum of Latino music, a shadow of mariachi music, a sanitized version of pleasant melodies with a slight tinge of ethnic flavor," adding that the song's video displayed "stereotyped images of Mexicans created through cheaply produced mass-appeal films."⁵⁵²

There is no question but that the music and video for "Tres Delinquentes" signal nostalgic pop-culture portrayals of mexicanidad—and notably the title itself is a compromise between Spanish and English orthography, seeming Spanish but maintaining the distinctive "q" of "delinquent" instead of the "c" of

⁵⁴⁹ Corona, "Representations of Ethnicity," 89, 138, 136, 88.

⁵⁵⁰ "Interview with Kemo the Blaxican," at <http://www.latinrapper.com/featurednews10.html>, published 7/28/04, accessed 9/20/14.

⁵⁵¹ Kun, Josh D. "The Aural Border," *Theatre Journal*, 52 (1), 2000, 16.

⁵⁵² Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 103-4.

delincuente. The video shows the rappers and their DJ in urban streetwear driving a classic Chevrolet convertible into a dusty Mexican mountain village, where they are met by threatening peasants in sombreros and serapes, a full mariachi in trajes de charro, women in ruffled Spanish party dresses, a skateboarding midget, and a breakdancer in a warm-up suit, all intercut with snippets of bullfight footage and what seems to be an urban dance club. The video certainly trades in stereotypes, but Kun and Perez-Torres seem to be suggesting that those stereotypes represent an Anglo perspective and are not legitimate signifiers of Mexican heritage or ethnicity. The tricky thing about this is that, as Kun writes elsewhere, Alpert regularly had himself photographed for album jackets and publicity pictures accompanied by a group of Mexican mariachi musicians and although those musicians did not in fact play on his recordings, “there was no caption, no reason to suspect that the six Mexican musicians weren’t the infamous Tijuana Brass themselves.”⁵⁵³ From Alpert’s perspective this was a kind of masquerade or even a kind of fraud, but listeners who fell for the presentation heard the music as a sound imported from Tijuana and like the people in Mexico City who accepted *orquesta típica* and radio mariachis as authentic rural folk music, many heard it as the sound of their own culture and heritage.

In the lyric of “Tres Delinquentes,” Kemo the Blaxican labels the Alpert sample as mariachi and places it in the context of *caló*-Spanish speech and a quotation from the José Alfredo Jiménez ranchera standard “El Rey”:

Watcha, trucha, cálmate, escucha,
Somos delincuentes, tú no quieres lucha.
But we freak it this way, sigo siendo el rey,
OG freaks the beat the mariachis play.

⁵⁵³ Kun, “Tijuana Sound,” 237.

As far as I know, no one has explored the extent to which Mexicans and Chicanos as well as Anglos have believed Alpert's band is from Tijuana, but there is evidence that many have, that they treasure his recordings as heritage music, and that they think of his work as a modern variant of the mariachi tradition. The Chicano rap scholar Pancho McFarland writes that "Delinquent Habits distinguishes itself in the Chicano rap world by creative use of *mariachi* and Tijuana brass,"⁵⁵⁴ with both his description and the lower case orthography of "brass" suggesting that he thinks of the band as Mexican, and numerous other writers and scholars have referred to "Tres Delinquentes" as using a mariachi sample.⁵⁵⁵ Kemo's website describes the song as fusing "a traditional mariachi sound (courtesy of Herb Alpert's 'Lonely Bull') with the raw hip-hop backdrop of the streets,"⁵⁵⁶ and a look at the comment thread on a YouTube video of Alpert and his musicians playing "The Lonely Bull" in the Tijuana bull ring in the 1960s turns up numerous writers with Spanish surnames who recall the band in general and this track in particular as family favorites, some of them specifically characterizing it as mariachi and several recalling it as a signifier of Tijuana: one writes, "herp albert [sic] dio su esencia musical a tijuana , hasta la tv local se identificaba con su musica" ("Herb Alpert gave his [or its] musical essence to Tijuana, even the local TV identified itself with his music"), and another recalls Alpert's music playing outside Tijuana stores in his youth, adding "H A was a

⁵⁵⁴ McFarland, *Chicano Rap*, 43.

⁵⁵⁵ E.g. Alborno, Martin, "Cultivating Delinquent Habits," *Frontera* 1996 (clipping, no issue or p.n.); Sansone, Glen, "Delinquent Habits," *CMJ New Music Monthly*, Aug 1996, 51; Sandiford-Waller, Thida, "Rhythm Section," *Billboard*, 18 May 1996, 21; Eddy, Chuck, "Delinquent Habits," *Vibe*, Sep 1996, 217, refers to it as "mariachi brass from Herb Alpert"; Macías, Anthony, "Black and Brown Get Down: Cultural Politics, Chicano Music, and Hip Hop in Racialized Los Angeles," in Brett Lashua, Karl Spracklen, Stephen Wagg, *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 66.

⁵⁵⁶ <http://www.kemotheblaxican.com>, accessed 10/2/14.

Tijuana icon to many inspirados , he brought the old spanish music back alive.”⁵⁵⁷

To the extent one thinks of Alpert as an outsider creating a touristic simulacrum of mariachi it makes sense to describe his music as fake and in Kun’s words “not mariachi at all,” but to the extent his music is recognized by Chicanos and Mexicans as a personal signifier of Mexican heritage it is legitimately part of their tradition. Although Alpert was not Mexican and Ives is not Mexican, the sample used in “Tres Delinquentes” serves for the trio and its listeners to, in Corona’s words, “highlight the group’s link to Mexican culture.” Indeed, it is a more direct link than when Kemo the Blaxican describes himself in the lyric as “hitting hard like an Aztec, swift like a Zulu,” since both Aztec and Zulu are mythic, generalized signifiers of indigenous identities, while Alpert’s recordings are recalled by many Chicanos as music played by their parents or grandparents in their homes as a signifier of family roots and a reminder of Mexico. Authentic mariachi or not, there is no reason to doubt Ives’s and Kemo’s claims that OG Style selected the track as familiar music from his youth. Indeed, that contention is supported by the sample that backs the album’s next track, “Lower East Side,” which has never been cited as an example of rapping over Mexican music, but is from a recording of the bolero “Flor de azalea” played on a Hammond B3 electric organ by a Mexican counterpart of Alpert’s, Juan Torres. Like Alpert, Torres was a pop recording star of the 1960s—though on the other side of the border—and promoted as a modern interpreter of the mariachi tradition: the liner notes to *Organo Melodico vol. 10*, the LP that includes “Flor de azalea” describes his

⁵⁵⁷ Juan Carlos Rodriguez, Collin S Bueno, comments at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16B5Xm8_IKw, accessed 10/3/14. Similarly, responses to a question on a Mexican website about “la cancion q tiene musica de mariachis y es rap” mention “Tres Delinquentes” as well as another track by Delinquent Habits that sampled a group of Tijuana Brass imitators, the Mexicali Brass, without ever suggesting that these tracks are not real mariachi (<https://mx.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090505105505AATzcNo>, accessed 10/5/14).

music as “a new style in which he combined the rhythms of mariachi with organ and percussion instruments to give them a very international touch and make them more emotionally moving for the listener.”⁵⁵⁸

Along with its musical nod to *mexicanidad*, “Tres Delinquentes” included multiple consecutive lines in Spanish, the first major Chicano? rap hit to do so, and the group also released a Spanish-language remake of the track as an extra on most versions of the single, the first US rap group to re-record one of its hits for the Spanish market. That market was clearly perceived as separate—the Spanish version did not appear on their album and although their next release, 1998’s *Here Come the Horns*, had cover art showing a mariachi band silhouetted against the sunset and more Alpert samples along with other evocations of ranchera, its singles did not include any Spanish verses. However, Cypress Hill soon followed their model, using mariachi trumpets and Spanish guitar on a single called “Tequila Sunrise” in 1998 and including a Spanish language remake of that song on their maxi single and Mexican album releases, and in 1999 released a full album of Spanish remakes of their earlier hits, *Los Grandes Éxitos en Español*.

It may be significant that the only Mexican American rap groups in Southern California to sample Mexican music—or even a simulacrum of Mexican music—in the 1990s were two trios that included non-Chicanos and sold widely to rap consumers outside the regional or Latino markets. Although Cypress Hill and Delinquent Habits presented themselves as Latino and were generally accepted as Latino by Chicano and Latino consumers, their evocations of *mexicanidad* were nostalgic—the Alpert samples could be considered another sort of oldies, connected both to the musical golden era of the early 1960s and to a

⁵⁵⁸ “...una nueva modalidad en la cual combinó los Ritmos del mariachi con el órgano e instrumentos de percusión para darles un toque muy internacional y hacerlas más emotivas para el escucha.” *Organo Melodico de Juan Torres*, vol 10, Musart LP EDM 1487, c.1970.

romantic, touristic Mexico. But for Chicanos and outsiders alike, the Mexican signifiers were clearly marked as “other.” The “Tres Delinquentes” video presented the group as visitors and outsiders in the Mexican village, facing off against stereotyped Mexican locals rather than joining with them, and the sleeve illustration for the single similarly showed them as modern urban street guys in a classic convertible with a turntable on its rear hood, while gaudily costumed and mustached mariachis float in the background, serenading them but not on the same plane (see figure 11).



Figure 11: "Tres Delinquentes" single cover.

The fact that Delinquent Habits and Cypress Hill made that particular nostalgic gesture and re-recorded their hits in Spanish, while artists like Lil Rob and Proper Dos signaled their heritage by sampling oldies recorded by black R&B acts and rapped consistently in Chicano English might indicate that the former groups' commercial orientation was directed more broadly toward a pan-Latino or mixed Latino and Anglo mainstream that still thought of Spanish as their language and mariachi as the defining Mexican sound. It could also suggest that they were balancing their less solid connection to the Chicano community by

emphasizing their connection to Mexican heritage. Or that they were presenting themselves as multi-ethnic aggregations and the use of music that signaled Mexican identity in a way that was personally significant but unusual for hip-hop—a sort of generic code-switching—fit their broader presentation of themselves as multi-ethnic collaborators. The message of the cohesive Chicano rap scene is that it represents a particular group that shares a particular way of speaking and a particular range of musical signifiers. Of course many members of that group have alternate tastes and identities—for example, situations in which they speak Spanish and listen to ranchera—but in terms of musical identification, they expect their Chicano rap to use R&B tracks and be in *caló*-inflected English, just as they expect their mariachi to use acoustic instruments and be in Spanish.

The choice to signal Mexican identity with archaic mariachi or nostalgic pseudo-mariachi fit well with the broader mix of identities Delinquent Habits and Cypress Hill were signaling. They presented themselves as young men from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds who grew up in the same neighborhoods with the same street environment and were sharing that experience in their music. Their Spanish was the language of their parents, and their Mexican music was likewise the Mexican music of their parents' generation. It was even arguably a sort of hypercorrection, underlining their affiliation with an ancestral *mexicanidad* that Chicano kids with uniformly Mexican ancestry took for granted and could therefore choose to ignore or deprecate. In any case it was a way of signaling a connection to a symbolic Mexican heritage, not to the kids currently taking ESL classes at their Los Angeles high schools who went dancing in cowboy outfits to the latest banda hits. Through the 1990s, no Southern California rap group made any attempt to mix contemporary ranchera styles into their sound, and even when they recorded Spanish-language versions of their hits, the intended

market seems to have been the growing audience for rock and rap en español, most of which is in Latin American and Europe, rather than their neighbors in Los Angeles who were listening to banda and norteño—including the growing audience that listened both to corridos and to gangsta rap.

An obvious spur for the Spanish-language remakes was that by the late 1990s a couple of rap groups from Mexico had proved that serious rap en español—as opposed to lightweight dance-pop with rap vocals, a brief trend in the early 1990s that produced Latin American hits by artists like Gerardo and Caló—could find an audience at home and elsewhere in Latin America and also some sales north of the border. Control Machete’s *Mucho barato* in 1996 was the first Mexican rap album to appear on a major label in the United States, thanks to production by Cypress Hill’s engineer, Jason Roberts, and it was followed in 1997 by Molotov’s *¿Dónde jugarán las niñas?* Both were released by Polygram and did well enough on the US market to earn Latin platinum and double-platinum status respectively—a much lower standard than normal platinum, signifying 60,000 units rather than one million, but still unprecedented for non-English-language rappers in the US market.⁵⁵⁹ These releases seem to have sold largely to fans of rock en español rather than rap fans—at least in my experience, Angeleno rap fans who are fluent in Spanish tend to disparage these groups as mediocre compared to Cypress Hill or any number of African American crews—and although their debuts got a lot of press attention neither reached the US Latin charts and their later albums made virtually no impact. Nor did either draw substantially on distinctively Mexican musical styles. Control Machete mixed some accordion into one instrumental track, but Molotov described their musical tastes as including “all different types of music; Latin music, R&B, Hard Rock,

⁵⁵⁹ <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php>, accessed 10/4/14.

Metal, and Funk...[and] Punk.”⁵⁶⁰ In the same divergent taxonomies used by Anglo marketers, this description distinguished five different Anglo-associated styles, but filed all the varied musical styles played by Latinos in the Americas in a single category.

By the turn of the millennium Chicano rap was solidly established as its own genre in Southern California and throughout the Southwest, and there was also a large Chicano and Mexican audience buying African American gangsta rap: Kun reported that although the audience for the main “urban” radio station in the Los Angeles area, KPWR, was “generally thought to be primarily black and Latino..., in fact the station notes that its prime marketing target is LA Latinos.”⁵⁶¹ In the 1990s there was also a growing audience for contemporary Mexican ranchera, not only among the huge population of recent immigrants but also among local Chicanos who were rediscovering ranchera through the hardcore narcocorridos, the quebradita dance clubs, and the classic drinking songs of José Alfredo Jiménez—in 2001, the *Los Angeles Times* considered it newsworthy that an English language station was number one in the local radio market, since for the previous six years the top position had consistently been held by stations playing Mexican Regional styles.⁵⁶² Given this situation, it is striking that no local Chicano rapper chose to mix any of those styles into their work, and suggests the extent to which rap—whether Chicano, African-American, or multi-ethnic—was understood by performers, marketers, and presumably audiences as indexical of a separate identity from contemporary Mexican ranchera. At the same time, some of those artists and marketers were aware that many young Angelenos were

⁵⁶⁰ Montes, Richard, “Molotov Interview,” at <http://www.brownpride.com/latinrap/latinrap.asp?a=molotov2/index>, accessed 10/4/14.

⁵⁶¹ Kun, “What Is an MC,” 742.

⁵⁶² Soichet, Emmanuelle. “English-Language Station Tops for 1st Time in 6 Years,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18

switching back and forth between rap and Regional Mexican depending on their mood or whom they were hanging out with in a given moment, and early in the 2000s some of them began to experiment with musical fusions targeted at those listeners.

3. Rap Meets Ranchera

During the same period that Chicano artists were shaping their own branch of rap and hip-hop, two new waves of Mexican music swept the Los Angeles area. The first to be noticed by journalists and scholars was *banda*, the brass band ranchera style of Mexico's Pacific coast, along with its modern, synthesized offshoot, *tecnobanda*, and in particular the associated dance style, *quebradita*. According to banda historian Helena Simonett, the tecnobanda style appeared in Guadalajara in the mid-1980s and by the early 1990s banda was the most popular music in Mexican Los Angeles. Indeed, it was by some measures the most popular style in Los Angeles as a whole: in 1992, the Spanish-language radio station KLAX became the city's highest-rated station, largely thanks to its banda programming. Simonett writes that this change not only astounded and horrified Anglo programmers, but startled local Mexican music promoters. She quotes the manager of El Lido dance club saying that when they opened the club in 1988 they featured cumbia and had a dress code forbidding any kind of headgear, but by the early 1990s they were playing banda and virtually all the male customers and many of the women wore cowboy hats.⁵⁶³

The banda craze was transnational, a fusion of older Mexican brass styles with the instrumentation, rhythms, and in some cases compositions of rock and disco. Its hits included new songs celebrating Mexican traditions and culture, such as "Sangre de indio" (Indian Blood), alongside remakes of Anglo pop hits like Paper Lace's "The Night Chicago Died" (remade as "La noche que murió Chicago"). The dance style was also a mix, in Simonett's description combining "dance styles from different regions of Mexico, in particular from the north and

⁵⁶³ Simonett, *Banda*, 25-35.

northwest, with simplified steps and gestures from folklórico dances and with steps from contemporary popular Latin dances.”⁵⁶⁴ Sidney Hutchinson, in her book on quebradita, notes the influence of current Latin dances like merengue, salsa, and cumbia, as well as north of the border styles including country line dancing, swing, rock ’n’ roll partner dances, and hints of hip-hop b-boy/girl styling.⁵⁶⁵ It was considered thoroughly Mexican, but also fresh and trendy, and both the music and the dance provided young Angelenos with a way to simultaneously signal pride in their heritage and a modern, urban identity.

Chalino and the Corrido Boom

In those same years a new wave of corrido singers and composers was also gaining popularity, although at first their audience was smaller than the banda audience and more limited to recent immigrants. In the mid-1970s Los Tigres del Norte had become the most popular group in the norteño genre largely thanks to corridos chronicling the deaths of drug smugglers—their defining hits were “Contrabando y traición,” a fictitious song about a female smuggler and gunslinger from Texas, and “La banda del carro rojo,” about the killing of a smuggler in New Mexico (though in the song his death was resituated in Texas). As a mainstream ranchera trend, *narcocorridos* had largely died out by the late 1980s, but the Tigres and other bands continued to record them occasionally and artists who focused on drug songs remained popular within the world of smugglers and continued to make cassettes and perform at private parties and occasionally in clubs on both sides of the border, especially in areas where the drug traffic was a significant part of the local economy. In the early 1990s the

⁵⁶⁴ Simonett, *Banda*, 57.

style took off again in Los Angeles thanks to a young songwriter and singer named Rosalino “Chalino” Sánchez. Chalino (as he is always called) began composing corridos while in prison in southern California, writing personalized ballads for his fellow inmates, and on his release continued to write songs on commission for sponsors in the border crime world. At first he produced his own cassettes, then he teamed up with a local record label owner, Pedro Rivera, who released albums and cassettes of his work on the Cintas Acuario label in Long Beach. In the early 1990s Chalino switched to the transnational Musart label and began recording ranchera standards along with his own corridos, but in commercial terms he remained a relatively minor figure until January 1992, when he was playing a concert in Coachella, California, and someone in the crowd pulled a gun and shot him in the shoulder. Chalino drew his own gun and returned fire, seven people were wounded and one killed, and the story made national news on both sides of the border. Four months later, Chalino was assassinated after a nightclub show in Culiacán, Sinaloa, and became a legend. His aggressive lyrics and distinctive vocal style, nasal and frequently off-key, were imitated by hundreds of young singers along the Pacific Coast from Jalisco to California.

In Los Angeles, Chalino’s real-life gunfighter persona had a dramatic impact on Mexican street culture. Lupillo Rivera, Pedro’s son, who became one of the most popular local ranchera stars of the 1990s and 2000s, recalls that Mexican music had been dismissed by most young Angelenos as strictly for rural immigrants until the Coachella shooting, but then:

All the young people were like, “Oh my God!” And like the next day, all these gangbangers, these cholos who’d been listening to oldies and all that, they started listening to Chalino. It was

⁵⁶⁵ Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 63, 74.

something new for me, because I'd always thought, "They'll never listen to this guy." Then, after he passed away, that's when it really blew up all around: in Mexico, Chicago, in Atlanta—it was like a craze.⁵⁶⁶

To young Mexican Americans of Lupillo's generation, there was an obvious connection between Chalino and the gangsta rappers who dominated the local hip-hop scene. In Lupillo's words, "You got for example NWA, Easy E and Doctor Dre and all, Ice Cube, were all together and they started coming out with like 'Boyz in the Hood' and all that other hardcore stuff. [The corrido] is almost the same thing. It's just that it's in Spanish."⁵⁶⁷ In sonic terms, the two trends could hardly have been more different: Chalino sang in an archaic rural style, sounding like a hillbilly from the Sierra Madre Occidental, using polka and waltz rhythms and typically backed by a standard norteño line-up of accordion, bajo sexto, bass and drums. The similarity was in themes and attitude: like the gangsta rappers, Chalino presented himself as a raw, aggressive gunfighter, the toughest guy on the streets of LA, and he provided a model of how to be as tough as the local gangbangers while simultaneously signaling Mexican pride. His aggressively unprofessional singing style—his own assessment was, "no canto, ladro," (I don't sing, I bark)—fitted the rap aesthetic, conveying the message that he was an authentic outlaw from the sierra, "keeping it real."

Chalino's success inspired a new generation of corrido singers on the West Coast, from Nayarit to San Francisco. In 1998, Sam Quiñones interviewed several young performers who had grown up speaking English and listening to rap before turning to ranchera. One of them, Edgar Rodríguez of the duo Voces del Rancho (Voices of the Ranch or Village), told him, "When we were small, we always

⁵⁶⁶ Wald, *Narcocorrido*, 133.

wanted to fit in, so we'd listen to rap... I guess we felt that if we listened to Spanish music, we'd be beaners or something... But after Chalino died, everybody started listening to corridos. People want to feel more Mexican." Saúl Viera, who recorded as El Gavilancillo (the Little Hawk), told Quiñones, "At first, when Chalino came out, no one really liked him. Myself, I was like, Where the hell did you get that guy? But then you pay attention to what he's saying and you start liking him. It's like gangster music about people getting shot, battles with police, growing marijuana." Like Rodríguez, Viera cast this as recognition of his heritage, saying, "When I was younger, I was ashamed of Mexican music. Now I know who I am. I'm not afraid of my race."⁵⁶⁸

The wave of young singers that included Viera and Voces del Rancho adopted more than Chalino's music: their album covers showed them in rural settings wearing cowboy gear and many of their fans assumed they were from the Sinaloa sierra. By the late 1990s, though, Lupillo Rivera began appearing on his corrido and ranchera album covers dressed like a hip, successful urban star, with a shaved head and Italian suits—though he continued to hold a cowboy hat in his hand, signaling his connection to older traditions (see Figure 12).

⁵⁶⁷ Lupillo Rivera, interviewed by author, June 2000.

⁵⁶⁸ Quiñones, Sam, "Sing Now, Die Later: The Ballad of Chalino Sanchez," *LA Weekly*, 29 Jul 1998, republished in Quiñones, *True Tales*, 12, 25-6.

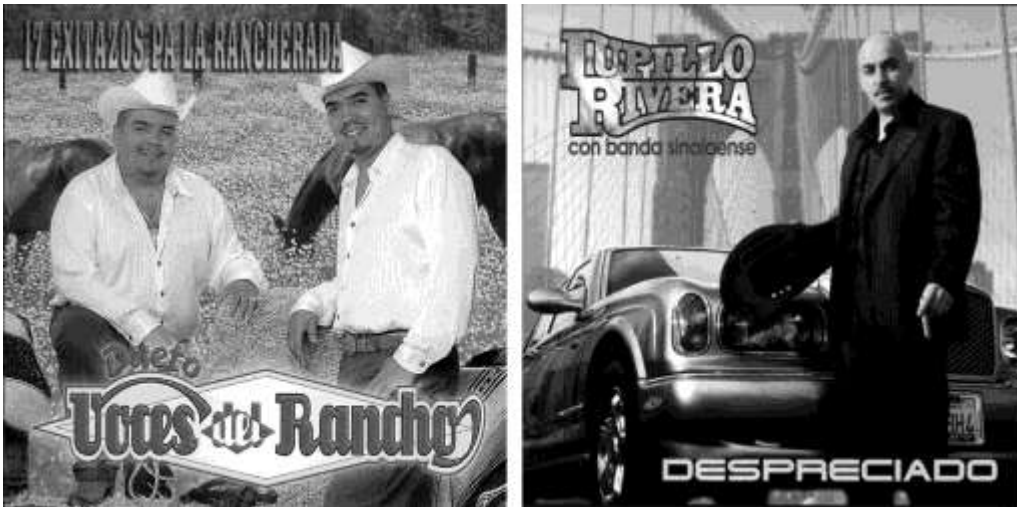


Figure 12: CD covers of Dueto Voces del Rancho and Lupillo Rivera

At the turn of the millennium the combination of urban fashions and rural sounds was taken still further by Jessie Morales. A teenager from South Central Los Angeles, he at first adopted a rural persona, calling himself El Original de la Sierra (the Original from the Mountain Range) and in 2001 became the first artist ever to place a ranchera album in the regional pop top ten for Southern California with *Homenaje a Chalino Sánchez* (Homage to Chalino Sánchez), which also debuted at number one on *Billboard* magazine's Latin Albums chart and became the first hit for the new multinational Univision record label conglomerate. In a *Billboard* interview that year, Morales suggested that Chalino's music had a special appeal that set it apart from mainstream norteño:

It was pura raza. Just corridos and songs of the real people of the pueblo that struggled in their way of working, in drug trafficking. He composed songs about tragedies, deaths of young people in the street, whose families asked him to do songs. He was more raza than Los Tigres or Los Tucanes.⁵⁶⁹

Morales followed in that tradition, writing songs about brave drug

traffickers and gun battles with rivals and the police, but as that quotation suggests—the references to “raza” and “the street”—his identification was from an urban, north of the border perspective. That December he released another album, *Loco*, with a front cover photo showing him in a modified zoot suit and Italian hat and a back cover photo of him in a sweatshirt and gold chain, flanked by two female models in bikinis. Most of the music was still polkas and waltzes with norteño or brass band backing, but one of the accordion-accompanied corridos was titled “OG Song”—the initials stand for “Original Gangster,” a standard rap term of respect, which Morales adopted as a secondary alias—and the CD included a final “hidden track,” on which Morales reworked Biz Markie’s 1988 rap hit “The Vapors,” rapping in English over hip-hop beats, with the lyric modified to include LA signifiers and a lone word of caló (“ese”). The title song was a departure of another sort, a Spanish translation of Willie Nelson’s country standard, “Crazy,” backed by accordion.

Like many young Mexican Americans, Morales had grown up hearing ranchera at home—his parents are from Nayarít and Zacatecas—but had preferred English language music, and particularly gangsta rap. His brother was a DJ and he lists his favorite artists as Eazy-E, Tupac, and RUN-DMC. Growing up in South Central, he was initially ashamed of his parents’ tastes, but he had a cousin who was involved in the drug traffic and got killed, Chalino wrote a song commemorating the event, and Morales was fascinated and inspired. He also was inspired by the musical tastes of local drug traffickers:

The Latinos, people who have to sell drugs, that’s how I heard them [corridos]. The narcotráficos that were happening around the area. So that’s how I heard—“Hey, that guy has a big

⁵⁶⁹ Burr, Ramiro. “Vallenato Among New Rhythms Invigorating Reg Mex Market,”

truck and he's bumping this Mexican music, he must be doing pretty good, he must be selling some stuff"—you know what I mean? So that's how I came through with this music. I wanted to come out and bring my parents out, maybe not with that lifestyle, but with this music that they were hearing.

Morales became obsessed with Chalino's recordings: "I was hearing these tapes day and night, day and night, studying the curves, the hooks that he did, the style and all that kind of stuff. So I was actually sounding kind of identical." He was thirteen years old when he first sang in public, at the Mercadito, a three-story market in East Los Angeles that has three restaurants on the top floor featuring mariachi bands on the weekends. Customers sometimes get up and sing with the bands, and Morales recalls:

I had some baggy pants, so-lows, the basic rap attire-wear. So I went up and I actually sang with a mariachi. And all the Hispanics there, they were like, I know they were saying something in their minds: "Look at this cholo singing a Chalino song. What's up with this guy?" I sang the "Nieves de enero," that's the first song I ever learned to sing in Spanish. So that was the tip-off. I heard some applause, and shhhh—I was like, "Am I crazy or are these people just applauding me?"

Morales changed his wardrobe—"I raised some money to buy my first hat on Pacific Boulevard in Huntington Park...twenty dollar hat, some fucking forty dollar boots, and that was about it, guayabera shirt." His older brother Herminio had been organizing and deejaying rave dances and had connections in the local music business, and in the late 1990s, still in his mid-teens, Morales began

recording. He recalls, “It was hard for me, because I was all the bad-talking English, and it was hard for me to write a corrido. My Spanish wasn’t really good. There was a lot of talk like, ‘OK, he sounds a little bit—his Spanish is not coming out pretty good, he must be a pocho.’” The first few CDs had cover photos showing him in rural settings that matched his performing alias and the songs were exclusively corridos of the drug traffic. Many were prefaced by short skits of drug deals and sound effects of high-powered cars and gunfire—a possible borrowing from hip-hop that was becoming increasingly common on corrido recordings. His vocal style was uncannily like Chalino’s, but that was not unusual: in the late 1990s, the West Coast scene was flooded with “chalinitos.”

Corridos Meet Rap

One thing that set Morales apart was his interest in combining a corrido career with a parallel career in English-language gangsta rap. One of his first CDs included a hint of this inclination: an autobiographical corrido, “El Original,” began with a spoken dedication in Spanish over the brass band backing track—a fairly common practice on narcocorrido recordings—that ended with a startling burst of English-language street bravado:

Esta se la dedico a todos los que no quieren a mí: A los
maestros que no me entendieron, a las leyes que me encerraron
cuando estaba tratando ayudar a mi familia en la única manera que
podía. Y ahora ves: fuck all y’all motherfuckers!⁵⁷⁰

Morales generally insisted that he wanted to keep the two careers separate, considering Spanish the appropriate language for corridos and English for rap. His first attempt to combine the forms maintained that division: he interpolated a brief

verse rapped in English over hip-hop beats in the middle of a banda-accompanied corrido, “El Jilguero” (The Goldfinch), sung in Spanish by his younger brother Jorge, who performs as El Jilguero. The result was jarring—the banda track is a straightforward polka using the melody of a familiar Tigres hit, “Pacas de a kilo,” Jorge sings it in Chalino’s style, and then half-way through it just stops dead and Jessie’s voice is heard over a synthesized drum track: “Coming from the streets of South Central,/ Still slangin’ the rocks, pimpin’ them hos./ Back on the street the bussies flow,/ Don’t hate on me, I’m motherfuckin’ OG.” Then the brass band starts up again, and the song continues with no further hint of hip-hop influence.

Morales says that from the outset he wanted to record an English language rap disc, but George Prajin, the Cuban American owner of Z Records and producer of both brothers’ recordings, was wary: “He was telling me, ‘We can’t hit the people that hard.’ That is true, you know, we were gonna get too much bad criticism.” In 2002 Morales appeared on a popular ranchera awards show, the Premios Que Buena,” sponsored by the local radio station KBUE, testing his mix of ranchera and rap, and the response tended to support Prajin’s pessimism. His performance was completely ignored by the press, and although it briefly sparked discussion on some internet chat groups, the posts were overwhelmingly critical. A typical post read:

IF HE WANTS TO RAP....LET HIM DO.. BUT WTF WAS
HE DOING AT PREMIOS QUE BUENA CON SU PAÑUELITO
EN LA CABEZA [with his bandana on his head]... HE MUST
HAVE BEEN DRUGGED UP.. THINKING HE WAS GOING
TO THE SOUL'S TRAIN AWARD...SI QUIERE SER RAPERO
QUE SEA RAPERO.. SI QUIERE SER PAISA QUE LO SEA.....

⁵⁷⁰ Jesse Morales, “El Original,” on *Homenaje a Chalino Sanchez*, Universal Music Latino,

PERO QUE NO QUIERA SALIR CON SU MEZCLA...[if he wants to be a rapper he should be a rapper...if he wants to be a country-identified-Mexican guy he should be that...but he shouldn't be coming out with his mix] [elipses in the original].⁵⁷¹

Another poster wrote, “EL O.G EMPESO A COSTAS DE CHALINO [El OG started out at Chalino's expense] TRYING TO IMITATE IN THE BIGINING AHORA HE WANT'S TO IMITATE TUPAC. TELL HIM TO GET A LIFE.”⁵⁷²

Morales's next CD, 2003's *Sigo siendo original* (I keep being original), went back to his earlier sartorial style, showing him in western wear with a cowboy hat, and although it included three rap tracks, two of them, “Si me acuerdo” and “El amor de mi vida,” were performed over ranchera backing and rapped in Spanish, while the third was again a “hidden track,” an alternate version of the first track titled “Si me acuerdo (hip-hop)” and backed by a synthesized hip-hop beat. (All three tracks also included sung choruses by guest artists). The album did well on the local market, though it failed to equal the success of his Chalino tribute or *Loco*, and the Morales brothers also made news as titular sponsors of a Z Records CD anthology heralding a new genre: *Jesse & Jorge Morales presentan Z Banda Rap*. The cover was a painting of a rapper in baggy streetwear fronting a trio of accordion, trumpet and tuba, and the tracks featured six local rappers or crews performing over banda or accordion backing.

The *Z Banda Rap* album was produced by George Prajin, the label's owner, and Ernesto Fernández, an arranger and recording engineer, and both were

2001.

⁵⁷¹ Post by XXTITAXX at <http://www.chalino.com/en/foros/topic/136/lupillo-vs-el-original/6>, circa 2003, accessed 11/8/2014.

⁵⁷² Post by Ramirez8181, at <http://www.chalino.com/en/foros/topic/620/will-jessie-morales-succeed-in-the-rap-game>, circa 2003, accessed 11/8/2014.

accustomed to recording ranchera rather than creating hip-hop beats. Drawing on their past experience, they did not use samples of existing banda tracks for their fusion experiment. Instead, Fernández brought in the same musicians he had used on previous banda projects, recorded them playing the parts he needed, then looped those tracks to fit the rap leads. The result was a unique sound, duplicating sampled hip-hop beats with brass instruments, accordion, drums, and keyboard. The rappers and their DJs first created their own tracks, in their usual style, then Fernández and his wife Angelica arranged matching backgrounds using live instruments and had them redo their raps over the new tracks. As Fernández explains:

We kind of kept it to what their version was, but adapted to banda and maybe I threw in a little couple things here and there that I do, but we try to keep it so they'll feel comfortable, so when they came in to rap, they already knew the beat, they felt the music, and it would, you know, just flow, you know, with the music, and that way it would be a lot easier to capture that.

The resulting arrangements used banda instrumentation, but hip-hop rhythms and tonalities. For example, Locura Terminal, a trio from Oxnard, brought in two songs based on Tupac Shakur's "Hit 'Em Up" and "California Love," rewritten with Spanish lyrics and addressing Mexican American themes. The new songs were titled "Dinero" and "Los Mexicanos," and Fernández created horn parts that matched the samples the trio had used on their home versions. "Dinero" was scored for trumpets, drums, and a minor-key bassline played by the tuba, which continued throughout the track:



Though the group had not yet released any records, Locura Terminal was part of a new wave of Mexican-identified, Spanish language rappers, and would go on to release several Spanish-language discs before reinventing themselves as English-language Chicano rappers. As the borrowings from Tupac suggest, their main musical roots and affiliation were with mainstream West Coast hip-hop and they tended to use beats and samples that had no particular links to Mexican or Chicano culture. Their appearance on the *Z Banda Rap* disc seems to have been a commercial choice, taking advantage of the opportunity to be part of the project, and they rarely used ranchera music on their later recordings—an exception being one track, “Me vale madre,” on their 2004 *Infierno a la gloria* CD, which had a norteño band called Oro Norteño providing instrumental fills and alternating sung verses with their rapping. Although the *Z* compilation was their one venture into banda rap, some of their non-ranchera recordings also indicate a degree of identification with current Mexican culture—for example name-checking the Zapatista guerrilla leader Subcomandante Marcos as a symbol of toughness—and “Dinero” was a direct attempt to write a rap for the narcocorrido audience. At one point, the lead rapper boasts “mi vida está descrito en un corrido de Chalino Sánchez” (my life is described in a corrido by Chalino Sánchez⁵⁷³), and the lyric follows the pattern of the boastful, first-person narcocorridos that came into fashion in the 1990s—to some extent supplanting the older tradition of third-person narratives—many of which purport to express the pride of top traffickers. It included typical narcocorrido tropes, describing the protagonist’s “troca del año” (late-model pick-up truck) and “cuerno de chivo” (AK-47) and calling him “el jefe de jefes” (boss of bosses), the title character of one of the Tigres’ biggest

⁵⁷³ Rap references to Chalino were not limited to banda rappers: Sick Jacken of Psycho Realm recorded a Spanish-language track, “El Barrio,” in 2007, which described him driving, “tocando Chalino por la vocina mia.”

hits, and ended with a shout-out in corrido style: “Quiero mandar un saludo a estos cabrones de Sinaloa, estos cabrones de Durango, de Culiacán, Guerrero, Tepic, Nayarit.” (I want to send a greeting to those cabrones [a term roughly similar to “bastard,” but denoting toughness] from Sinaloa...).

Locura Terminal’s other track on the banda rap set, “Los Mexicanos,” was a broader anthem of cultural pride, though not the Chamber of Commerce version. Its chorus, which was “sung” using autotune to shape the rappers’ phrasing into a melody, boasted, “Los mexicanos son parranderos, pistoleros, y mujeriegos” (Mexicans are partiers, gunmen, and womanizers). The lyric included references to the Mexican states of Jalisco, Sinaloa, and Michoacan—all famed for drug trafficking, as well as for sending disproportionate numbers of immigrants to California—and the first rapped verse again portrayed the performers as tough drug traffickers, threatening to shoot down their “vicious and envious” enemies, “like they did to Colosio,” a reference to the assassination of a candidate in 1994 Mexican presidential election. The second verse was rapped primarily in English and claimed, “we represent the Golden State, California,” boasted of smoking dope and drinking, and finished with the claim, “we run the streets like Fidel Castro.” Finally, they returned to Spanish for a series of increasingly bloody descriptions of what they would do to their enemies.

For Locura Terminal, the *Z Banda Rap* disc provided a chance to record for a well-distributed local label and helped introduce them to a broader audience of Spanish-speaking music listeners, and although they did not stick with the banda/ranchera approach, they did not need to substantially alter their style to fit the project. For other performers, the banda rap style was more of a stretch. A rapper named 2-High from Pasadena had previously been involved in the English-language Chicano rap scene and brought a track he had recorded in English called

“Wild Wild West” (inspired by the identically titled hit by Kool Moe Dee), with production and beats by Ernie G of Proper Dos. As on *Locura Terminal*’s tracks, Fernández mimicked the original beats in his horn arrangement, and 2-High had to similarly translate his lyric to fit the new setting. He kept the original chorus, “Hey, hey, hey, it’s the wild, wild west,” but rewrote the body of the lyric in Spanish, though in one section he retained elements of the English original.

English lyric:

Spanish lyric:

All you playa haters in the game you can’t stop it.
pararme.

Tienes tu envidia, pues trata de

Trying to make a better beat but you can’t top it.
te sale.

Tratas de copiar mi música pero no

Ernie G, get the key, it’s time to lock it.

Ernie G., get the key, para cerrarle.

Lyricaly, I represent myself,

Lyricaly, me represento yo,

From LA to the Bay I gotta get the wealth,

From LA to the Bay gano dinero,

San Diego to OC and the county jail,

San Diego to OC y el condado,

Throw it up in the air, represent yourself,

Grítelo, Where you from? ¿De qué

barrio?

From New York, New York, Brooklyn, Chicago...

Desde Nueva, Nueva York,

Brooklyn, Chicago...

The *Z Banda Rap* disc appeared in the spring of 2003 and attracted some attention in Southern California, but did not crack the national Latin music charts, nor did it get much (if any) airplay even around Los Angeles. However, it was shortly followed by a half-dozen other releases that used similar fusions of rap with ranchera backing, and by that summer *Billboard* magazine’s Latin music columnists were writing about banda rap, or “urban regional music,” as a significant new trend. The first group to have a hit in the genre was a duo called Akwid, who entered *Billboard*’s “Regional Mexican Airplay” chart on May 10 with a single titled “No Hay Manera.” A month later they released a CD called

Proyecto Akwid on the transnational Univision label, which within four months had sold over 200,000 copies and been certified as platinum by the RIAA and remained on the Latin Album charts for a year.

Akwid Arrives

Unlike the groups on the *Z Banda Rap* disc, Akwid produced their own beats and their fusion of hip-hop and ranchera was a self-directed musical vision. Sergio and Francisco Gómez were brothers, born in Jiquilpán, Michoacán, and raised since early childhood in South Central Los Angeles. They grew up speaking Spanish and listening to Mexican music at home—their mother liked older *norteno*, their father preferred cumbia and tropical styles, and their own favorite artists included the romantic banda singer Pancho Barraza, Banda el Recodo, the *onda grupera* pop band Los Bukis, and international Latin balladeers like José Feliciano—but their first musical efforts were as party deejays playing the popular English-language styles of the early 1990s, and after a while they began rapping to spice up their appearances. At the time it didn't even occur to them to rap in Spanish. "When we used to listen to hip-hop music, it was all in English," Francisco explains. "And it was something that we just identified ourselves with and connected with...we didn't choose it, it kind of chooses you, you know?"

"We had no idea, like, there was Spanish rap," Sergio adds.

Like, it didn't even cross our mind, because, you know, where we grew up its majority of people were, you know, black, so it was just—to us hip-hop was in English, you know. Till, I mean, till we heard, you know, Kid Frost, like, Lighter Shade of Brown, and Proper Dos; probably those were the acts that we first heard

that would throw Spanish words in there—it wadn't necessarily all in Spanish—so that was mostly when we said, “OK, if they're Mexican, that means we can do it, too.” I mean, even though we would use very little Spanish as well...it was still all English, hip-hop, we never thought of doing it all in Spanish either. Because even at that time there was no market for that.

They were impressed when Mellow Man Ace hit with “Mentiroso,” but Sergio says, “It was still like, to us, it was like, OK, that's just for him, because nobody listens to Spanish rap.” Francisco adds, “We liked the sound of it, but we didn't have, we weren't appealed, or inspired by it. We still thought, you know, rap should be in English.” When they began recording in 1993 they called themselves Juvenile Style and sounded like other Chicano rappers of that period, using black street slang ornamented with occasional words of caló or Spanish—although stylistically they had their own look, both sporting long hair tied back in ponytails. They made a second CD in 1995, by which time they had shaved their hair short, but neither album sold particularly well—in Sergio's words, “I wouldn't even call it mediocre success, you know, it was just like, ok, we put them out, nothing happened.” They continued to record but did not release another disc until 2002, by which time they had renamed themselves Akwid (“cause we weren't juveniles anymore,” Francisco says), combining their deejay aliases, AK (Francisco) and Wikid (Sergio). They were still rapping primarily in English, and seemed inclined to continue that way: the one Spanish track on *2002 A.D.* was titled “Se Habla Espanoll” (sic), and began with an introductory explanation:

Yeah, check this out: I got something I want to get off my chest. You know, I been shopping my demo around, showing it

around to people, and they say, “Yeah, that shit’s tight. But y’all Mexican, y’all be Mexican, how come y’all never bust in Spanish?” I say, “Yo, that’s not my thing, you know, I flip my style the way I do and that’s just me.” You know, “Why you sweatin’ me?” But anyways, check this out...

They then rapped a short track in Spanish, but it was the only one on the disc. Francisco says that they had actually recorded that track in 2000, inspired by hearing a rap group from Spain called Siete Notas Siete Colores, who they felt were the first artists to get a legitimate, original flow in Spanish: “That was like mind blowing.” Otherwise, they had been thoroughly unimpressed by Spanish-language rap. They dismiss Control Machete as “like a heavy metal group,” and Molotov as funny-sounding: “They sound like they’re doing it playing around, you know, like a stereotypical way. Like, are they making fun of rap...? They don’t do it to show skill in the rap, they do it just to make the word rhyme.”

Although Francisco says that through the 1990s they were not aware of any credible-sounding Spanish-language rap or rock, they were already toying with the idea of mixing ranchera tracks in hip-hop style. At first they were just goofing and did not take their experiments seriously: they had some ranchera albums, and would kid around with them when friends came over on the weekend. “We’d just sing Mexican music while we drink,” Sergio says. “‘Cause that’s what we do. And, you know, I had a lot of break-beat records, you know, and I’d just throw them over the music, you know, the Mexican music, and it’s be like, you know, we’d laugh about it and be like, ‘He’s just playing around...’”

“Yeah,” says Francisco. “Then it started sounding good to us... Like, ‘Wait a minute! That’s working!’”

Sergio completes the thought: “You know, it’s actually, like, ‘That’s

actually, like, fucking cool!’ Even though we thought, like, ‘If people hear us, they’re gonna think we’re fucking crazy...’ You know, we were, like, we thought we were the only ones that would like that.”

The experiment might have gone no further if the brothers had not happened to meet another producer, Nelson Mendoza, who liked their ranchera experiments and connected them with Guillermo Santiso, one of the most powerful figures in the transnational record business. Santiso had been president of Fonovisa records before it was folded into the giant Univision media conglomerate, and was looking for artists for a new Univision subsidiary he was starting called Headliners. Santiso was interested by Akwid’s fusion style, but suggested that rather than sampling existing ranchera recordings they should recreate their tracks with live musicians. According to Sergio, “We’re like, ‘What the fuck,’ you know...when they were bringing in like the brass to replay everything and they started doing harmonies and we were like, ‘Oh, shit, this is like, this is fucking insane.’”

The first fruit of their collaboration was “No hay manera,” which begins with a spoken interlude over a backing track of tuba, two valve trombones, and drums that positioned the brothers as pioneers: “Algo que muchos han tratado, pero ahora solo Akwid a logrado.” (Something that many have attempted, but now only Akwid has succeeded.) The opening lines of the lyric expanded on that idea and directly positioned them as innovators, while simultaneously establishing links to older Mexican traditions: “No hay manera de que puedas parar esto/ Como un corrido/ Akwid ha regresado con un nuevo sonido.” (There’s no way you can stop this/ Like a corrido/ Akwid has returned with a new sound.) The main theme of the lyric was a macho boast that they were rich and successful womanizers. To underline the ranchera connection, the rap sections were

interspersed with a sung chorus of “Te lo pido por favor,” a well-known Banda El Recodo hit composed by the Mexican pop star Juan Gabriel, performed by the band’s current lead vocalist, Luis Antonio López, “El Mimoso.” The musical arrangement closely followed El Recodo version, though with an added trumpet solo at the end in a style suggesting a touch of smooth jazz.⁵⁷⁴

Although the Gómez brothers’ previous work had been rapped in English, the new album did not include any code-switching or English-language tracks—the only English word slipped in unawares in the second track, “Es mi gusto,” where one line begins, “So ya lo saben...” (*So they know already...*). Neither brother noticed this, and when it was pointed out they were initially surprised, then explained, “That is Spanish street slang, that’s considered Spanish to us...it wasn’t intended to be said in English.” There was also a subtle English interpolation in the pronunciation of their name: though they rap in fluent, Mexican-accented Spanish, they consistently pronounce “Akwid” with the flat, short vowels of US English, [ækwid] rather than the Spanish [ɑ:kwi:d] (ahkweed). Once again, they say they were not aware of this: the pronunciation is an unconscious signal of their local Los Angeles identity rather than a choice to foreground that identity.

Francisco says that at first they had difficulty rapping in Spanish, because that was not the language they associated with the genre, and when they wrote “No hay manera,” the only way they could do it was to compose the lyric in English, then translate it:

It was a really tough transition, because when you’re
accustomed to a language or to a street slang in English it’s very

⁵⁷⁴ Although some critics and scholars have described this as a Banda El Recodo sample, the version on Akwid’s track is quite different from Banda El Recodo’s original, which was sung by Julio Preciado.

hard to translate that slang into Spanish... If you're used to doing it in English, you know your cues, you know? So that gives it the momentum, and then the translation is tough, to have the same meaning and try and find words that rhyme. It was tough but we made it happen, we figured it out.

Once the ice was broken, they wrote all their later lyrics directly in Spanish and say the change was liberating. Their hip-hop mindset had been based in English and influenced by all the other rappers they had heard, and when they switched languages it freed them from those influences and they began, in Francisco's words, to "just talk the way that we usually would talk, or the family would talk." Once they got the hang of it, Sergio says, it felt more natural than their previous rap identities:

When I started writing in Spanish, I realized that it was so much easier for me to write in Spanish than in English. Because in English, you know, I was trying to write being influenced by what the hip-hop market was in English, and in Spanish I could just be my culture and it comes out so much natural (sic) instead of trying to be something that I really don't live—you know what I mean?—in that culture. When I could write off of what I could exactly relate to, it just flows.

Since they are fluent in both languages and their English-language rap had included numerous Spanish words, it might have seemed even more natural to rap bilingually, or at least to interpolate some English words and phrases like many of the groups on the *Z Banda Rap* CD and other banda rap releases have done. For the Gómez brothers, though, there seems to have been a clear division between their English-language rap personas and their Spanish-language personas, and

although they first described this as a divide between a character created for the hip-hop market and a “natural” speech style from their own culture, when asked why they chose not to use any English on their banda releases, Sergio framed this as another marketing decision:

We realized where the market, they were going to market us in, you know, when we were recording our album, it was like, “OK, we’re shooting for like straight Spanish market,” like straight Mexican, you know. We were still like, “Are you guys sure? That this is going to work? Because like, you know, this is hip-hop.” You know what I mean? We had no clue what was going to happen, you know, we were just doing it, like... “Let’s give it a shot, why not?” You know? Even I was even iffy, I would make fun of like what we were going to do, like we would hear a car pass by with like loud corridos and stuff and I would laugh and be like, “That’s what our shit’s going to sound like.”

In a sense Akwid and Univision were coming at the project from opposite directions. The brothers’ musical allegiance was with hip-hop, and their idea was to create a legitimate hip-hop style that represented them and people like them—immigrants who embraced US urban culture but still felt connected to Mexico—the way Kid Frost represented Chicanos, Tupac represented African Americans, and Siete Notas Siete Colores represented young Spaniards. Unlike Jessie Morales, Ernesto Fernández, Locura Terminal, or Guillermo Santiso’s team at Univision, they had never been interested in the corrido boom. Sergio says they sometimes went to regional Mexican clubs because “we liked watching the girls dance quebradita,” but never got personally involved: “We never wore the boots and the hats, you know what I mean?” When they listened to Spanish-language

club music at all, it tended to be “hip-hop, rock en español and all the alternative stuff,” and when they started mixing ranchera tracks that did not change their fundamental orientation. “Our whole angle was actually—how can I say it?—it was authentic on the hip-hop side,” Sergio says. “Instead of, if you take—it’s like trying to take Los Tigres del Norte and tell them, ‘OK, make a hip-hop song,’ you know what I mean, then that’s different. But to make hip-hop, you have to come from the hip-hop side.”

By contrast, Santiso had built a career working with Los Tigres and other ranchera stars, and was experimenting with banda rap as a way to modernize ranchera. His dream was precisely that the Mexican-identifying guys bumping corridos out of their cars would play Akwid as well, and while Univision’s publicity department described their record as “urban regional,” giving equal weight to its rap and ranchera elements, the company pushed it overwhelmingly to the Mexican Regional market. As the company’s vice president for promotion told *Billboard*, they were hoping to open new markets, but “also believe we’ll be able to tap into the existing fan bases of groups like Banda el Recodo and Los Tigres del Norte. A lot of these people also like to listen to urban music. But now we’ll be able to offer them what we think is urban music that can address some of the things they’ve been buying in English, rather than in Spanish.”⁵⁷⁵

In musical terms the attempt to market Akwid’s record as a kind of ranchera might seem odd, but it made sense in terms of US Latin sales patterns. Banda rap arrived at a moment when overall music sales, including Latin music sales, were plummeting, and Regional Mexican music was one of the few genres resisting that trend. A *Billboard* article by Leila Cobo on May 10, the week “No hay manera” entered the Regional Mexican Airplay chart at number 29, noted that

⁵⁷⁵ Cobo, Leila. “Latin Rap: Heat Up, Obscenity Down,” *Billboard*, 23 Aug 2003, 66.

more than half of the two hundred top albums on the magazine's Latin Albums chart in the past year had been regional Mexican releases and the genre accounted for seven of that week's top ten CDs. The article added that those figures actually understated the sales of the genre, since it was the most pirated style in the United States and there was no way to track how many unofficial CDs were selling at swap meets, and domestic product was also competing with illegal imports of Mexican pressings.

Cobo only made passing mention of Akwid, pairing them with Los Jardineros, a norteño band led by a young singer named Jesus "Chuy Jr." Chavez, whose latest album included several tracks with a light, party hip-hop approach thanks to producer Byron Brizuela, who would shortly helm a series of banda rap releases for Univision. But they were clearly being positioned as leaders in a coming trend. She quoted Eddie León, a Spanish radio consultant who was vice president of programming for Liberman Broadcasting, the parent company of LA's KBUE, saying that although KBUE's format was entirely Spanish, more than half the station's listeners spoke English and a "Mexican-American rap" fusion was inevitable. More generally, Cobo suggested that Regional Mexican marketers were trying to change the genre's image, getting away "from the vision of big hats, big boots, and big mustaches." Several of the people she interviewed complained that the genre was still stereotyped not only by Anglos but within the Latin music business, which was overwhelmingly dominated by executives, producers, and deejays from Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Caribbean and South American backgrounds, who were familiar with Latin pop and tropical styles but had never paid attention to Mexican music. Although Mexican artists accounted for roughly two thirds of Latin music sales in the US, a Miami-based publicist explained that Mexican Regional styles were clearly under-presented on the

Spanish-language TV networks because, “None of the producers is Mexican, and frankly, they just don’t know who many of these acts are or how big they are.”⁵⁷⁶

Two weeks later, *Billboard* ran an article headlined “Rap and Hip-Hop Fusion Fuel Regional Mexican Scene,” which suggested the marketing strategy Univision had in mind: that banda rap would not only catch on as a unique style, but help the Regional Mexican market as a whole to reach a broader, younger audience. It also suggested that previous Chicano and Mexican rappers had not represented this target audience, quoting León as saying, “Rap is the genre that sells the most, and there was no Mexican-American rap.” The writer, a well-known Texas-based Latin music journalist named Ramiro Burr, mentioned a few previous attempts at ranchera-rap fusions, but all were novelty records by groups known for other styles: in 1991, two Tejano pop groups, Tierra Tejana and Grupo La Sombra, had released regional hits that included some rap, and in 2002 Los Razos, a California norteño band consisting of four middle-aged men from Michoacán who had established themselves with a series of obscenity-laced narcocorridos had tried their hands at a techno-cumbia-rap track, “Puros Pelones” (Pure Shaved-heads), that opened with the group’s leader saying, in heavily accented English: “Ey ladies, this fucking song is for you, y for my homies.” Los Razos new album, *Hierbabuena*, ended with a track featuring two young rappers, El Chavo y El Ferruco (which would resurface two years later on an album produced by Psycho Realm), and *Billboard* noted that other established Mexican regional acts were also experimenting with rap and “at least six companies have come to us with new product that’s rap or hip-hop with Mexican roots.”⁵⁷⁷

Two weeks earlier, Akwid had become the first group to put a ranchera-rap

⁵⁷⁶ Cobo, Leila, “Surging Interest Ignites Regional Mexican Scene,” *Billboard*, 10 May 2003, 20.

fusion record on the national charts, but Burr's article did not mention them, perhaps because their release had not yet reached his desk in San Antonio. One of the anomalies of the Latin music charts is that Spanish pop radio programming in the United States remains far more regional than Anglo pop programming, so a Mexican Regional group can be in heavy rotation in Los Angeles but unknown in Texas, and the whole Mexican Regional genre is typically ignored by Latin stations serving largely Caribbean immigrant populations—the week Cobo noted that seven of the ten best-selling Latin albums were Mexican Regional, there were only two Mexican Regional singles on the Latin Hot Tracks chart, which measured radio play, and it is safe to assume that neither was getting much (if any) play in Miami or New York. One of the reasons Mexican Regional producers were so hot on the idea of a hip-hop fusion was that they hoped it might make East Coast Latinos aware that Mexican music could be more than hokey polkas, and create a Latin crossover market for other Mexican-identified styles. Cobo wrote another trend piece for *Billboard* in August, which opened with a photo of Akwid on page one and took a new tack, suggesting that they were part of a broader wave of Spanish-language rap. Linking their success to the increased visibility of Puerto Rican reggaeton performers on US Latin playlists, she used the fact that *Proyecto Akwid* and Don Omar's mainland debut disc, *The Last Don*, had both made the Latin Albums top ten to bolster an argument that “Spanish-language rap acts are making inroads into the US Latin market mainstream.”

The point of trend pieces is to create catchy stories, and it is not clear how seriously anyone took the idea that Akwid and Don Omar were part of the same wave. Akwid's single did get some attention on non-ranchera playlists, even making the Tropical/Salsa Airplay chart for two weeks in June—which suggests

⁵⁷⁷ Burr, Ramiro. “Rap and Hip-Hop Fusion Fuel Regional Mexican Scene,” *Billboard*, 24

that at least a few influential stations thought it might appeal to reggaeton fans—but whatever the hopes for a crossover, Univision concentrated its push on Regional Mexican markets. The duo's album sales were consistently listed on the Regional Mexican rather than the Latin Pop charts, which is where *Billboard* filed reggaeton artists like Don Omar as well as Texan pop acts like A.B. Quintanilla's Kumbia Kings, who were adding rap (among other flavors, including house beats and merengue) to an updated version of Rigo Tovar's border cumbia style. In terms of radio play, this may have been a shortsighted strategy. The intent was to broaden the scope of Regional Mexican programming, but the result was that Akwid never broke beyond that market, while most ranchera stations remained wary. "No Hay Manera" was only listed in the top forty of *Billboard*'s Regional Mexican Airplay chart for its debut week in early May and three weeks in June, and only cracked the overall Hot Latin Tracks chart the last week of June, at number 50, thanks to its brief appearance on the Tropical/Salsa Airplay chart. By contrast, *Proyecto Akwid* climbed into the Latin Albums top ten and remained among the top 100 for a year,⁵⁷⁸ and when they released their next CD in July 2004, it debuted at number two and *Billboard* noted that it had managed this feat "with little or no radio support."⁵⁷⁹ (The Gómez brothers reacted with typically wry humor, titling that album *KOMP 104.9* and framing it as a broadcast from their own radio station, complete with dimwitted announcers and commercials for new releases by a lame bilingual rapper and a lightweight Latina pop singer.)

In Los Angeles, Akwid did get some strong early radio support, especially from KBUE (La Que Buena), the station that had led the narcocorrido boom in the late 1990s and prided itself on defining the cutting edge of Mexican Regional

May 2003, 23.

⁵⁷⁸ *Billboard*, 28 Jun 2003, 43. Chart figures have been compiled by consulting all available issues of *Billboard* for 2003-04.

trends. Pepe Garza, KBUE's program director, told Helena Simonett that he had encouraged the Gómez brothers to experiment with the banda fusion in the first place and Josh Kun wrote that KBUE was the first station to play "No hay manera" and the song's "update of traditional banda styles found an immediate home with the station's listeners."⁵⁸⁰ Kun noted that the track was also played on the "urban" station KPWR (Power 106—Where Hip Hop Lives), the only time a recording had been included in both Mexican Regional and R&B playlists, but its run on that station was very brief. Although Univision promoted Akwid and the other banda rap artists it released over the next year as bridging the worlds of ranchera and hip-hop, the language alone would have been sufficient to keep the style off virtually all R&B stations. Nor did most Mexican Regional stations program Akwid's single, since their formats were strictly ranchera with perhaps some romantic pop and few cared to take a chance with rap even if it was flavored with ranchera instrumentation. For a couple of months the track was fairly hot in Los Angeles and got at least some play in other southwestern urban centers, but in hindsight the unanimous verdict was that radio was not ready and the surprise was how well Akwid's CDs did despite the lack of airplay. The initial sales figures were everything Univision could have hoped, far eclipsing the success of any previous Spanish-language rap album—not only Molotov's and Control Machete's, but even Cypress Hill's.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ *Billboard*, 3 Jul 2004, 4.

⁵⁸⁰ Simonett, "Quest for the Local," 129; Kun, "What Is an MC," 742.

⁵⁸¹ The closest contenders seem to have been Molotov's *Donde jugarán las niñas*, which was certified double platinum by the RIAA, signifying at least 200,000 albums sold but never seems to have charted (presumably because it sold too slowly and in too wide a variety of stores to qualify) and Cypress Hill's *Los grandes éxitos en español*, which charted for a few weeks but does

Ni de aquí ni de allá

Univision moved quickly to capitalize on Akwid's success. In September they released the debut CD of a nineteen-year-old rapper from South Central, Juan Pablo Huerta, who performed as Jae-P. Unlike Akwid, who were signed as a self-contained production unit, Jae-P was produced by Byron Brizuela, who had produced Chuy Jr.'s ranchera-rap experiment a few months earlier and would shortly produce discs for the first and only female banda rapper, Flakiss, and several other performers. Brizuela had been a dance deejay and was familiar with current sounds, although he had no previous track record as a hip-hop producer, and says he and his wife Cecilia invented the concept of "urban regional," inspired by the changes they were seeing among young Latinos. He had been born in El Salvador in 1970 and came to Los Angeles with his parents at age five, and says his generation dreamed of assimilating: "Growing up in the seventies and eighties my passion was to want to be like the kids on TV... We felt that we were white, you know, we wanted to be mainstream." He recalls being into hip-hop and new wave, Latina girls talking like Valley girls, and although he grew up in one of the most heavily Latino sections of LA County—the four areas he mentions, Bell, Maywood, Cudahy, and Huntington Park are about 95% Latino—he recalls white kids as still being a significant presence and regarded as models. However, when he visited his old high school a few years later, it was like another world: "All of a sudden [it] has gruperio dances you know, they do the quebradita, the football band is playing banda music at halftime. That blew my mind, I was like, Whoa, what's going on here?" He saw banda rap as a way of capturing that new spirit, and his stable of artists was put together with an eye to reaching a range of youth demographics—David Rolas for the party crowd, Flakiss for the girls, and

not seem to have sold much over 100,000 albums. *Proyecto Akwid* was certified double platinum

Jae-P as the socially conscious spokesman of a proud new generation reclaiming its Mexican heritage.

Guillermo Santiso was likewise interested in promoting Mexican pride and had helped guide Los Tigres del Norte through a transformation from brash young narcocorrido singers to respected elder statesmen singing about immigration, discrimination, and releasing anthemic corridos like “Somos mas americanos” (We are more American), which claimed the Southwest as a historic Mexican homeland. With Jae-P he hoped to convey a similar message to hip-hop fans and the first article to mention the young rapper quoted Lupe de la Cruz, a vice president for promotion at Univision, describing him as “a modern practitioner of *corrido*.”⁵⁸² Most of the tracks on Jae-P’s debut album were in Spanish, and the two bilingual cuts maintained Spanish as the base language. His breakout single was an explicit manifesto of transnational identity, “Ni de aquí ni de allá,” rapped in Spanish but asserting a position between two languages and cultures, and provides a good sense of the message he, Brizuela, and Santiso were trying to communicate and the audience they hoped to reach:

Yo no tuve opinión, me trajeron muy morrillo,

It wasn't up to me, they brought me as a little kid,

Cuando dijo mi apá, “Vamos cruzando el río.”

When my dad said, “We’re going to cross the river.”

Ni mi cara o mi piel fue la forma aceptada,

Neither my face nor my skin was the accepted style,

“Made in the U.S.A.,” chin, no valgo nada.

“Made in the U.S.A.,” hell, I’m not worth anything.

Con los años me chingé y me puse bien perrón,

and by March 2005 Univision claimed sales of more than 400,000 units.

With the years I got my shit together and became a big dog,

Aprendí a hablar inglés, me creía bien chingón,

I learned to speak English, I thought I was baddass,

Aunque hablo el idioma, no creas que ya la hice,

*Although I speak the language, don't think I've already
made it,*

Para el gringo soy un *wetback*, un pinche chiste.

To the gringo I'm a wetback, a fucking joke.

Me vale lo que dicen o piensen de mí,

I don't care what they say or think of me,

Mi hijo será presidente de este pinche país,

My son will be president of this fucking country,

El latino hoy en día no es un simple lavaplatos,

The Latino today is not just a dishwasher,

Hey, Loretta Sánchez, ¿quién te limpia tus zapatos?

Hey, Loretta Sánchez, Who shines your shoes?

Si no te aprovechas de esta tierra en lo que ofrece,

*If you don't take advantage of what this country has to
offer,*

Te vas a regresar como un perro que no agradece.

You'll go back home like an ungrateful dog.

México yo te quiero y allá me enteraran,

Mexico, I love you, and that's where they'll bury me,

Pero aquí está la lana y me la tengo que chingar.

⁵⁸² Cobo, Leila. "Latin Rap: Heat Up, Obscenity Down," *Billboard*, 23 Aug 2003, 66.

But the dough is here, and I've gotta fucking make it.

Chorus:

Porque no soy de aquí, ni soy de allá,

Because I'm not from here, nor am I from there,

Pero aquí es donde me gusta, aquí me voy a quedar.

But here is where I want to be, and here I'm going to stay.

Porque no soy de aquí ni soy de allá,

Con dos acentos en la lengua llegare a triunfar.

With two accents in my tongue I will come to triumph.

Although the song's main theme was pride in Mexican heritage and the difficulty of getting by in the United States, it also had lines that pointedly situated Jae-P as equally—and equally unjustly—discriminated against in Mexico: “México yo te quiero y me quiero regresar/ Pero tu gente no me entiende y jamás me aceptará.” (Mexico, I love you and I would like to return/ But your people don't understand me and will never accept me.)

Depending on whom one asks, the lyric of “Ni de aquí ni de allá” was composed either by Jae-P and Brizuela (according to Jae-P) or by Brizuela and his wife Cecilia (according to the Brizuelas). Either way, it was meant to express the feelings of a new generation of Mexican American immigrant youth. Josh Kun noted one aspect of the message when he wrote, “That Jae-P chooses to rap from the point of view of an undocumented migrant when he himself was actually born in South Central... highlights the centrality of migrant experience to the formation of identity in Nuevo LA.”⁵⁸³ But although Jae-P clearly identified with the immigrant experience and spoke for an immigrant character in his hit, he more

⁵⁸³ Kun, “What Is an MC,” 752.

generally defined himself as a Mexican from South Central. In national terms, he was neither from “here,” the Anglo United States, nor “there,” the nation of Mexico, but he was most definitely from the “here” of his block and neighborhood. The banda rappers differed from the Chicano rappers who preceded them in their choice of music, language, and cultural signifiers—they frequently referenced singers, places, foods, and historical figures from Mexico, and their Spanish rarely included border caló—but they shared the insistence that they were representing a local constituency.

For Jae-P, the local setting was defined particularly narrowly. He grew up on Hickory St., between 87th and 88th Streets, less than twenty blocks north of Watts Towers, the area’s most famous landmark, but was unfamiliar with it, saying, “I don’t know, I didn’t hang around down there. It was too crazy.” He says his own neighborhood was calmer, although “there were people running through here, and shooting. It was pretty crazy here too.” Much of the area was still largely African American, and the local businesses continue to be a mix, The New Jerusalem Primitive Baptist Church a block away from the Mercado Amigo, but his immediate block was entirely Mexican.

Jae-P says he first got to be known around the area as a skateboarder, but there were a group of young men living on the corner of his street who rapped and they offered to teach him, explaining how to divide his lines into regular bars, how long a verse should be, and how to fit the rhymes together. They were Mexican as well, and rapped in the mainstream Chicano style—“gangster stuff, hardcore stuff,” but from the first he says he found it easier to write in Spanish and preferred “positive” lyrics, which “pretty much tripped everybody out, you know, the guys were like, ‘Wow, in Spanish, it sounds real crazy.’” He adds: “At the time I didn’t know there was more like Spanish rappers, you know? I mean, I

knew, but I didn't know it was like so big, you know, like, a lot of people will be interested in it." There was only one older man in the neighborhood who did Spanish rap, a blind man who rapped as Blind-o, and he provided encouragement and some mentoring: "He pretty much pumped me up to keep going, you know? 'Cause he started taking me to studios, and I started checking them out, you know, to see how it went."

Jae-P grew up in a large extended family of immigrants from Colima and Guanajuato, and says Spanish was pretty much the only language he heard in his home or the homes of his uncles:

My dad would sometimes, would tell me, like, "You know what?" You know, "Talk to me in English, so I can learn some stuff." And we did, but it was weird! It was weird to us, 'cause, I mean, in school we talked English, like, all the time, but in Spanish all day every day... I was listening to Ramón Ayala, Los Tigres del Norte, Vicente Fernández, Javier Solís, just everything, everything, you know, everything that my parents grew up with, so I guess that also has a lot to do, you know? Your surroundings and all, my uncles, cousins, it was all Spanish.

Born in 1984, Jae-P recalls the change that came with the rise of *quebradita* in his childhood. Before, all the kids he knew were listening to English-language music, but when *quebradita* took off, the older kids began throwing parties on the block where they would dance to Mexican music. "It was a whole different thing, everybody wanted to just turn Mexican, they just—they were proud of being, you know, speaking Spanish."

The change was not immediate, nor did everyone go along with it, and he says the theme of "Ni de aquí ni de allá" grew out of his personal experience:

Like me growing up in, you know, in the neighborhood, you know, my English wasn't that good. So, you know, kids would make fun of me, and, you know, it was sad, and it made me feel bad, you know... They're not going to accept you because you're not fully—you know, I mean, I guess the way things got set up now, it's like you're not from here, you know, you're Mexican. So that makes you feel bad. Now, when we go back to Mexico—'cause I remember, you know, going over there—kids used to make fun of me. They'd be like, "Oh, go back, you pocho," you know? And I'm like, "What? We're the same."

He says most of the local rappers were resistant to his rapping in Spanish, though he frames this in commercial terms: "Some of the guys that I started with that they did English, they started telling me, like, 'Oh, you know, Spanish rap is not gonna make it.' And they're Mexican. They're like, 'You gotta do it in English, that's the way to come up.'" Hip-hop was street music, not family music, and English was the main language of the street. Walking with Jae-P around his neighborhood, some young people greeted him in a mix of English and Spanish, but others—including a man he pointed out as a good rapper—spoke African American English with no apparent Mexican or Chicano inflections and referred to each other as "my nigga." Jae-P seemed equally comfortable with both styles, and although he normally raps in Spanish, the notes to his CDs present him as comfortably bilingual, for example including a dedication: "To my fans, I couldn't have done it sin ustedes, gracias por todo su apoyo... I love you y que sigan luchando juntos."⁵⁸⁴

Ni de Aquí Ni de Allá was released in October 2003, while *Proyecto Akwid*

⁵⁸⁴ Jae-P. *Esperanza*. Univision CD10279, 2004.

was in the Latin Albums top ten, and though it never climbed above number 25, it remained on that chart for 23 weeks. It also got some airplay locally on KBUE, and its accompanying video got some showings on Spanish music TV programs. In contrast to the marketing push stressing ranchera and banda connections, the video showed Jae-P with familiar Chicano or cholo signifiers, at home shaving his head and ironing a football jersey, then around his neighborhood, flashing hand-signs in front of a graffiti-style rendering of his name that included a portrait of a classic Pachuco, posing beside a “dancing” low-rider car fitted with hydraulics, and partying with similarly jersey-clad, shaved-headed friends.

Nine months later, in July 2004, Akwid’s second Spanish album debuted on the Latin Albums chart at number two, and Jae-P’s second release debuted at number seven that October. Titled *Esperanza*, it was an attempt to extend his original appeal beyond the core Mexican-American audience, featuring a first single titled “Latinos Unidos.” The video showed him in a sports jersey again, but also in a suit and tie, acting as a Latino newscaster, and walking the streets of Los Angeles with a small crowd of young men and women, some carrying flags of Mexico, the United States, Colombia, Guatemala, Cuba, Brazil, and other countries, others carrying banners with the title phrase, shouting along with him on a chorus that echoed familiar street chants of the Chicano rights movement, but with an international twist: “¡Latinos unidos! Como dicen, ¡Jamás serán vencidos!” (Latinos united! As they say, Will never be defeated!) Like his previous hit, the lyric detailed discrimination in the United States and deculturization, decrying the gringos who pass laws against immigrants, call them “wetbacks,” and pay low wages to people with dark skin, but also to previous arrivals who have forgotten their roots:

Aunque tengamos enemigos en el exterior,

Although we have foreign enemies,

Conozco a otro aún mas peor.

I know another that is even more worse.

Le decimos el paisano simplemente de cariño,

We call him a countryman simply from affection,

A veces discrimina peor que un gringo.

At times he discriminates worse than a gringo.

Raza contra raza, piel contra piel,

Race against race, skin against skin,

No es fiel a su pasado, chicano equivocado.

You are not loyal to your past, mistaken Chicano.

Tuvo la fortuna de llegar antes que yo,

You had the luck to arrive before me,

De Juan se hizo John, se le olvidó el español.

Of Juan you made John, Spanish was forgotten.

A track called “Raza Facts” found Jae-P and Cecelia Brizuela reciting historical and statistical information about Mexicans both in Mexico and the United States, he in English and she in Spanish, and ended with a breakdown of the US Latino population: three million Puerto Ricans, two million Cubans, ten million Central and South Americans, and twenty million Mexicans, prophesizing that by 2050 Latinos would be the majority, and urging, “Sigan reproduciendo. ¡Que viva la raza!” (Continue reproducing. Long live la raza!) Then Jae-P picked up the theme with a bilingual rap, almost perfectly balanced between Spanish and English and titled “Latin Invasion.” While “Latinos Unidos” was rapped over banda backing, “Latin Invasion” used an electronic, synthesized background with only an understated accordion loop suggesting any ranchera connection.

A front page article in *Billboard* the week the new album was released included Jae-P's picture under the headline "Latin Biz Sets Sights on Teens," along with pictures of the Spanish-born Mexican telenovela star Belinda, whose Latin pop debut was on its way to selling two and a half million copies worldwide, and the Louisiana-born Mexican American sister duo Ha*ash, who were hitting with a Spanish-language style using elements of Nashville country music. The text suggested that "for the first time in many years, US labels are seeking talent that is homegrown, bilingual and bicultural and that can speak to a similar generation of teens," and while citing Akwid as the best-selling "urban/regional" act, wrote that Jae-P was doing better with teenagers. It quoted Univision's Lupe de la Cruz saying, "We're reaching young people who were buying 50 Cent and Jay-Z and Black Eyed Peas, and now they have music that is relevant to them, in Spanish." Other artists mentioned included the female banda rapper Flakiss and Yolanda Pérez, who had hit with a pair of accordion-backed bilingual rap tracks, "Estoy enamorada" (I'm in love) and "La reina del mall," (The queen of the mall), which paired her with KBUE's Don Cheto, a 61-year-old radio personality from Michoacan who presents himself as a comical rural immigrant, arguing about her cholo boyfriend and her requests for money to go shopping in popular clothing store chains.⁵⁸⁵

Three weeks later, another *Billboard* story suggested that the US Latin music market was serving a younger audience than ever before and young performers were hitting far quicker than the more mature, slow-building artists who had previously dominated the field. In a list of performers ranging from Spaniards to Puerto Ricans and from light pop to reggaeton, Akwid was hailed as "the biggest sales success of the past 12 months," with the note: "In a business

⁵⁸⁵ Cobo, Leila, "Latin Biz Sets Sights on Teens," *Billboard*, 2 Oct 2004, 1, 24.

that's largely dependent on radio to break acts, Akwid is an anomaly because it has never had major radio airplay." By contrast, Pérez's comic singles had been radio hits, with "Estoy enamorada" spreading beyond KBUE and the Los Angeles market to reach number three on the Regional Mexican Airplay chart—though her albums had not charted at all.⁵⁸⁶ Nor was Pérez marketed strongly as a banda rapper; she tended to be described as a teen ranchera singer and her rap hits were considered perky novelties rather than part of any wave of Spanish-language hip-hop.

That wave would be hot news on the US Latin pop scene for another few years, but despite Akwid's initial success, banda rap would not remain a significant part of the trend. Akwid and Jae-P were the only banda rap acts to put albums on the national charts, while Akwid and Pérez were the only ones to even briefly crack the radio charts. A couple of anthologies titled *El Movimiento de Hip Hop en Español*, volumes one and two, featuring Akwid, Jae-P, Pérez, Flakiss, David Rolas, the groups Azteca and Mexiclan, and the Salvadoran American duo Crooked Stilo, also reached the top ten on the Latin Albums chart. But by the end of 2005 "urban regional" had lost momentum and the hope that ranchera-rap fusions would be more than a passing fad on the mainstream Latin scene was essentially finished.

Illusions of Fusion

With hindsight, artists and producers involved in the brief heyday of banda rap give varying explanations for the movement's collapse. As Ayala Ben-Yehuda summed up in *Billboard*, "airplay and widespread label support have been hard to come by. Add to that an insufficient touring circuit, a dearth of U.S.-

⁵⁸⁶ Cobo, Leila. "Slow Rise: New Acts Require Money and Time," *Billboard*, 23 Oct 2004,

born artists skillful enough in Spanish to rap in it and a stubborn street aesthetic...” And, he added, “just as hip-hop in Spanish was starting to take off, a more danceable Latin urban genre—reggaetón—exploded onto the scene.”⁵⁸⁷ In late July of 2004, a Puerto Rican rapper named Raymond Ayala who recorded as Daddy Yankee released a CD called *Barrio Fino* that debuted on the Latin Albums chart at number one, and although it dipped for a few months, by February 2005 it had come back strong and remained at the top position for eight weeks. It featured a hit single titled “Gasolina” that not only made the top twenty on the overall Latin airplay chart (Akwid had never reached above number fifty, and only held that position for a week), but was also at number 13 on *Billboard*’s Hot Rap Tracks chart alongside the genre’s most popular English-language performers, at 44 on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart, and even reached the Top 40 of the overall pop Hot 100.⁵⁸⁸ I was living in Los Angeles at that time, doing initial research on banda rap, and my impression was that within a couple of months “Gasolina” singlehandedly destroyed the genre. Into early 2005 I still heard Akwid and occasionally Jae-P bumping from the windows of passing SUVs throughout the city, but once it hit, I never heard a banda rap track in public again.

Reggaeton had several advantages over banda rap. For one thing, it was a lot more fun to dance to, and for another it had evolved relatively slowly and organically and was well established on its own turf before it took off in the United States. It had been developed and honed by club deejays and performers around the Caribbean, from Panama to Puerto Rico, and by the time Daddy Yankee hit in the US he was part of a genre with more than a decade’s history, dozens of recording artists, and a solid fan base of listeners and dancers. As a

27, 32.

⁵⁸⁷ Ben-Yehuda, Ayala. “Under the Radar: Latin West Coast Rap Struggles To Find Its Commercial Potential,” *Billboard*, 6 Sep 2008, 31.

result, the artists who reached an international audience had already broken out of a crowded pack, and their beats were not just the inspiration of a handful of relatively untested producers like Byron Brizuela and Ernesto Fernández; they were club-tested favorites with beats that were strong and catchy enough to compete with the top products of Anglophone hip-hop. There was also the issue of “keeping it real.” To many hip-hop fans, including Mexican American and Chicano hip-hop fans, banda rap tended to sound fake. Everybody knew that it had not started as a neighborhood thing in local clubs or barrio dance parties, and it was largely invented and promoted by marketers with little or no hip-hop background. The rappers were genuinely devoted to hip-hop, but most were unknowns with no street reputation, and the people making their beats were more familiar with ranchera and dance-pop than with serious hip-hop production. By contrast, reggaeton was coming from the hottest clubs in Puerto Rico and—by the time it reached Los Angeles—from the streets of New York.

By April 2005, *Billboard*’s Leila Cobo noted that although Nielson Soundscan (the record industry’s measure of sales) credited Akwid with 260,000 units sold for their two banda rap CDs, Daddy Yankee’s *Barrio Fino* had already sold 477,000, and there were plenty of other acts coming along in his wake, including established artists like the Panamanian singer El General, who had been selling steadily throughout Latin America since 1991 and was up to 500,000 combined sales of his recordings in the United States. José Behar, the president of Univision Music Group, was still optimistic about banda rap, pointing out that the company’s recent anthology, *El Movimiento de Hip Hop En Español*, had made the top ten on the Latin Albums Chart and Jae-P and Crooked Stilo had tracks in recent video games, *Fight Night Round 2* and *Fifa Street*. But the article’s final

⁵⁸⁸ *Billboard*, 12 Feb 2005, 27-29, 34, 65, 66.

sentence highlighted a problem banda rap had from the first: wrapping up a discussion of the Cuban rap group Orishas, who had moved to France and were mixing hip-hop with Cuban *son*, Cobo suggested their lack of success in the US was because they had no grass-roots following, and she quoted Rich Isaacson, head of a New York-based marketing firm called Fuerte Music: “The most successful hip-hop artists start out with credibility. If you go straight to radio, you won’t last.”⁵⁸⁹ Aside from Akwid the banda rap artists were unknowns who had adopted ranchera-styled beats at the urging of producers and record companies, the style had gone straight to radio, and there was only one station strongly behind it, LA’s KBUE, which by 2005 had lost faith and dropped the genre from its playlist.

When KBUE quit on it, banda rap was essentially over as a genre. Of the artists who had been promoted as part of the style, Locura Terminal went back to standard R&B beats and rapping in English; Dyablo continued to release his own Spanish-language rap CDs but no longer tended to use ranchera elements; Jae-P switched to using laid back acoustic piano and guitar for his backing tracks, though he kept in touch with ranchera by writing corridos for local norteño bands; David Rolas was by then working in radio; and Flakiss and Mexiclan were no longer involved in music.

Akwid was the exception, mostly because they always had been. “I think the big difference for us is that we weren’t made [by someone else],” Francisco says. “We were already made, street-made, we were South Central-made. We had our way of making music, our bar was always extremely high, because we wanted to be Dogg Pound, DJ Quik.” That is, they were trying to make serious hip-hop that could hold its own with the work of the most respected local African

⁵⁸⁹ Cobo, Leila. “Latin Rap Makes Its Move,” *Billboard*, 30 Apr 2005, 35.

American DJs, and the people promoting banda rap did not understand those standards. “When we went to the Latin industry, where everybody just played around with it,” Francisco says. “Even our shittiest music, they would be like, ‘Wow!’” As a result there was virtually no quality control: “I respect a lot of the artists, but as far as what Brizuela and them did, they were just pretty much sticking anybody in the studio and recording them and saying, ‘This is the next big thing.’ There was a big mistake that the record labels made, that when they seen the success that we began to have they started just signing everybody that looked Mexican and could rap in Spanish or whatever and they were just going with it. And honestly, they made a mess out of the genre.” Sergio adds that a lot of the raps also were written by the producers rather than the artists, and sounded like it—some were OK as lightweight novelties, but it wasn’t authentic from a hip-hop perspective.

Francisco compares this situation with reggaeton, noting that when Don Omar and Daddy Yankee broke through in the United States they were surrounded by other artists: “They were all, if not better talented, they were as good as the first guy, so they really had a good thing going for their genre, as musicians.” By contrast, “Here in the West Coast...they just started getting anybody and they tried to create a genre.”

Univision’s response to reggaeton was the standard corporate reaction: to get a piece of the action. Sergio recalls that they tried to get Akwid to do a reggaeton collaboration:

We actually sat in a meeting with Don Omar talking about the song we were going to do...[but] just after that we realized the impact we had in Mexico, being Mexican and representing that culture, and realizing how proud and dedicated they are to, you

know, to their culture. So we realized, you know, if we do something like that, or just change who we are for the music industry, we gonna lose that—

Francisco finishes the thought: “We would have lost everything.”

Instead, the brothers stuck to their own sound and retained a relatively small but loyal following in the United States, while continuing to build a growing fan-base in Mexico and Latin America. Looking back, they suggest this mirrored their own evolving understanding of and commitment to their cultural heritage.

Francisco recalls:

We grew up, we thought we were black, to a certain extent—I swear, our vocabulary, our way of being—I mean, I used to play basketball every day, it was my hobby, I was upset because I wouldn’t grow tall, I was like, “What the hell happened to me?” I didn’t know. But once we rediscovered ourselves and who we really are, you know, it kind of comes to you, right? It’s not something that you look for. And it was a realization, I think, and when we go to Mexico we don’t get treated as *pochos*, because we walk the walk, you know? We are who we are.

Sergio adds, “We started realizing how Mexican and *paisa* we were, you know? Like we’re still, I mean, *paisa paisa*...you know, we don’t consider ourselves Americans.”

The term *paisa* is a shortening of *paisano*, meaning “countryman,” both in the sense of compatriot and the sense of peasant, and has often been used by Chicanos in a negative sense for recent, rural immigrants. Defining a similar and overlapping term, *chúntaro* (often shortened by Anglophone Chicanos to *chunty*), Luis Urrieta writes that both describe “a ‘low-class person’ or an ‘undocumented

Mexican,” often judged by “personal appearance such as clothing preferences, haircut style, etc.”⁵⁹⁰ Writing about the cultural and identity shift that came with quebradita dancing, Sydney Hutchinson quotes a young woman saying, “In the past, it had been more like, if you listened to norteñas...it was like, ‘Oh, that’s paísa stuff, and we’re Chicanos.’” With quebradita and banda, that had shifted, in her terms making young people “proud of their heritage, you know: ‘This is my music, I’m Mexican, and what?’”⁵⁹¹ (That final “and what?” is a translation of the Spanish “¿Y qué?” meaning: “You want to make something of it?”) As immigrant and US-born angelenos began identifying publically as Mexican and going dancing in cowboy gear, *paísa* became increasingly common as a term of affinity or fashion, opposed to *cholo* and signifying a taste for ranchera dress and music. Writing about ethnic segregation in California prisons, Roberto Velasquez and Susana Funes suggest that paísa identity also provides an alternative to the local gang affiliations, writing that Mexican prisoners have to identify as *norteño*, *sureño*, or *paísa*, “referring to people from Northern California, Southern California, or Mexico respectively.”⁵⁹² In that context, paísa can also signify a tough, modern street identity sometimes described as *paísa gangster*, a term used by Helena Simonett to describe Jae-P’s performing persona, often shortened to *paísa G*.⁵⁹³

The Gómez brothers claimed *paísa* as an identity on a track of their 2010 CD, *Clasificada R*, with a bilingual rewrite of Kid Frost’s “La Raza” titled “Esto Es Pa Mis Paisas”:

⁵⁹⁰ Urrieta, Luis. *Working from Within: Chicana and Chicano Activist Educators in Whitestream Schools*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 2010, 185.

⁵⁹¹ Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 133.

⁵⁹² Velasquez, Roberto J., and Susana M. Funes. “The Mass Incarceration of Latinos in the United States: Looking Ahead to the Year 2050,” in Scott William Bowman, *Color Behind Bars: Racism in the U.S. Prison System*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014, 277.

Viva la raza, güey, somos lo máximo
 Representando aquí con algo clásico...
 Unos preguntan qué es lo que nos pasa,
 No es para tí, homie, esto es pa' mis paisas.
 (Long live la raza, you bastard, we're the best
 Representing here with something classic...
 Some people ask us what's happening
 It's not for you, homie, this one is for my paisas.)

The track is backed with their usual mix of brass instruments, but the horns are playing over a sample of Frost's original hit, and at the end he appears to rap a guest verse in "that LA stilo" (LA style), proclaiming, "It's the year two thousand and ten and it's still for the raza." It might seem a curious choice for Akwid to claim a particularly Mexican, rural identity on a track with the original Chicano rapper, which also had more English-language lines than anything they had done in eight years, but they position the mix as a dual acknowledgment of roots:

That song was a tribute to Frost...him and Lighter Shade of Brown and Proper Dos were inspiration to us. So that was like, 'We have to give him that.' But at the same time, we're doing it with banda and, you know, it's mostly in Spanish, so, you know, you have to figure out a way to combine it and not make it wack for him and wack for us and our fans... That was a big project, because the song is a big deal to the culture. We grew up on that, you know, and to be able to do a song with him was a tough deal, you know? It's a big deal to us.

Akwid had made canny use of guest performers from their first banda rap

⁵⁹³ Simonett, "Quest for the Local," 130.

CD. They had a reputation as English-language Chicano rappers, and when they changed languages and added horns, they also established direct connections to the world of mainstream ranchera with a long list of collaborations. *Proyecto Akwid* began that process with its nod to Banda El Recodo and other tracks featuring Jenni Rivera and Adán Sánchez, Chalino's son. Those particular guests were suggested by Guillermo Santiso, and both were smart choices: young, LA-based singers identified with the hardcore local narcocorrido trend, whose fans could be expected to like both ranchera and rap. They were, in Sergio's words, "strategic collaborations," associating Akwid with artists who were established on KBUE, and perhaps even recommended by the station's program director, Pepe Garza. "That audience is the audience that they were trying to target," Sergio says. "We didn't know those artists because we were more on the traditional banda, we just knew Banda El Recodo, Banda Machos, and stuff like that."

For their second Spanish album the brothers chose the guests, selecting the older ranchera singer Lorenzo de Monteclaro, the Texas border cumbia pioneer Rigo Tovar (who was not able to guest in person because he was dying, but appeared as an extensive sample), and Cesar Serrano of the traditional banda Los Estrellas de Sinaloa. When Helena Simonett interviewed Garza in 2005, he told her, "Akwid lost some credibility amongst and support from local fans" because of "the move away from Los Angeles regional Mexican music," to more directly Mexican-identified guests⁵⁹⁴ but although Rivera and Sánchez were more immediately popular with local youth, the whole point of banda rap was to connect hip-hop with Mexican traditions and it is hard to believe many of their fans disapproved. The brothers say that in any case they were picking artists they knew and admired: "When we had success with the first album, there was also a

⁵⁹⁴ Simonett, "Quest for the Local," 134.

lot more credibility in our taste and what we're doing, so when we could say to Santiso, you know, 'What about this guy?', he would say, 'All right, let me get him.'"

The choice of guests undoubtedly increased their credibility with some fans—I was surprised and impressed that Lorenzo de Monteclaro had agreed to work with them, and although not typical, I doubt I was unique. Nor did they abandon the LA narcocorrido connection: 2006's *E.S.L.* opened with a skit in an E.S.L. class, underlining their affiliation with recent immigrants, then went into a cut featuring Jessie Morales—uncharacteristically singing in English, but still sounding like Chalino as he intoned, "You can take me out the hood but you can't take the hood out me/Cause I'ma be where I come from, see." Akwid neatly balanced this declaration by rapping its rural immigrant counterpoint: "Me pueden sacar del rancho a pasos/ Pero a mí el rancho no me lo sacan ni a madrazos" (They can take me from the rancho by steps/ But they can't take the rancho out of me even with a beating). The juxtaposition highlighted the underlying messages of the urban corrido and banda rap styles: the Mexican corrido singer is actually from the streets of LA, the rappers are actually from rural Mexico.

In 2008, Akwid released their most guest-heavy CD, *La Novela*, including tracks with Jenny Rivera, Voces del Rancho, Raúl Hernández of Los Tigres del Norte, the Sonoran corrido singer El Flaco Elizalde, the romantic banda vocalist Rocio Sandoval, and the norteno superstars Los Tucanes de Tijuana. By that point, the brothers were not only supervising their recordings, but also directing their own videos, and the two from this album neatly displayed their range of interests: The title track, featuring Voces del Rancho, was about parental abuse and its video intercut the brothers rapping in baseball jerseys and the Voces singing in cowboy outfits with a black and white film of a boy being beaten by his

drunken father, then fleeing with his mother. By contrast, the Tucanes collaboration showed the brothers in suits at a wedding reception, vying with the group's handsome leader, Mario Quintero, to pick up a beautiful woman who turns out in the end to be a lesbian.⁵⁹⁵

Looking through the comments on those videos, the vast majority are in Spanish, and the brothers say their audience is increasingly in Mexico and Latin America rather than the United States.⁵⁹⁶ "I feel like the genre that we do, it doesn't really appeal to the culture here in America," Sergio says. "Even though there are some people that relate to it because of who they are, but as much as the hip-hop in Spanish is growing in Mexico, it's probably, like, the Spanish is diminishing here with the younger generation." Indeed, Sergio says his son speaks no Spanish and Francisco says his daughter speaks only a little bit. They do not seem troubled by this, Sergio saying, "I never felt about it till you asked," and continuing:

You know, even if the kids at one point stop speaking Spanish here in the States, which means they won't understand our music, Mexico is growing. So who do we want? I'm not looking for a particular audience, I don't wish—I'm not trying to shove our music down California's new generation...if Mexico likes what we

⁵⁹⁵ "Akwid-La Novela ft. Voces Del Rancho,"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qyr13WLJ4U>, uploaded 20 Dec 2009, accessed 11/23/14; "Akwid - Ombligo A Ombligo ft. Los Tucanes De Tijuana,"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Az_zrq4gNg, uploaded 7 Oct 2009, accessed 11/23/14. The ending to this video is treated as an ironic surprise, and could signal that both Akwid and the Tucanes are out of place in the upper-class, modern, north-of-the-border venue. On the other hand, it could just have occurred to Akwid or the video director as a funny twist that would cause comment and attract viewers.

⁵⁹⁶ There are also some English-language and bilingual comments, especially for "La novella." Many of the comments are on the order of "this was my life," for example: "q pinche rola para traer recuerdos de cuando era chavalito delas pinches madrisas q me acomodaba mi jefe chale q desmadre 1994 fuck man" (what a fucking track to bring back memories of when I was a kid of the fucking beatings my dad gave me hell with it what a mess). Complicating easy

do, then Mexico, you know, is where our audience is.

In terms of the US Latin media, Akwid had their moment in 2003-5, then more or less dropped off the radio and disappeared with the collapse of the banda rap experiment. The brothers themselves seem to have come to terms with this, Francisco saying:

When we started we didn't have anything, we didn't have radio, we didn't have anything. Now, we don't have no radio, we don't have nothing, but we have a huge fan base, we have a good following, and we live off our career, you know? We take care of ourselves, so it's almost like—I don't want to say, "Man, fuck these guys," you know, because I don't want to sound like that, but, you know, "You don't want to fucking play us, don't play us"—it doesn't fucking matter.

As a unique musical duo with its own sound, Akwid carries on, and one factor in their continued appeal is the range of styles and influences the brothers acknowledge and incorporate into their work—from banda and norteno to transnational pop, R&B, Chicano rap, and occasionally rock en español—and the identity they perform, of quirky, original Mexican hip-hop artists based in the urban United States. The dream of the record marketers who promoted banda rap as its own genre was somewhat different, and the difference is encapsulated in a slightly varying rubric that became a cliché of that attempt: A Univision press release from 2004 hailed the genre as "Dos culturas, dos lenguas y una sola voz—la fusión inevitable de la música Regional Mexicana con el Hip Hop" (Two cultures, two languages and one single voice—the inevitable fusion of Regional Mexican music and Hip Hop). A slightly altered version of this rubric ("Dos

ascriptions of transnational immigrant experience, this poster, German Santamaria, identified

mundos, dos lenguas, una voz”) ran across the top of Jae-P’s debut CD. A press release for his second album quoted Byron Brizuela saying, “lo Regional Urbano no necesariamente se refiere a la combinación de música, también describe la fusión de dos idiomas, dos culturas y dos estilos de vida.” (Urban Regional doesn’t necessarily refer to the musical combination, it also describes the fusion of two languages, two cultures and two lifestyles.”⁵⁹⁷ The bilingual rapper Dyablo produced an anthology on his own Discos Profeta label that included tracks from the *Z Banda Rap* album alongside his own productions and similarly titled it, *Dyablo Presents Banda Rap: Dos Mundos, Un Estilo...* (Two Worlds, One Style). And in an interview for the Spanish hip-hop website *misionurbana.com*, Akwid was quoted as saying, “Nuestra música es lo que somos: identifica dos culturas inseparables para nosotros.” (Our music is what we are: it identifies two cultures that are inseparable for us.)⁵⁹⁸

The trope of two inseparable cultures, two cultures in one, two cultures or worlds fused in a single style or voice, is basic to many formulations of Latino identity in the United States. But, once again, each definition of culture is subjective and the choice to define a group of people as unitary necessarily involves ignoring for that moment the many ways in which they differ. Immigrants as a group share the characteristic of having moved from one place to another; natives as a group share the characteristic of being rooted in one place. A concept of “Native American” that includes Navahos in New Mexico along with Chicanos in Los Angeles is perfectly defensible, as is a concept of “immigrant” that includes the members of Akwid along with people who have come to Los Angeles from Korea or Iran, as is a concept of “Chicano” that includes the Gómez

himself with the emblem of the Spanish Fútbol Club Barcelona.

⁵⁹⁷ Univision press releases, circa 2004.

brothers along with Al Hurricane, or a concept of “Latino” that includes the Gomez brothers and Hurricane along with immigrants from Argentina, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Any of those groupings can also be divided into binaries: men and women, old and young, criminals and law-abiders, rich and poor, rancheros and urbanites, Spanish-speakers and English-speakers, and so on and so forth.

In order to conceive of Latinos in the US as a single group that fuses two cultures, one has to define their myriad heritages outside the United States as in some sense unitary, the myriad situations in which they live in the United States as unitary, and their experience as a sort of “third space” joining those two unitary spaces. There are situations or purposes for which that interpretation makes perfect sense, but it is inherently unstable because each of the unitary spaces is in fact nothing of the sort, and to the extent there is a new space—an identity that is shared by US Latinos, or by any subset of US Latinos—it is as unitary as any other identity.

When Jae-P described himself as “ni de aquí ni de allá,” he was referencing two unfused cultures, both of which were part of his heritage but which remained clearly separate and neither of which accepted him. He was positioning himself as an immigrant, someone who came from “there” and now is “here,” and in the process positioned his two spoken languages and his two musical languages as the speech and music of “there” (Spanish and ranchera) and the speech and music of “here” (English and hip-hop). He could mix both binaries and was performing his pride in that mixture, but the formulation maintained the binary. Unlike the language and geography of Chicano rap, which is presented as the speech style of a particular group in a particular place, Jae-P’s English and Spanish were presented as two speech styles and his mastery of both was presented as evidence

⁵⁹⁸ “Así suena la América Latina del Siglo XXI,” http://misionurbana.com/esp_akwid.php,

of his connections to two different places and cultures. His CD cover made this division explicit, as did the cover of Akwid's *Proyecto Akwid*. Both had Mexican scenes and signifiers on the left, US scenes and signifiers on the right, and the artists in the middle—though, in a telling difference, Jae-P was portrayed as dividing the two sides, while Akwid bestrode both, linked by a strip of film (see figure 13)



Figure 13: Covers of *Proyecto Akwid* and *Ni De Aquí Ni De Allá* CDs.

Josh Kun writes that Akwid's cover shows them "between the two worlds they straddle: the tubas, beer, cacti, and Mexican flags of Michoacan, and the palm trees and office buildings of downtown Los Angeles."⁵⁹⁹ In fact, the signifiers are not quite that specific: the cathedral of Morelia, Michoacan, is on the left and the skyscrapers of LA on the right, but the other Mexican signifiers are more geographically scattered or vague: saguaro cacti grow only in the Sonoran desert, tubas are emblematic of Mexico's northwest coast, and beer is common throughout the country, but mostly brewed in the north. The juxtaposition is less of two distinct places than of two generalized ways of life: a

traditional Mexico, represented on Akwid's cover by the eighteenth century cathedral and on Jae-P's by a town on a wooded hillside, and a modern, urban United States. While Jae-P divides the two, Akwid joins them in a cinematic imaginary, sitting on the hood of a Porsche that can cruise through either environment, bumping ranchera or hip-hop and not necessarily matching the soundtrack to the scenery.

There are millions of young Mexican immigrants and children of Mexican immigrants who share variations of those cultural links, and often describe them in the binaries of bilingualism and having access to two cultures. The dream of banda rap was to create a music that expressed that experience. There are numerous possible explanations for why the genre never gelled, from ineptitude to prejudice to bad timing, but the simplest may be that to the extent the target audience wanted to musically express its sense of dual cultural affinities, it was already doing that by consuming both hip-hop and ranchera. If young US mexicanos wanted their own hip-hop, there was Chicano rap, and if they wanted their own ranchera, there were Jessie Morales, Voces del Rancho, Adán Sánchez, and Lupillo and Jenny Rivera—by 2005, Jenny was singlehandedly selling out the Kodak and Gibson Amphitheaters and soon would have her own reality show.

When Sergio Gómez imagined hearing Akwid's music bumping from the windows of the cars that were playing corridos, he was describing one of the few situations in which ranchera and rap already tended to overlap. Lots of young angelenos had both gangsta rap and corrido CDs in their cars, and put on one or the other, or one after the other, depending on their mood, or the neighborhood, or who they were riding with at the time. By contrast, no Los Angeles radio station or club was playing a mix of corridos and rap, because the existence of a large

⁵⁹⁹ Kun, "What Is an MC," 747.

audience that liked both did not mean that there was a large audience that wanted them mixed. The pleasure of having access to multiple cultures, languages, or musical styles is to a great extent in the ability to move between worlds. If enough people overlap the same range of worlds, the lines between those worlds will tend to blur, but to the extent people want to emphasize that they still have access to both, they are as likely to reinforce the dualism as to embrace the blurriness.

When young Chicanos got into quebradita, they not only danced to Mexican bands but dressed up in cowboy outfits, and when immigrants from rural Mexico get into hip-hop or punk rock, they go to rap and rock shows in urban streetwear. As Jenni Rivera suggested, young Chicano? angelenos had access to real Mexican ranchera and real LA rap, and the fact that many liked both did not mean they were looking for a music that was neither from here nor from there.

4. West Coast Party al Estilo Mexicano: Comparative Bilingualisms

Despite several hits, some impressive album sales, and a year-long marketing push, banda rap did not become established as a musical genre. Nonetheless, the attempt indicated a significant shift in the formulation of identity among young music consumers in Los Angeles. The embrace of “Mexican” as a local identity that could be associated with a local style of rap had implications beyond the commercial success or failure of the specific style of rap some promoters invented to represent that identity. Language provides one way of exploring how the modern, local conception of “Mexican” differs from the earlier formulation of “Chicano” to represent roughly the same group of people—Mexican immigrants and their descendants in Southern California—and how that conception was shifting at the turn of the millennium. As local identities, both Chicano and Mexican are associated with a heritage of Spanish speech and Spanish-English bilingualism. However, the bilingualisms associated with these identities are in some respects quite different, and to some extent require different definitions or understandings of the word *bilingual*.

As a cultural trait, bilingualism is often taken for granted as an aspect of Latino heritage, and the fact that virtually all Latinos in the United States can speak and understand more Spanish than the average non-Latino is proof of this generalized bilingualism. This formulation, which I would characterize as “heritage bilingualism,” is not dependent on the ability to communicate in Spanish, but rather on the ability to signal Latino heritage through the use of words and phrases understood to be Spanish that are common in English-dominant Latino communities, spoken in the accent and inflection of those communities, in ways that are socially indicative of membership in those

communities. I use the phrase “understood to be Spanish,” because some of those words and phrases are unknown in Spain, in most of Latin America, or even in most of Mexico. The cultural affinity signaled by saying *ganga* for “gang” or *el witier* for Whittier Boulevard is roughly analogous to that signaled by singing a snatch of “Lo Mucho que te Quiero” or “Angel Baby”—it is understood by a community as an indicator of shared heritage, irrespective of any connection to Spanish or Latino heritage elsewhere.

Heritage bilingualism is different from a conception of bilingualism that requires an ability to speak two languages. Many people who speak a variety of Chicano English can also speak other languages—Spanish, German, French, or school English—but even someone whose only speech style is Chicano English would be recognized by many people both in her community and in academic linguistics departments as bilingual. One can argue that such speakers are in fact monolingual, since they only have one speech style, associated with one cultural group—we do not call French teenagers bilingual just because their normal vocabulary includes dozens of words of English—but in heritage terms they are not only conscious of using words from another language but are signaling a deep personal connection to that language, and many people regard that as a form of bilingualism.

Conceptions of heritage bilingualism, however warmly they may be embraced, inevitably are part of the discourse of language loss as well as the discourse of language preservation—Chicano English preserves Spanish-language heritage, but the only reason one defines that connection as a kind of bilingualism is because one considers Spanish-English bilingualism a valuable and important aspect of Chicano identity and yet acknowledges that many Chicanos do not speak Spanish. The shift from Chicano to Mexican as a local identity for people

born in the United States adds another layer to this discourse—there is arguably a Chicano language that is indigenous to the United States, but Mexico has its own national language. The marketing concept behind banda rap included the belief that a new generation of angeleno hip-hop fans spoke the language of Mexico, or at least wanted to have a style of rap based in that language. That assumption may have been misplaced—that young, locally-born angelenos were dancing and listening to norteño and banda songs performed in Mexican Spanish did not necessarily mean that they could understand an intricate, fast-paced, Spanish-language rap, or that they wanted to listen to rap in that language—but its logic nonetheless demanded a different kind of bilingualism from the artists. Unlike Chicano rappers, banda rappers were expected not only to use some Spanish words and phrases in their raps, but to rap in Spanish.

In their first manifestations, both Chicano rap and banda rap were attempts to create new styles that would be recognized and adopted by preexisting audiences, and in both instances there was some doubt about what those audiences would want. As a result, both styles began with experiments in bilingual Spanish-English rap. Neither experiment proved to be particularly durable, but it is nonetheless worth giving a close reading to the differences between them because they suggest some complexities and particularities disguised by standard formulations of bilingualism, and the ways these differences reflect larger changes in local conceptions of identity. This chapter focuses on four songs from two CDs: “La Raza” and “Ya Estuvo” from Kid Frost’s *Hispanic Causing Panic*, the groundbreaking Chicano rap album released in 1990; and “Al Estilo Mexicano” and “El Nuevo Sonido” from Jae-P’s *Ni de Aquí Ni de Allá*, one of the defining banda rap albums released in 2003. In each case, the songs were exceptional for their bilingualism—all the other tracks on

Frost's album were in English and all the other tracks on Jae-P's were in Spanish—and each not only mixes Spanish and English, but was explicitly presented as a performance of bilingual facility and bicultural identity. However, the four songs use different approaches, reveal differing linguistic skills and aims, and suggest different conceptions of the artists and their audiences, and the way those conceptions were shifting at the turn of the millennium.⁶⁰⁰

My analysis of these four songs suggests that the artists chose varied linguistic approaches to achieve varied ends, and highlights the intentionality of those choices. While drawing on previous work on bilingualism and code-switching, I also try to emphasize the difference between intentional artistic efforts to showcase bilingualism and the relatively unconscious code-switching in day-to-day bilingual speech. Much of the research on code-switching has focused on trying to understand how and why speakers mix languages in their everyday interchanges, often by looking for “triggers” that cause speakers to shift from one system to another. I have drawn on some of the conclusions of this work, but have not attempted to analyze either the number or style of shifts between language systems with the precision or consistency of researchers such as William Labov or Shana Poplack.⁶⁰¹ I provide some quantitative analysis and cite specific words and phrases as examples of differing linguistic approaches, but my focus is on the

⁶⁰⁰ To the extent this change was driven by demographic shifts, it was catching up with the numbers rather than reflecting them. In 2000, almost exactly half the Hispanic population of the Los Angeles-Long Beach metro area was foreign-born, but the most dramatic change had been in the decade 1980-90, when the area's Hispanic population grew 62.2% as compared to 26.6% growth in the following decade. The number of new arrivals seems to have stayed fairly constant over that period—of the Metro area's foreign-born population in 2000, roughly a third had entered before 1980, a third in 1980-90, and a third in 1990-2000—but the proportion of newcomers relative to the total population was less dramatic after 1990. (“Los Angeles--Long Beach, CA: Population Demographics and Diversity Profile,” at <http://diversitydata-archive.org/Data/Profiles/Show.aspx?loc=761¬es=True&cat=1>, accessed 3/14/2015.)

⁶⁰¹ Labov, William, et al. *A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City*. Cooperative Research Project No. 3288, Columbia University, New York, 1968; Poplack, “Sometimes I’ll Start a Sentence.”

identities the rappers are choosing to project. Suzanne Romaine has noted that it is standard for researchers who “are more interested in the pragmatic rather than grammatical aspects of code-switching” to consider the overall communication event “at the discourse level,”⁶⁰² and studies dealing with written or artistic code-switching in particular have tended to emphasize the importance of examining performances or written communications as whole creations rather than as collections of dislocated phrases. In their study of Arabic-French bilingualism in Algerian *rai* music, Abdelâli Bentahila and Eirlys Davies argue that it is often useless or misleading to explore the language of songs with analytic models developed for the study of conversation, since one or two words used in a song title or as a repeated refrain can create a dominant bilingual frame for a performance that is otherwise monolingual in another language.⁶⁰³ Indeed, in some instances a heading or refrain serves simply as a linguistic framing device, and may be otherwise unconnected to the message of the lyric. (For example releasing Mellow Man Ace’s monolingual Spanish rap “El mas pingón” with the title “Do This [Spanish Flavor]” reassured Anglophones that despite having a lyric they could not understand, it was regular hip-hop, meant for them too, and in that sense bilingual rather than Spanish-only.)

I am wary about using the terms code-switching or bilingual for some of these examples because both terms imply the use of two languages, while in some instances it seems equally valid to interpret the linguistic device as an assertion that the speaker is using her own language, suited to a unitary identity that

⁶⁰² Romaine, Suzanne. *Bilingualism*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989, 137.

⁶⁰³ Bentahila, Abdelâli, and Eirlys E. Davies. “Language Mixing in Rai Music: Localisation or Globalisation?” *Language & Communication* 22, 2002, 187–207. Similarly, In a study of internet chat and discussion groups within immigrant communities, Lars Hinrichs shows (*Codeswitching*, 90) how the brief interjection of a word of a shared language often serves to indicate a identity and pride in that identity even for readers for whom the language it “is no longer used as a communicative code for the message content.”

acknowledges a heritage connection to people who spoke a different language. In the constant mixing and overlapping of speech styles throughout history, the choice of when to give any particular mix status as a language is more dependent on power relationships than on linguistic determinants. Both Frost and Jae-P use code-switching to highlight their dual connections to Spanish and English, at times in ways that reveal ambiguities about their conceptions of the languages and the potential difficulty of combining two languages while maintaining the duality implied by the term *bilingual*. Every language is compounded and adapted from earlier or neighboring languages and all living languages continue to borrow new terms and locutions, so any choice to single out some words as borrowings or switches is necessarily subjective. What is regarded as a foreign word by some speakers may be considered part of the normal vocabulary by other speakers of the same variety, even within in the same region or social group. J.C.P. Auer argues that whether a word is considered a switch should depend on whether the speaker thinks of it in those terms. Studying Italian immigrants in Germany, he argued that when they used the word *Mann* while speaking Italian, a researcher should not necessarily consider this a “transfer” or borrowing, since to do so “we have to show that the speaker *makes use of* the other-language status of *Mann*. It is not enough that *Mann* can be found in a German dictionary and not an Italian one.”⁶⁰⁴ My concept of heritage bilingualism would give different weight to the same immigrants using one or two Italian words while speaking German, but granting the importance of one usage as signaling significant cultural information while dismissing the other as a minor local habit clearly demands that we think about the messages language signals in fairly complex ways.

Such cautions are particularly relevant to bilingual rap, since as a

⁶⁰⁴ Auer, J.C.P. “A Conversation Analytic Approach to Code-switching and Transfer,” in

professional performance style grounded in adolescent street slang it involves a lot of intricate language-play that is exceptional and intentional, but exists in a linguistic world where it is common for new words to be quickly assimilated to the standard vocabulary. Studying bilingual rap in Quebec, Mela Sarkar and Lisa Winer found that some words they initially classified as loans from English were considered by local teenagers to be standard Quebec French or even Parisian French learned from imported rap records.⁶⁰⁵ Similarly, when I showed a young Chicano from Los Angeles the phrase “Nel chale men estás safado” (a Youtube comment on “Al Estilo Mexicano”) and asked him whether he would consider the word “men” a switch into English, he instead identified it as Mexico City slang, saying that is how they write “man” and the full phrase would translate as “No way, man, you’re nuts.” This is a good example of how language can undergo multiple transmutations within transnational populations, since many older Mexico City residents would identify the phrase “nel chale men” as pachuco slang from Los Angeles.

Any discussion of bilingualism and code-switching by Chicanos or Mexican Americans must take into account the historical depth and continuity of language overlap and interchange in the Southwest, and the possibility that what an outside researcher identifies as language-mixing may be part of an established and stable linguistic system. In one of the first articles describing Chicano English as a unique dialect, John Gumperz and Eduardo Hernández-Chávez suggested that nouns such as *chicano*, *gabacho*, and *pocho*, exclamations such as *órale* or *ándale*, and some common sentence connectors (I would add some common obscenities) should be considered normal components of that dialect rather than

Heller, *Codeswitching*. 204.

⁶⁰⁵ Sarkar, Mela, and Lisa Winer. “Multilingual codeswitching in Quebec rap: Poetry, pragmatics and performativity,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3(3), 2006, 181.

switches into Spanish, since “They serve as stylistic ethnic identity markers and are frequently used by speakers who no longer have effective control of both languages.”⁶⁰⁶ Indeed, *Chicano* has by now become a standard English word, as likely to turn up in the speech of Anglos as of Latinos. The tricky thing about this is that many common words have resisted assimilation. Aurelio Espinoza transcribed mixed Spanish-English sentences in the early twentieth century that would still pass as standard street talk today, such as “Esa sí fue una *first class* cochinada” and “Well, *compadre*, how is your *vieja*?”⁶⁰⁷ The first example was presumably spoken by someone with a solid control of Spanish, but the second could easily be said by someone who was essentially monolingual in English. However, unlike *chicano* (or *cañon*, *rodeo*, and *taco*), neither *compadre* nor *vieja* has become standard in Anglo speech, so although both are common in the speech of many monolingual Chicano English speakers and have been for a century, they are still recognized by virtually all those speakers as Spanish. They are not code-switching in the strict sense of involving a shift from one speech style to another, but it seems safe to say that any rapper who uses one of those words on a recording is aware of using a non-English term.

The use of border caló adds another level to this discussion, since many of its terms are foreign to the standard lexicons of both Spanish and English. These include terms adopted from Romany (*vato*, *chingar*), English (*wachar*), regional Spanish (*nel*, *ése*), standard Spanish reworked (*cuete* for gun, from *cohete*, rocket) and of unknown provenance (*chale*, *jaina*). In Spain the term *caló* refers to a

⁶⁰⁶ Gumperz, John J., and Eduardo Hernández-Chavez. “Cognitive aspects of bilingual communication,” in Hernández-Chavez, A.D. Cohen, and A.F. Beltramo, eds., *El Lenguaje de los Chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics Used by Mexican Americans*. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1970, 156-7.

⁶⁰⁷ Espinoza, Aurelio M. “Speech mixture in New Mexico: The influence of the English language on New Mexican Spanish,” in H.M. Stephens and H.E. Bolton, eds., *The Pacific Ocean in History*. New York: MacMillan, 1917, 416.

Spanish-Romany creole, but on the US-Mexico border it is used more generally for underworld or underclass jargon, originally the pachuco speech of the 1940s but more recently the cholo speech associated with Chicano gang members. As such it is particularly attractive to Chicano gangsta rappers: for example, in the lyric of Lil Rob's "Soy Chingón," two-thirds of the non-English-based words are caló and would be as unfamiliar to many Mexicans as they are to most Anglophones. Along with similarly non-standard terms shared with African American rappers—*endo*, *ranker*, *solja*—these caló terms are part of the normal lexicon of Chicano rap, and when the producers of Jae-P's first CD included a glossary of unfamiliar words—presumably for Spanish-speakers, since the liner notes are in Spanish—they did not distinguish Anglo hip-hop terms like *baller*, *beats*, *homie* and *ho's* from the caló *chapete*, *heyne*, *malandrines*, and the mixed *paisa G*.⁶⁰⁸

As a generalization it makes little sense to regard the use of caló in Chicano English as code-switching, since such usage is one of the defining traits of the speech style, as it was of pachuco Spanish. However, that is not to deny its importance as a way of signaling ethnic, cultural, or linguistic affinities. Since the 1960s Chicano linguists and artists have drawn attention to the use of border caló, "pocho Spanish," Chicano English, and other distinctive and mixed forms as "emphasizing the specialness of the Chicano community."⁶⁰⁹ Such emphasis is particularly clear in the context of public performances. In the 1940s, Pachuco caló took on a theatrical linguistic role similar to that of African American jive talk, designed not only to signal membership in an in-group and confuse outsiders, but also as performative speech to amuse and impress one's listeners.

⁶⁰⁸ Jae-P, *Ni de Aquí Ni de Allá*, Univision CD10168, 2003.

As with jive talk, it was used in movies and songs both to suggest hip modernity and as a form of comic verbal display. The more ornate Pachuco dialect had largely died out by the 1960s, in part because Spanish ceased to be the primary base language for most urban Chicanos—though the parallel decline of black jive talk suggests that other factors were involved as well, such as the economic leveling and increased racial and cultural integration of the postwar years, and normal generational shifts. However, it left its mark on day-to-day Chicano English: in the early 1980s, Rosaura Sánchez wrote that although young Chicanos no longer spoke the ornate, Spanish-based *caló* of the 1940s they continued to employ its “peculiar intonation and a sprinkling of ornamental ‘*órale-ése-vatos*’ added for effect.”⁶¹⁰

Sánchez was arguably describing traits of a regional English speech style rather than switches into another language. However, a drawback of that characterization is that the term “Chicano English” implies a linguistic sub-group within an Anglo mainstream, and although that is an appropriate characterization in some contexts it is less so in others. Frost not only sprinkles Mexican border slang throughout his lyric, but opens the second verse with the declaration, “The form that I’m speaking is known as *calo*,” and his decision to describe his speech in these terms is at least as relevant as the fact that some linguists categorize it as a dialect of English. He is making an explicit choice to portray himself as speaking the language of his group, not that of the mainstream—though it is also notable that he stresses the first syllable of *caló* to make it rhyme with *malo*, a choice no Spanish-speaker would be likely to make. In linguistic terms the base vocabulary and grammar of his lyric is certainly English, but it is also insistently

⁶⁰⁹ Peñalosa, Fernando. “Some Issues in Chicano Sociolinguistics,” in Richard P. Duran, ed., *Latino Language and Communicative Behavior*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981, 12.

⁶¹⁰ Sanchez, *Chicano Discourse*, 129.

other:

Quiúbo, aquí estoy, MC Kid Frost

Wassu

p, I'm here

Yo soy jefe, matón, yes the big boss

I'm

boss, killer

My cuete's loaded, it's full of balas

gun,

bullets

I put it in your face and you won't say nada

nothin

g

Vatos, cholos, you call us what you will

guys,

gangbusters

You say we are assassins, inhuman, taught to kill

It's in my blood to be an Aztec Warrior

Go to any extreme and hold no barriers

Chicano, and I'm brown and proud

Want this chingazo? Simón, ése, let's get down

punch,

sure, man

Right now, in the dirt

What's the matter? You afraid you're gonna get hurt?

I'm with my homeboys, [my chas?], my camaradas

buddi

es

Kicking back con mi ganga, y pa' mí no digue nada
my gang, and don't
nothing 'bout me

with
say

Yo soy chingón, ése, like Al Capone, ése

I'm

tough, man

Controlo a todos so don't never try to sweat me *I*

control everybody

Some of you don't know what's happening—que pasa, *what's*

happening

It's not for you anyway, 'cause this is for the raza.⁶¹¹

Any attempt to classify Frost's language use is further complicated by the way he framed his audience. Although he was rapping in a speech style generally considered an ingroup dialect, which would become the standard language of later Chicano rap, and constantly emphasized that he was addressing that ingroup—"this is for the raza"—he simultaneously kept addressing outsiders and forcing them to recognize themselves as outsiders, saying "some of you" won't understand, but "it's not for you anyway."

Performance contexts can complicate the analysis of bilingual usage by reversing the process by which words once regarded as borrowings or code-switches become assimilated as normal components of monolingual speech. In songs like "La Raza," and in internet comments responding to such works, usages that have been assimilated in daily conversation often take on a performative aspect that re-exoticizes them. Chicanos routinely use many of the words Frost highlights as *caló* in their daily speech without considering them switches into another language or dialect—*cholo* and *vato* are no more exceptional in the English of many Chicanos than *taco* or *loco*—but Frost explicitly pushes his listeners to think of them as part of a non-English language system. He presents them as switches into an unfamiliar code and as a result even words that would normally be assumed to be English are potentially open to question. When Frost raps, "Cruising in the calle, headed for the volo/ No one to go with me, so I had to

go solo,” *calle* and *volo* are clearly highlighted as distinctive, but what about *solo*? In Anglo speech there would be no reason to suggest that “solo” is anything but standard English, but the word is at least equally common in Spanish—until the twentieth century its use as an adverb was far more common in Spanish than in English—and in the context of this verse it was chosen because it is phonologically compatible with the Spanish-inflected *volo*. Ben Rampton draws a parallel to “sleeping metaphors” in monolingual speech, which although they are not usually recognized as metaphors may retain some of the associations of their original meanings, and suggests that in discussions of multilingualism and code-switching the distinction between normal and exceptional speech is likewise “highly variable and often ambiguous,” and researchers should be wary about attempting to fit all their examples into discrete categories.⁶¹² In Frost’s verse, *solo* may function both as an English word and as a reminder of a Spanish word, and to file it conclusively as belonging to either language system is potentially misleading.

The difficulty of sorting and defining languages in Frost’s lyric parallels the difficulties a musicologist would have in sorting and defining the musical component of his track. Both the four-note bassline that opens and underpins his rap and the prominent sample that appears ten seconds later are drawn from “Viva Tirado,” El Chicano’s 1970 hit, which was in turn based on a cool jazz recording by the piece’s African American composer, Gerald Wilson. Wilson’s version already had Afro-Latin touches, most obviously in the clave-inflected rhythm of the piano and horn riff that El Chicano adapted to organ:

⁶¹¹ Molina, Arturo, Jr, Tony Gonzales, and Gerald Wilson. “La Raza,” on Kid Frost, *Hispanic Causing Panic*, Virgin CD 91377, 1990.

⁶¹² Rampton, “Language Crossing,” 303-4.



American or undifferentiated American mainstream. When Wilson titled his piece in Spanish he was paying tribute to a Mexican bullfighter and its rhythm suited the Spanish title, but when Willie Bobo titled a Latin jazz piece “Fried Neckbones and Some Home Fries,” the message was that those rhythms also fitted a conception of “soul” rooted in the experience of African Americans in the southern United States.

It may be no coincidence that El Chicano’s first venture into Latin jazz had at least titular Mexican connections, and was certainly no coincidence that it was a local composition, but many listeners heard their recording as specifically Chicano not because of anything inherent in Wilson’s composition, but because of their name, the fact that it was promoted as an anthem of Chicano pride, and perhaps because of the prominent use of electric organ, which had likewise marked other Chicano hits in recent years.⁶¹⁵ Among Chicanos it remained a beloved oldie, but by the time Kid Frost used their sample as the basis for “La Raza,” I doubt many non-Chicanos remembered “Viva Tirado” and still fewer would have recognized the bassline and brief organ sample that underpinned his rap. As with his samples from War—an African American band that most listeners outside the Southwest never associated with Chicano heritage and one of the most sampled groups in hip-hop history—the ethnic referent underlying “La Raza” was an important element of its localized appeal to Chicano cultural pride, but unlike the pseudo-Mariachi horns of “Tres Delinquentes,” to most Anglo listeners it was not recognizably Mexican, nor was it more distinctively Latin-sounding than hundreds of other hip-hop samples—especially since the bassline is

⁶¹⁵ E.g., “Wooly Bully,” “96 Tears,” and the Sir Douglas Quintet’s “She’s About a Mover.” Frank Rodriguez’s organ on “96 Tears” was adapted directly from accordion (Habell-Pallan, Michelle, “? and the Mysterians: Early Punk’s Hidden Identity,” paper at the Experience Music Project Conference, Seattle, 2005). The leader and organist of the Sir Douglas Quintet were not

quickly overlaid with a frequently-sampled funk drum lick from Graham Central Station's "The Jam."⁶¹⁶ If outsiders heard the track as signifying *latinidad*, it was due to the context: the frame of pride in the *raza* and the use of Spanish and caló.

"Outsiders" in this instance would not have been limited to Anglos. Frost titled his CD *Hispanic Causing Panic* and began the disc's second bilingual song, "Ya Estuvo," with an announcement that it was for "all the Latinos in the house," but much of the caló vocabulary of "La Raza" was no more familiar to Latinos outside the Southwest than to English-speakers, nor would other Latinos have necessarily recognized "Viva Tirado" or considered it notably or authentically Latin. Another musical referent in "La Raza" was even less likely to be recognized by outsiders as an ingroup signifier: at one point, Frost raps "Just like the song when you're eighteen with a bullet/ Got my finger on the trigger, I'm not afraid to pull it." The reference is to another popular Chicano oldie, "Eighteen with a Bullet," but although that song is a classic signifier of Southern California barrio culture, sometimes associated specifically with East LA's 18th Street gang, and was used as the dominant sample for what may have been the first explicitly Chicano rap recording, Spanish Fly's "Soy 18 with a Bullet,"⁶¹⁷ it was composed and recorded in retro-doo-wop style by a British singer, Pete Wingfield, and is associated with Latino culture only within the southwestern Chicano community.

All of which is to say that like such other signifiers as caló, low-rider cars, Pendleton shirts, and tear-drop tattoos, the musical and linguistic elements that

Chicanos, but the other band members were, and their songs included the original version of the raza pride anthem, "Soy Chicano."

⁶¹⁶ Graham Central Station could easily be filed as part of the story of Chicano rock and funk, since the lead guitarist, David Vega, was Chicano and several other members were associated with Santana and Azteca. However, no historian of Chicano music includes them, nor did the Chicano scholars I asked (José Cuellar, Luís Rodríguez) think of the band as in any way Chicano.

⁶¹⁷ By some reports a demo version of "Soy 18 with a Bullet" was made in 1989, predating "La Raza," though it seems not to have been released until the early 1990s.

signal Chicano identity in Frost's work and the work of other Chicano rappers include imports from Mexico alongside local adoptions, inventions, and reformulations. In their study of bilingualism in Chicano poetry, Eva Mendieta-Lombardo and Zaida Cintron use Carol Myers-Scotton's categories of marked and unmarked speech to make the argument that all Mexican-derived terms in English-based Chicano poems can be considered code-switches due to the explicit intentionality of their use as ethnic markers.⁶¹⁸ I present a similar argument above, but also recognize its inherent flaw: code-switching is a process of shifting between two forms of speech and although the use of Spanish and caló in Chicano verse undoubtedly serves to mark that verse as an expression of Chicano identity, it does not follow that the use of non-Spanish, non-caló elements is a switch back into a non-Chicano speech style. When Frost raps, "Soy chingón, ése, like Al Capone, ése," he is rapping two parallel, rhyming phrases that form a single cohesive statement: "I'm tough like Al Capone." It would be absurd to describe this as a series of multilingual code-switches, from the Spanish *soy* to the Romany caló *chingón*, the local border slang of *ése*, the English of *like* and *Al*, the Anglicized Italian of *Capone*, then back to *ése*. But it is only a bit less absurd to say Frost switches into English for three words, then back to Spanish. If he had said, "soy chingón como Al Capone," no one would call that code-switching, even if he pronounced the gangster's name with standard US English inflections, and it is by no means clear that in Chicano speech the words *like* and *como* distinguish separate language systems.

In one of the first studies of bilingual Chicano poetry, Guadalupe Valdés Fallis noted the difference between language use in writing and day-to-day

⁶¹⁸ Mendieta-Lombardo, Eva, and Zaida A. Cintron. "Marked and Unmarked Choices of Code Switching in Bilingual Poetry. *Hispania* 78 (3), 1995, 565-572; Myers-Scotton, "Code-switching."

speech, citing a pair of terms from the Prague School linguists: *automatization* and *foregrounding*. In her formulation, automatized language does not attract attention to itself, while foregrounded language is anything that is intended to be noticed, and she argued that poetic language involves a maximization of foregrounding—drawing attention to the poet’s choice and organization of words—with communication frequently relegated to a secondary consideration. In Chicano poetry, the mix of English, Spanish, African American slang, *caló*, and in some cases words of Nahuatl conveys a message both of cultural identity and of artistic skill, and she suggested that the ways in which a writer switches between language systems in his poems need not reflect the normal speech of either the artist or the audience, or even their ability to speak the languages involved, but rather function as “ethnic identity markers which serve the purpose of establishing a common ground regardless of actual proficiency.”⁶¹⁹

Such artistic foregrounding and ethnic signaling are clearly intended in “La Raza,” and also in Jae-P’s “El Nuevo Sonido” and “West Coast Party al Estilo Mexicano.” Frost and Jae-P both make it clear that they expect their audiences to be pleased and surprised by their linguistic choices, not because the usages are unfamiliar—they are explicitly addressing listeners familiar with similarly multilingual speech—but because previous rappers had not made similar choices. Frost’s previous work hewed to African-American vernacular speech norms, so his use of even the most common Spanish and *caló* words was foregrounded as a departure from those norms, and he emphasized the new focus by ending each verse with the declaration, “this is for the raza.” (Though the song is titled “La Raza,” the lyric consistently uses the English article.) Jae-P, a dozen years later, defined himself as Mexican rather than Chicano, though like Frost he was born in

Los Angeles, and he foregrounded this identity not only by rapping in Spanish and using distinctively Mexican locutions, but also with ranchera musical signifiers (prominent accordion and brass band loops) and by declaring rap a modern equivalent of the Mexican corrido.

Jae-P's code-switching was much more virtuosic than Frost's, displaying full, comfortable fluency in two language systems, and unlike "La Raza," which can be substantially understood without knowing Spanish, his "El Nuevo Sonido" was aimed at listeners who understood and were thoroughly familiar with both Mexican and African American speech styles:

¿Qué quieres de mi guey? *What's that?*
 ¿Que cambio mi cultura? Chales, *fuck that!*
 Soy lo que soy, sigo siendo el rey,
 Que se chingen los putos *that ain't down with my thing.*
 Para ti soy un paisa, pa' mi banda un *OG.*
 Que suene la tambora con el *hip-hop homie.*
 No desprecies mi sonido, *'cause it's born in LA*
 Con elementos de banda y un *rap* muy chingon, guey

I was cruisin' in my Chevy, scoping out the *rucas*,
 Strollin' through Pacific, bumpin' in my *troca.*
Se siente la vibración de mi sonido,
 People want to know, "who's rappin' that *estilo?*"
 Hip-hop ain't the same no more, 'cause it got linked with
banda,
 It's time we get our props, y *¡que viva la raza!*

⁶¹⁹ Valdés Fallis, "Code-switching," 882, 884.

And to all you brothers tryin' to dis our game,
 Our corrido's just like rap an' it's been out before you had a
 name.⁶²⁰

While African American English serves as an automatized base language in Frost's performance and the elements of Spanish and *caló* are foregrounded as exceptional, in "El Nuevo Sonido" both languages are foregrounded, since the message is neither that he is rapping in English nor that he is rapping in Spanish, but that he can smoothly mix the two, and whichever he chooses as a base, he continues to use the other as well. Since the point of "El Nuevo Sonido" is that both corridos and rap are musical signifiers of Jae-P's bicultural identity and the song's bilingual code-switching matches that theme, one could argue that both languages are, in Myers-Scotton's terms, unmarked. As she wrote: "When the speaker wishes more than one social identity to be salient in the current exchange, and each identity is encoded in the particular speech community of a different linguistic variety, then two or more codes constitute the unmarked choice... it is the overall pattern of using two varieties which carries social meaning."⁶²¹ But it makes at least as much sense to say Jae-P is marking both languages, since he is making a point of mixing forms that are normally discrete or opposed to each other and announcing the novelty and originality of this fusion as a "new sound."

In 1990, "La Raza" was likewise presented as a new sound. Mellow Man

⁶²⁰ Brizuela, Byron, and Juan Pablo Huerta. "El Nuevo Sonido," on Jae-P, *Ni De Aquí Ni De Allá*, Univision CD 10168, 2003. (What do you want from me, punk? *What's that?*/That I change my culture? Hell no, *fuck that!*/I am what I am, I keep being the king/The faggots can go fuck themselves *that ain't down with my thing.*/To you I'm a paisa, to my band an *OG*/Let the tambora play with the *hip-hop homie.*/Don't put down my sound, *'cause it's born in LA*/With elements of banda and a *rap* that's baddass, punk./I was cruisin' in my Chevy, scoping out the *broads.*/Strollin' through Pacific, bumpin' in my *pick-up.*/You can feel the vibration of my *sound*/People want to know, "who's rappin' that *style?*"/Hip-hop ain't the same no more, 'cause it got linked with *banda.*/It's time we get our props, *and long live the raza!*/And to all you brothers tryin' to dis our game,/Our corrido's just like rap an' it's been out before you had a name.)

⁶²¹ Myers-Scotton, "Code-switching," 146.

Ace and Tony G had recorded “Mentirosa” with the local Chicano audience in mind, but despite its Santana samples, they were Cubans and the lyric had no Mexican or Chicano signifiers. *Hispanic Causing Panic* was the first explicitly Chicano rap album, and “La Raza” in particular was framed as a statement of ethnic pride, greeted by many older listeners as an extension of the Chicano poetry movement of the 1960s and 1970s and similarly intended to reinforce a consciousness of ethnic and cultural identity.⁶²²

At the same time, Frost was careful to make his performance accessible to the broader hip-hop community. Of the roughly 365 words in “La Raza,” only 66 are Spanish or caló, including three repeats each of “¿Qué pasa?” and “raza,” and most of these are isolated nouns within otherwise English phrases.⁶²³ Many of the caló and Spanish terms would be recognizable to Anglo southwesterners who were even marginally familiar with Chicano or Mexican culture, and a completely monolingual English-speaker unfamiliar with these words could still understand most of the song, missing only some incidental details and one bilingual joke: “You’re so cool that I’m a call you a *culo*” (ass). In this sense it is no more limited to an in-group than a lot of African American rap, which also routinely uses terms and phrases that are likely to be obscure to many listeners, and the song became a national hit. Just as Chicanos who might not understand particular words of Spanish or caló could still appreciate Frost’s use of “their” language, non-Chicano hip-hop fans could appreciate the unfamiliar words as exotic flavors in what remained clearly recognizable as “their” music.

⁶²² Rafael Jesús González wrote (“Pensamientos sobre la literatura chicana,” *Mujer* 2(1), 1972, 30, quoted in Valdés Fallis, “Code-switching,” 878) “Chicano literature is literature, to a great extent, of propaganda, polemic literature whose goal is not to explore what is most personal and, finding that, transcend to what is universal, but rather intends from its root to create Chicano culture, to recruit the youth to a new consciousness of itself not only as individual beings but as a political force” (my translation).

The language of “La Raza” displays little of what Poplack called “skilled code-switching,” meaning the ability to keep two grammars simultaneously in one’s head and move smoothly back and forth between them.⁶²⁴ Frost’s tendency to switch out of English only for single nouns, greetings, and short, simply-patterned phrases matches what Romaine among others described as typical of speakers with less than full proficiency in their secondary language⁶²⁵ (not to be confused with their second language, since some Chicanos who grow up English-dominant start out speaking Spanish). It also matches the way many bilingual code-switchers communicate with people outside their communities and would be a reasonable style for Frost to have used for a national debut even if he were comfortable with more skilled or complex styles. Poplack noted that New York Puerto Ricans who switched “frequently and smoothly” between English and Spanish in conversations with fellow Nuyoricans made single-noun switches almost three times as often when talking with a non-Puerto Rican, even if the outsider spoke both English and Spanish, while in-group bilingual switching included twice as high a proportion of full sentence switches and almost three times as much intrasentential switching (shifting from one language to the other in the middle of a sentence).⁶²⁶

Of the sixty non-English words in “La Raza,” twenty-two are nouns presented within English phrases and ten others are tags or greetings (e.g., *quiúbo*, *simón*, *ése*, *¿qué pasa?*). The remaining twenty-eight words are grouped in eight Spanish phrases, most of which are extremely short and could easily be formed by someone with limited control of the language. Three are basic “I am x” phrases,

⁶²³ This word-count is approximate, since some phrases were unintelligible, and omits the frequently repeated chorus: “This is for the Raza, Raza.”

⁶²⁴ Poplack, “Sometimes I’ll Start a Sentence,” 241.

⁶²⁵ Romaine, *Bilingualism*, 209.

“*yo soy chingón*,” “*yo soy jefe*,” and “*yo soy muy malo*” (“I’m tough,” “I’m boss,” and “I’m very bad”), all of which would more typically be said by a native Spanish speaker without the personal pronoun. Two others are the basic “*aquí estoy*” (“here I am”) and “*y ¿sabes qué? loco*” (“and you know what, crazy?”), a formulaic question followed by a word that is commonly used by both Chicanos and Anglos. In several instances the switches are translational (a word or phrase is said in one language, then repeated in the other), which again matches Poplack’s data for bilinguals communicating with people outside their communities: “*Yo soy jefe*...yes, the big boss”; “I’m with my homeboys, my *camaradas*”; “you don’t know what’s happening, *que pasa*” and the looser translation: “*Tú no sabes nada*; your brain is hollow.” There is only one instance of smooth switching over three consecutive lines: “Kicking back *con mi ganga*, *y pa’ mí no digue*⁶²⁷ *nada*./ *Yo soy chingón ése*, like Al Capone *ése*,/ *Controlo a todos*, so don’t never try to sweat me.”

My point is not to determine the extent to which Frost’s lyric should be classified as code-switching, or to sort out any specific classification, but on the contrary to suggest the particularities of group, regional, or individual identity and meaning that are obscured by universalisms like “code-switching,” “bilingualism,” “Spanish,” “English,” “Latino,” or “Chicano.” Take the word *volo*, meaning “boulevard,” which he uses in “La Raza” and a later track titled “The Volo”: I cannot come up with a single instance of its use outside Los Angeles Chicano low-rider culture, and nothing to indicate it was coined by people who primarily spoke Spanish. The temptation to classify it as Spanish is

⁶²⁶ Poplack, Shana. “Syntactic Structure and Social Function of Code-switching,” in Duran, *Latino Language*, 169-184.

⁶²⁷ If I’m hearing this correctly, *digue* is presumably a mispronunciation of *diga*, perhaps through a kind of hyper-correction towards a nonexistent double subjunctive—but I may just be mishearing.

similar to the French tendency to classify the word *footing* (meaning jogging) as English or classifying *copacetic* as academic jargon—the words were clearly intended to signal departures from, respectively, standard English, French, and African American street speech, and potentially to signal affinities to Spanish, English, and erudite academese, but can only be understood in terms of their context and those intentions, and are misunderstood if one carelessly files them in the latter categories.

The essential linguistic message of “La Raza” is that Frost talks that way and is part of a group that talks that way, but also that he expects most of his listeners to speak English better than Spanish and assumes that many will find his speech style foreign. A look at the comment section for a YouTube posting of the song’s video supports those conclusions. The comments were all written eighteen to twenty years after the song was recorded and presumably do not precisely match the linguistic breakdown of his original listeners, but when contrasted with the breakdown of Jae-P’s YouTube commenters, they indicate a very different fan base (see Figure 14). Of the first three hundred comments, 261 are in English, 15 are in Spanish, and 24 include both languages. A further breakdown of the 24 mixed comments yields similar proportions: twenty use English as a base language (e.g. “My Kind of Old Skool Vatos Locos 4ever”), two use Spanish as a base (“esto ensena el pride de toda la raza latina”), and two are roughly even.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁸ Kid Frost, “La Raza,” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ8AS300WH4>, uploaded 23 May 2009, accessed 4/30/2011; Jae-P, “Al Estilo Mexicano,” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aH5Y_eTr4o, uploaded 6/13/2009; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5QQVZPKp-k>, uploaded 8/25/2009; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJRIrcgfnvM>, uploaded 12/11/2009, all accessed 4/25/2012.

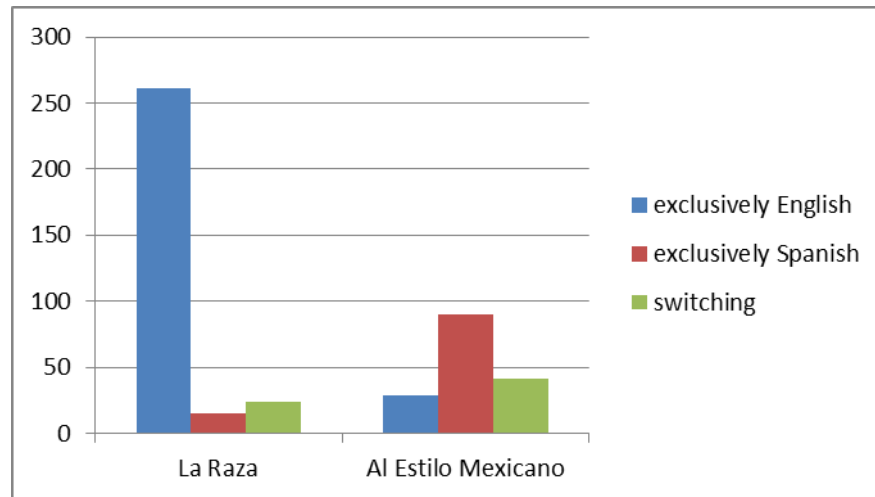


Figure 14: Language use in YouTube comments on "La Raza" and "Al Estilo Mexicano."

Most of the songs on Frost's album were couched entirely in African American English, and only one other made substantial use of Spanish: the explicitly bilingual "Ya Estuvo (That's It)." This track begins with a brief dialog in English between Frost and his African American collaborator Will Roc, with Roc at first misunderstanding the title phrase as "You're stupid" and Frost providing a translation—"Man, 'ya estuvo' means 'that's it', 'that's all,' 'it's all over for you,' man"—and explaining that he is "running this one down for all the Latinos in the house." Frost raps the first verse in Spanish, after which Roc says, "Yeah, that's kinda dope. But I don't know *what* the hell you talking about. I bet you, *bet* you, you can't say that in English." Frost responds by rapping a translation, then follows with a second verse that is likewise rapped first in Spanish, then in English.

Although "La Raza" and "Ya Estuvo" are both explicit performances of bilingualism, they display very different strategies and intentions: "La Raza" is framed as a display of ethnic identity, while "Ya Estuvo" is framed as a display of bilingual lyrical skills. The lyric of "La Raza" is credited to Frost himself and its

linguistic choices mimic a normal Chicano conversational style, urban street English interspersed with *caló* and bilingual switching—which helped make it the defining anthem for a generation of Chicano rap fans. By contrast, “Ya Estuvo” suggests command of two discrete linguistic systems, showcasing Frost’s ability to rap full verses in either language rather than mixing them. In Fishman’s terms, “La Raza” exhibits compound bilingualism, mixing two languages in one form of discourse, while “Ya Estuvo” exhibits coordinate bilingualism, keeping the two systems clearly separated.⁶²⁹

Frost’s message of bilingual virtuosity in “Ya Estuvo” is undercut by the fact that he did not compose the lyrics, which are credited to George Anthony Perez a.k.a. Lyrical Engineer, and neither the Spanish nor the English seem to match his normal speech or rap style. There is virtually no use of *caló* or slang in the English sections, and the Spanish is stilted and careful, though appropriate as *pocho* Spanish, a style often mocked in Mexico for lacking native fluency but spoken with an accent and regional markers that differentiate it from school Spanish (for example, *nadien* in place of *nadie*). In terms of the information conveyed in each verse, the English verses simply translate the Spanish ones (or perhaps, judging by the relative smoothness of phrasing, vice-versa), and the intervening dialogue frames them as translation.

Those spoken interludes also frame the verses’ balanced bilingualism as exceptional and performative, reminding or reassuring listeners that Frost remains a member of the mainstream hip-hop community. His casual use of African American conversational English and the fact that he is performing the bilingual rap for an African American buddy serve to anchor his performance in that dominant frame and to maintain English as a norm from which the use of Spanish

⁶²⁹ Fishman, Joshua A. “Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When” [1965],

is a theatrical departure. As he says in his sign-off: “Yeah, Kid Frost definitely in effect. Bringing you the funky sound for the nineties.... Ya estuvo. That’s it. Coming with the now sound is the Latin spice, always precise.” Although the explicit point of the song is that Frost is bilingual, the spoken sections implicitly reinforce the message that his Spanish rapping is a symbolic display of ethnic and cultural pride. For Spanish-speaking listeners, the stilted syntax, simple vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes of the Spanish verses underline their symbolic nature,⁶³⁰ contrasting with the relaxed, street-flavored English of Frost’s comments: “Hell yeah, homeboy... I’m gonna bust this one on a switch move. For all the bilingual people in the house: y’all know what time it is.” The music likewise underlines Frost’s local identity: the bassline is a sample from War’s “Smile Happy,” and the dominant musical voice is a harmonica played in the virtuosic, blues-flavored style of that band’s Lee Oskar.

In “La Raza” and “Ya Estuvo,” and on his first CD as a whole, Frost identified as Chicano, Latino, and Hispanic, with English as his normal language and no references to Mexico except obliquely when he rapped “it’s in my blood to be an Aztec warrior.” By contrast, a dozen years later Jae-P consistently identified as Mexican or *mejicano*, only occasionally placing this identity in a broader Latino context, and when he echoed Frost’s assertion of Aztec heritage in “El Nuevo Sonido,” he added a nationalist frame—“Hijo de Aztecas, descendiente de Cuauhtémoc” (Son of Aztecs, descendent of Cuauhtémoc)—placing himself in the lineage of the Aztec leader who fought the conquistadores in Central Mexico. By 2003 Chicano rap was solidly established as a regional, ethnically-coded

reprinted in Wei, *Bilingualism Reader*, 101-3.

⁶³⁰ The Spanish lyric has stilted lines like “*Una vez más en español digo esto/De Los Angeles vengo directo*,” and errors no native speaker would make, like “*nadien están sentando*,” which mixes the colloquial Spanish *nadien* with a calque of the English present progressive “are sitting.”

genre, and Jae-P's linguistic choices signaled a divergence from that genre, connecting him to a new emphasis on Mexican immigrant identity and pride.

Frost's work has often been discussed as an updated extension of the Chicano poetry movement of the 1970s, employing the political philosophy and multilingual tropes of writers whose expressions of Chicano pride were geographically grounded in the Southwest and represented pride in a rooted and distinctive local culture.⁶³¹ By contrast, Jae-P presents himself as a spokesman for first- or second-generation immigrants who, although they may have been born in Los Angeles, maintain their connection with Mexico. "Al Estilo Mexicano," a duet with another bilingual rapper, David Rolas, which became a popular party hit on its release in 2003, has a Spanish base and includes 122 English words out of a total lyrical content of 620 words. In quantitative terms this makes it a remarkably precise mirror image of "La Raza," each song taking eighty-two percent of its words from its base language. However, in contrast to Frost's tendency to interject single words in Spanish or *caló* in otherwise English sentences, Jae-P and Rolas tend to switch smoothly and completely from one language system to another either inter- or intrasententially.

The correlation of these linguistic choices with the artists' formulations of ethnic identity operates at several levels. Frost signified a border Chicano identity with his use of *caló*, while Jae-P signifies an immigrant heritage both in his thorough command of Mexican Spanish and by referring to Mexican music, food, and drinks. At the same time, Frost also identified as Latino and Hispanic, suggesting links with other Latin American communities throughout the United States, while on his debut album Jae-P identified specifically as urban and West

⁶³¹ Among many examples, Pulido writes, "Kid Frost worked within the legacy of poets of Jose Montoya, Alberto Alurista, J.L. Navarro and Raul Salinas" ("Knowledge—the Fifth

Coast. Each artist shifted identities somewhat from one track to another, and each used his two bilingual tracks to add nuance to identities that were expressed monolingually in the body of their albums, Frost as a mainstream West Coast urban rapper and Jae-P as a Mexican, ranchera-identified, Spanish-language rapper. “La Raza” situated Frost in the line of Chicano artists who share a deeply rooted heritage in the Southwest, while “Ya Estuvo” situated him as someone who hung with African Americans but also spoke the heritage language of a pan-Latino culture. “Al Estilo Mexicano” situated Jae-P as someone living in Los Angeles who insistently continued to maintain his “Mexican style,” not only in language and music, but in food, drink, and social mores, while “El Nuevo Sonido” positioned him as a new kind of angeleno who lived and mixed comfortably with both homies and paisas. In Myers-Scotton’s formulation, both used bilingualism as a way of asserting multiple identities, declaring, “not only am I X, but I am also Y,”⁶³² but their X’s and Y’s were divergent and multilayered, not only relative to each other but from one song to another, and the shifting language balances of each track reinforced these shifting identities (see figure 15).

Element,” 53), and Rodríguez writes, “Kid Frost’s work mirrors an ethic of cultural, community values advocated in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*” (*Next of Kin*, 113).

⁶³² Myers-Scotton, “Code-Switching,” 170.

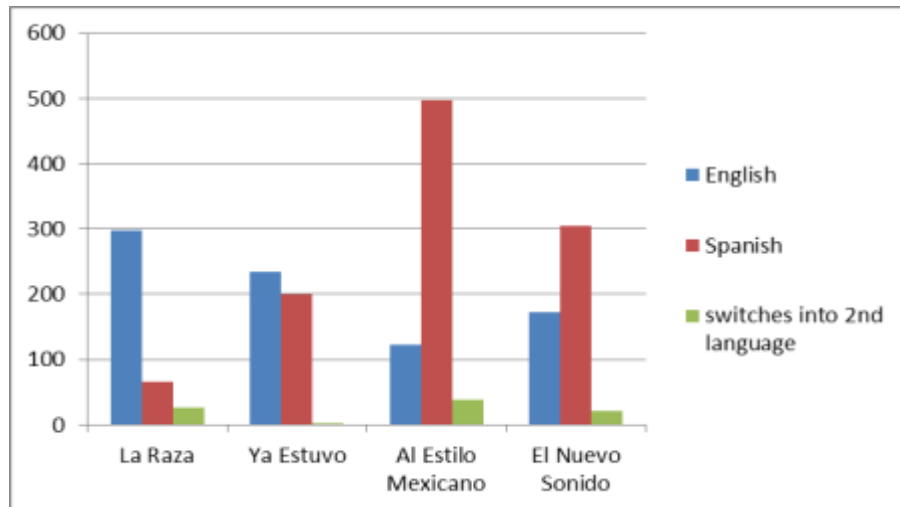


Figure 15: Language use in Kid Frost's "La Raza" and "Ya Estuvo" and Jae-P's "Al Estilo Mexicano" and "El Nuevo Sonido."

To some extent, Jae-P's approach was an evolution of Frost's: in 1990 rap was still generally typed as an African American style, and Frost had created a career as a Chicano who was down with that world. On *Hispanic Causing Panic* he asserted both his solid standing in the black hip-hop community and his unique position as a Chicano who could rap in caló or Spanish. It was a departure from his previous recordings, which were indistinguishable from those of his African American peers, and in commercial terms the two bilingual tracks were experiments. "Ya Estuvo" attracted little attention, and Frost never again tried to rap a verse in Spanish. "La Raza," by contrast, was a national hit and a regional sensation, Frost used that style from then on, and it became the foundation of a new, separate genre: Chicano rap. Jae-P grew up in a world where Chicano rappers were normal, and his professional assertion of being neither X nor Y was in part a declaration of difference from that norm. To that extent, their messages could be read as Frost saying, "You may think of me as part of black rap culture, but I'm really Chicano," and Jae-P saying, "You may think of me as another Chicano rapper, but I'm really Mexican."

At the same time, Jae-P was part of a generation that was redefining its

understanding of “Mexican.” He rapped most of his CD in Spanish, with virtually no border slang, but his professional name asserted an Anglophone hip-hop identity, orthographically prompting fans to pronounce his initials in English. His two bilingual songs were similarly complex assertions of layered identities: “El Nuevo Sonido” paralleled Frost’s “Ya Estuvo” by explicitly highlighting his skill as a bilingual rapper and switching base languages from verse to verse. However, unlike Frost he is fully fluent in both languages and highlighted his skilled, comfortable command of both grammars by continuing to code-switch from both bases, and he also underlined the point that he was mixing separate systems by constantly referring to the novelty of his combination of ranchera and hip-hop. The lyric stressed that its titular “New Sound” was a logical bicultural mix representing a community in which many young people listened to both styles, referencing the three largest ranchera radio stations in the Los Angeles market, La QueBuena, La Nueva, and La Raza along with the main hip-hop station, Power 106.

In linguistic terms, Jae-P’s approach neatly mirrored Frost’s: Where Frost asserted a generalized US hip-hop identity in English and a specifically local identity in his *caló*-inflected Spanish, Jae-P used only occasional words of *caló* and a couple of specifically Los Angeles locutions (for example, referring to Whittier Boulevard as “*la Whittier*”), and his Spanish was broadly Mexican. The CD’s title song, *Ni de aquí ni de allá*, provided a dominant linguistic frame, claiming the power of his bilingual skills—“con dos acentos en la lengua llegaré a triunfar” (with two accents in my tongue I will finally triumph)—but rapped almost entirely in Spanish.

Of that album’s two bilingual tracks, the most popular was the duet with

David Rolas, “Al Estilo Mexicano.”⁶³³ As noted, at a word-for-word level this song has almost exactly the reverse linguistic proportions of “La Raza,” but the syntactic balance is very different. Like Frost and Will Roc in “Ya Estuvo,” Jae-P and Rolas preface the rapped verses with an introductory conversation that establishes a linguistic frame, but in this case it is a frame of smooth, casual language-mixing:

Jae-P: Hey Rolas?

David Rolas: ¿Que pasó? compa.

JP: Hey, you know what time it is, homie?

DR: A huevo.

JP: Hey, meet me at my primo’s house, eh?

DR: Orita, homie, orita. Ahí voy pa’ ’llá.

JP: Simón, así lo hacemos—ain’t nothing but a party, ya’ll.

Although most of the rapped lyric is in Spanish, the frame of smooth, casual switching is maintained throughout by repetitions of the phrase, “West Coast party al estilo mexicano,” which recurs sixteen times over the course of the performance, and a majority of the language shifts are at the phrase or sentence level rather than involving single words. There are only two English noun switches and eight English interjections or tags, all variations of *hey*, *homie*, and *y’all*. Many of the English phrases are formulaic—“living it up,” “party, y’all,” “ain’t nothing but a party,” “you know what time it is?”—but used with the ease of a native speaker, and there is also one noun-switch back into Spanish: “Hey, meet me at my *primo*’s house.” Where Frost on his debut CD was an established English-language rapper choosing to use Spanish and *caló* in some songs to signify Chicano identity, Jae-P and Rolas switch languages in a way that reflects

⁶³³ Brizuela, Byron, David Pérez, and Juan Pablo Herta, “Al Estilo Mexicano,” *Ni de aquí*

their abilities to access and balance two separate but equally comfortable linguistic identities, as immigrants from Mexico who have created a solid place for themselves in the United States. The song's message is of pride in both their heritage and their current situation, and the language fits the theme of a party in urban LA featuring ranchera music and a menu of iconic Mexican drinks (mescal and four different brands of tequila) and foods (*birria de chivo* [goat barbecue stew] and *tacos de nopal* [cactus tacos]).

The code-switching in "Al Estilo Mexicano" is notable for the ways it both duplicates and diverges from day-to-day conversational habits. Many studies of code-switching point out how switches can be triggered by particular subjects of conversation, a classic example being a "home" language being introduced when talking about subjects related to heritage or family, as in "meet me at my *primo*'s house."⁶³⁴ Another familiar example is a switch being triggered by the use of technology that is associated with a particular language, as when Jae-P and Rolas switch to English to mention their CD player while talking in Spanish about listening to the mariachi singer Vicente Fernández (identified by his familiar nickname), and drinking tequila: "Chente *on the box* y a tequila en la mano." On the other hand, they also make switches for purely structural, literary reasons, solving problems of rhyme or meter. The option of drawing on two vocabularies expands a lyricist's thesaurus and, although I cannot find any discussion of this in the academic literature, it makes sense that bilingual artists would at times employ codeswitching simply for that purpose. In the third verse of "Al Estilo Mexicano," a Rolas quatrain about taking two women to the beach includes the phrase

ni de allá, Univision CD 10168, 2003.

⁶³⁴ E.g. Blom, Jan-Petter, and John J. Gumperz, "Social Meaning in Linguistic Structure: Code-switching in Norway [1972,] in Wei, *Bilingualism Reader*, 124-30; Myers-Scotton, "Code-switching," 1988.

“quieren ver el *sunset* y jugar en ’l’arena” (“they want to see the sunset and play in the sand”). The brief switch to English serves no apparent rhetorical function, but along with being more economical it preserves the trochaic meter of the line, which would be broken by the dactyl of its Spanish equivalent, “puesta del sol.” Two lines later, an intrasentential switch provides Jae-P with a string of unbroken dactyls and a rhyme (albeit inexact) for the Spanish word “vez,” which would not be easily available in a Spanish phrase conveying the same information: “Oye, David Rolas, escoge esta vez/ ¿Quieres la nalgona *or the one with the big breasts?*” (“Listen, David Rolas, make your choice this time/ Do you want the big butted woman...”)

Although such switches highlight the extent to which this lyric is an artistic composition, the song’s language use also suggests aspects of the performers’ normal conversational style. In most of their recordings, both Jae-P and Rolas rap monolingually in Spanish, and here as well the first and second verses, performed as solo raps by each artist, are entirely in Spanish except for one interjected “homie.” However, as noted above, the introductory conversation is full of switching, and when the two artists start trading lines in verse three they immediately begin to mix languages. These switches are consistently smooth and seemingly off-hand, as when Rolas responds to an invitation with, “Horita, *homie*, horita” (“in a moment...in a moment”) or Jae-P raps about “*Livin’ it up* con todos mis hermanos” (“...with all my brothers”).

As with the comments on Frost’s “La Raza,” comments on YouTube postings of the video for “Al Estilo Mexicano” match the song’s linguistic balance. Of the first 150 comments, 90 are in Spanish, 29 in English, and 41 mix the two languages. Of the 41 that mix, 21 are in Spanish with English insertions (including two with only English orthographic laughter: “hahaha” rather than

“jajaja”), eight are in English with Spanish insertions (including one that just says “Mexicano forever”), seven are evenly balanced, and five simply quote bilingual lines from the song. However, a closer look suggests that some of the commenters who used Spanish exclusively may have done so less because it is their standard language choice than as a performance of Mexican pride, since many of them have English or bilingual Youtube aliases (e.g. TheRaulJuarez, TheMexicanUnknown, Xxnoheartx, doctormasterdevil, sureno4bandit, cynthia838, and xxMexicana4everxx). Supporting this hypothesis, another comment from TheRaulJuarez was entirely in English.⁶³⁵

Addressing a largely bilingual audience, Jae-P’s code-switching assumes a level of familiarity with both systems that is very different from what Frost’s work implies. A monolingual English speaker would miss little of importance in “La Raza” and nothing in “Ya Estuvo,” but Jae-P’s bilingual songs include long passages in each language with virtually no direct translation and relatively little overlap of information. “El Nuevo Sonido,” an explicit manifesto for his bilingual, bicultural, bimusical approach, is one of the most balanced code-switching raps on record. The overall word count is sixty-four percent Spanish, thirty-six percent English, and the structural balance is even closer: The first verse is based in Spanish with English switches, the second in English with Spanish switches, the third begins in Spanish then shifts to an English base, and only the fourth upsets this pattern, sticking to Spanish with a few noun-switches to English. The music signals a Mexican affiliation with accordion as the most prominent melodic instrument, but the first rapped lines lay out an aggressively bicultural stance: “¿Qué quieres de mí, güey? *What’s that?*/ ¿Que cambio mi

⁶³⁵ Jae-P, “Al Estilo Mexicano,” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aH5Y_eTr4o, uploaded 6/13/2009; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5QQVZPKp-k>, uploaded 8/25/2009; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJRIrcgfnvM>, uploaded 12/11/2009, all accessed 4/25/2012.

cultura? Chales, *fuck that!*” (What do you want from me, jerk?.../That I change my culture? No way...) The first verse includes constant code-switching, obscenities in both languages, and the bimusical declaration: “Que suena la tambora con el *hip-hop*, *homie*.” (*Tambora* is the bass drum used in banda music and also a generic term for that genre.) This verse is based primarily in Mexican Spanish, but Jae-P switches accents as smoothly as words: the h’s of “hip-hop” are clearly articulated, and the i is pronounced as the standard American English /ɪ/ rather than the Spanish /i/.

The second verse, based in English, continues to stress the bicultural message with local signifiers: “cruising in my Chevy” evokes Los Angeles car culture, and “strolling through Pacific” refers to Pacific Boulevard, one of the city’s main Mexican shopping districts. Once again, attention to his accent suggests further complexities, since although he is rapping in English he pronounces “Chevy” with a Spanish /tʃ/ rather than the Anglo-American /ʃ/ (sh)—a reminder that simplistic divisions between English and Spanish are often misleading.⁶³⁶ The intentional novelty of Jae-P’s approach is underlined with the comments, “Hip-hop ain’t the same no more, ’cause it got linked with *banda*” and “People want to know who’s rapping that *estilo*,” and the verse ends with an update of Frost’s original challenge to a monocultural understanding of rap: where Frost was asserting that Chicanos had a place on a scene typed as African American, Jae-P implies that rap is a modern variation of the old Mexican outlaw ballad tradition: addressing “all you brothers trying to dis our game,” to say, “our corrido’s just like rap an’ it’s been out before you had a name.”

⁶³⁶ This might seem a subtle distinction, but when I quoted some lines of the song to a Puerto Rican friend as an example of Jae-P’s style, I pronounced the word as an Anglophone would, and although he had never heard of Jae-P or Mexican rap, he instantly corrected me, saying, “But he would say ‘Chevy’,” pronounced with the hard *ch*.

“El Nuevo Sonido” was a manifesto of the banda rap fusion, announcing a “new sound” tailored to fit the musical tastes and cultural affinities of young angelenos who had grown up performing and listening to rap in English and corridos in Spanish. It made this point in both musical and linguistic terms, with a mix of accordion and hip-hop beats backing the bilingual lyric and code-switches targeted at the overlapping corrido-rap audience, and the third verse defined that audience in a display of bilingual virtuosity and local flavor, declaring “*I represent South Central y a todo mi raza,*” and addressing “*my peeps en los campos,*” “*mi raza that’s in the Southwest,*” and “*my chalinillo gangsta homies,*” a reference that simultaneously name-checked the most famous Los Angeles rap style and the gun-slinging local corrido idol.

The song’s final verse was based in Spanish but continued to emphasize Jae-P’s bicultural and bilingual identity: “*Estudié con los gringos, en dos lenguas me definiendo/ Mi sangre es mexicana pero mi oído es universal*” (I studied with the gringos, I get by in two languages/ My blood is Mexican but my ear is universal). Unlike the earlier verses it could easily be understood by a monolingual Spanish speaker, but Jae-P maintains the bicultural flavor with English-language fashion signifiers: “*baggy pantalones,*” “*Cortez, fat laces,*” and a reference to *MTV*, which is spelled out in English although the surrounding phrase is Spanish. (In a parallel to his Spanish pronunciation of “Chevy,” he pronounces “Cortez” with American English inflections, reflecting its status as a brand of Nike sneakers rather than its Spanish roots.) This verse could help clarify the song for monolingual Mexican fans while at the same time reminding them of Jae-P’s connection to urban US youth styles, which have potent cultural currency on both sides of the border. As with the Spanish and caló nouns in Kid Frost’s “La Raza,” the effect of the Anglo brand-names on Mexican listeners does not

require any bilingual fluency, since even if the words are not fully understood they suggest shared fashions and thus accentuate the bond between performer and audience.

While Jae-P's lyrics matched and exemplified his theme of a new bilingual, bimusical, transnational youth culture, the musical message was less clear or effective. Unlike Akwid, whose banda rap debut, "No Hay Manera," smoothly and recognizably melded hip-hop beats with the popular ranchera styles of Juan Gabriel and Banda el Recodo, Byron Brizuela embraced the idea of mixing hip-hop and banda, but was not as effective in maintaining the strengths of either style. The backing tracks for "El Nuevo Sonido," "Al Estilo Mexicano," and "Ni de Aquí Ni de Allá" use accordion or horn-like keyboard samples to provide a flavor that might be recognized as Mexican by some listeners, but equally might not if the rapping did not make that connection, since aside from the timbre of the instruments there is no attempt to blend ranchera into the beats. "El Nuevo Sonido" has a mostly monotonic electric bassline and an electric keyboard playing a simple, repetitive melody, and the accordion only comes in for the chorus, playing an equally repetitive, single-note line:



This song was not selected as a single, and perhaps should not be taken as exemplary, but the lack of balance between the in-your-face attitude and expert bilingual code-switching of the lyrics and the relatively unexceptional musical backing suggests the difficulty of shaping a musical genre to fit a marketing plan: there were unquestionably a lot of young people in Los Angeles who shared Jae-P's dual allegiance to a familial Mexico and a local street culture, but unlike the Chicano ingroup Kid Frost was addressing in "La Raza," they did not have a

musical style that signaled that shared duality. When Chicano rappers sampled “Viva Tirado,” “Low Rider,” “Eighteen with a Bullet,” or “Angel Baby,” they were signaling a particular identity within the broader hip-hop mainstream: to outsiders the music sounded like normal hip-hop, but Chicano listeners recognized the samples as emblematic of in-group solidarity, so it was simultaneously authentic as hip-hop and authentically theirs. By contrast, banda rap sounded neither like mainstream hip-hop nor like ranchera, and for listeners to embrace it as theirs, they either had to recognize it as maintaining its separate component styles while simultaneously fusing them or to see it as a new style that expressed their modern group identity.

Judging by Akwid’s unique endurance and the failure of banda rap to become established as a genre, plenty of listeners were pleased to hear a record or group that mixed banda or accordion with hip-hop, but relatively few embraced that fusion as “their” musical language. The Gómez brothers may be right that this was because the other artists who pursued similar fusions did not come up to their musical level, or because the market got flooded too quickly with too many artists. But it seems significant that although both Kid Frost at the dawn of Chicano rap and Jae-P in the brief wave of banda rap experimented with bilingual lyrics, neither they nor their peers pursued that approach. The logic of rapping bilingually was that there was a large audience that spoke both Spanish and English and would hear the alternation and mixing of those languages as expressing its shared identity. But the logic of code-switching and bilingualism is that an individual can access two linguistic identities, which requires maintaining the separation between those identities. When multiple linguistic identities cease to be separate, the result is a single linguistic identity—Saxon and Norman becoming English, or cowboys ceasing to think of *canyon* and *lasso* as Spanish

words, or Mexicans not thinking of *azúcar* as Arabic, *maíz* as Taino, and *chile* as Nahuatl.

The musical analog to bilingualism or multilingualism is having a variety or range of tastes, not a single, blended taste. When Jae-P and David Rolas described themselves as partying “Mexican style,” the music they played to accompany tequila, *birria*, and *tacos de nopal* was Vicente Fernández singing mariachi, not Kid Frost or Santana, because they wanted to explicitly signal the Mexican aspect of their mixed identities. At a different party, they would presumably be playing Tupac, Snoop, and Cypress Hill, and some of the same friends might come to both parties—but plenty of people would be comfortable at one party and not the other, and the concept of biculturalism requires that in at least some contexts those binaries be maintained.

Transnational artists like Jae-P, Akwid, and Jessie Morales share a sense of dual identities grounded in their transitional position between countries and generations, with Mexican-born parents who don’t speak English comfortably and don’t care for rap and US-born children who may not speak Spanish or share their affection for ranchera music. Their professional stances of bilingual fluency and command of both rap and ranchera signal their comfort with both worlds and their ability to move between those worlds, as well as their affinity with other people in the same position. But none have built lasting careers on that particular affinity: Morales is known as a corrido and ranchera singer; Jae-P and Akwid as Spanish-language rappers.

Kid Frost likewise experimented with bilingualism only briefly on his first album (if by bilingualism we mean using full verses or phrases of Spanish as well as English) and later Chicano rap artists have rarely used more than occasional words or brief, formulaic phrases of Spanish or *caló*—and specifically the words

and phrases that are common in Chicano English—except when recording separate projects for Spanish-language markets. Few Chicano rap performances even include as much Spanish as “La Raza,” which demands at least minimal fluency in the language to catch the full lyric. The use of *caló* and Spanish words remains common in the genre, which has a large and enthusiastic audience throughout the Southwest, but like the backing tracks, which are sampled or created from the vocabulary of R&B, rock, and techno, the identity it signals is unified and local—not of being *ni de aquí ni de allá*, but of a particular group in a particular place.

Chicano rap, like gangsta rap and other forms of hip-hop, and like the earlier Chicano poetry movement, has often been characterized as signaling resistance to assimilation in a white Anglo mainstream. In Susan Gal’s terms, it is an “unauthorized vernacular form” through which minority groups can “enact values of solidarity, opposing the dominant value of status and individual mobility” in the broader culture of the United States.⁶³⁷ By now, most Chicano rap is recorded specifically for that market and in general the artists and marketers show no sign of wanting to reach beyond that community—which in its own terms is not simply the Chicano community, but specifically the Chicano gangsta rap community. Kid Frost recorded *Hispanic Causing Panic* before that particular community existed, and the varied linguistic approaches on that CD reflected its varying formulations of hypothetical, potential, but as yet undefined audiences. In retrospect, “La Raza” was the beginning of Chicano rap, and when it appeared it was immediately greeted as a cultural manifesto. But while its language was one of Gal’s unauthorized vernaculars and its explicit stance was oppositional to the mainstream, it was also marketed to that mainstream, and embraced by much

⁶³⁷ Gal, Susan. “The Political Economy of Code Choice,” in Heller, *Codeswitching*, 249.

of that mainstream as a new color in the hip-hop rainbow. The same linguistic techniques that can be used to define an in-group and shut others out can also be used to make oneself interesting to those outsiders, and the use of foreign words and in-group language, including the aggressive street slang of NWA and the tough-guy caló of “La Raza,” were in that sense both explicitly oppositional and implicitly assimilationist.

There is a long history of pop singers signaling their ethnicity with codeswitching songs that their community recognizes as gestures of solidarity and outsiders embrace as exotic, and the temptation to characterize these performances as opposing or countering mainstream discourses has to be balanced with the recognition that they simultaneously express their group’s presence in the mainstream, at least aspirationally. The wave of Italian code-switching hits in the 1950s is an obvious example: Dean Martin reached the top of the charts in 1953 with “That’s Amore,” and when he sang, “When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that’s *amore*,” it was a gesture of solidarity with other Italian Americans, but also suggested that non-Italians could embrace the unthreatening normality of Italian ethnicity and language as easily as they embraced pizza. Michael Picone writes that this kind of language-mixing suggests pride in one’s ethnic heritage, but also “allows for the injection of a degree of exoticism without compromising a sense of conformity to mainstream American identity” and “serves to emphasize, by the token inclusion of foreign elements, how much assimilation has taken place...such playful use of foreign words neutralizes foreignness and subsumes it to the dominion of mainstream American identity, thus rendering other identities less threatening.”⁶³⁸

This neutralizing, mainstreaming effect is not limited to songs with a few

token words from a non-Anglo lexicon. “La Macarena,” the 1996 dance hit that spent more than three months at number one on *Billboard*’s Hot 100 chart and remained on that chart for over a year, had a chorus sung entirely in Spanish and lines of smooth intrasentential codeswitching: “Come and find me, my name is Macarena,/ Always at the party con las chicas que son buenas.” Nonetheless, it was wildly popular across lines of age, ethnicity, and political or cultural affiliation: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, and Bob Dole all joked about dancing the Macarena, and a CNN correspondent described the “thumping Spanish beat” as ubiquitous: “These days you just have to Macarena to be anybody.”⁶³⁹ Three years later, Ricky Martin’s “Livin’ La Vida Loca” went to number one with a codeswitching title phrase that in Chicano culture had traditionally been associated with gangbanging rather than dancing, and was greeted by the mainstream media as heralding a new Latin boom, the happy sound of an increasingly multicultural America. Many Latino music entrepreneurs saw this as an opportunity, but others considered it an insult: Martin’s hit led a concerted attempt to place Latino artists and styles in the Anglo mainstream, exemplified by the national network broadcast of the first Latin Grammy awards in 2000, and as head of Fonovisa records, Guillermo Santiso led a boycott of the telecast by Mexican Regional performers. His immediate reason was that although Mexican Regional music accounted for two-thirds of US Latin sales, only one of the eleven acts booked for the Latin Grammy show was Mexican, but he also decried the bouncy, cartoonish portrayal of Latino culture, comparing Martin to Desi Arnaz and saying, “All he needs is a bunch of bananas on his head to make him the

⁶³⁸ Picone, Michael D. “Artistic Codemixing,” *U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics* 8(3), 2002, 194.

⁶³⁹ Russell, Melinda. ““Give Your Body Joy, Macarena’: Aspects of U.S. Participation in the ‘Latin’ Dance Craze of the 1990s,” in Walter Aaron Clark, *From Tejano to Tango: Essays on Latin American Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 2013, 182.

perfect Latin stereotype.”⁶⁴⁰

Chicano rap is clearly very different from the Italian pop of Dean Martin or the sprightly dance beats of Ricky Martin and “La Macarena,” but Frost’s *Hispanic Causing Panic* was similarly aimed at both Latino and non-Latino fans and despite the lyrical warning “La Raza” was heard by many Anglophone listeners as attractively exotic rather than exclusionary. Musically, it was even less distancing: even if one recognized the samples from El Chicano and War, all the tracks sounded like mainstream West Coast beats, less foreign than Martin, a salsa star whose track was also released in a Spanish version and combined rock guitar leads with the pop-Caribbean rhythms of his previous hits, and the Spanish singers and composers of “La Macarena,” who retained the rhythms and *palmas* of flamenco rumba.

As Chicano rap evolved into its own genre, the lyrics became more consistently directed at in-group listeners but most of the beats remained indistinguishable from other West Coast gangsta rap. The message was simultaneously an assertion of Chicano identity and an assertion that this identity should be recognized alongside African American identity as representing local urban culture. As Frost told Brian Cross:

[F]rom what people hear off these NWA, Eazy E records they think right away that’s the way South Central is, but in reality it’s two races tryin’ to live together. I mean, first of all Los Angeles is predominantly Hispanic, so for them not to have Latin rappers, or not to have rappers kicking Spanish flavors, it doesn’t make sense... The Maravillas and the White Fences and the [Chicano] gangs in LA have been out way before the Crips and

⁶⁴⁰ Wald, *Narcocorrido*, 152.

Bloods.⁶⁴¹

This discourse, whereby Chicano rap culture is grounded in a local gang heritage that predates the more famous African American gangs, is common in discussions of Chicano rap history and, like the grounding of Chicano geographical heritage in the conquered land of Aztlán, is a declaration of local roots, of being from “here.” Like New Mexico music, Chicano rap represents an audience that perceives itself as stable and rooted in local history, and its spoken and musical languages reflect this: *caló* and oldies may be signifiers of a non-mainstream, non-Anglo identity, but it is not a transitional, immigrant identity, and in that sense it is not a mixed or bicultural identity.

Particular performances, like particular conversations or particular individuals, always come out of heterogeneous backgrounds and are always multifaceted and multivalent—they are created in a particular place and moment, through a particular sequence of events, and always represent the duality of at least two different people, each with particular quirks and affinities. Genres, languages, and groups, by contrast, are always by definition unitary—they are what is shared, what is similar, defined by the tactical disregard, erasure, or denial of particularities. Each of the four songs explored in this chapter was framed as a display of cultural duality and bilingual skill, and simultaneously as a declaration of group affinity. All four can be described as representing Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American, Chicano, or Mexican culture in Los Angeles, as drawing on two languages, as exemplifying a clash, overlap, or meeting of cultures, as “two cultures, two languages, a single voice.” But each is also a particular performance, accessing and performing its mix of disparate sources in a particular way, and the ways in which the songs differ are arguably more significant than what they share.

⁶⁴¹ Cross, *It's Not About a Salary*, 193.

One attribute shared by all four performances is that in linguistic terms they are outliers, similarly “spectacular,” to use Roxy Harris’s term, in their mix of Spanish and English. Each identifies and frames its mix differently: “La Raza” identifies it as *caló*, framed as the language of the *raza*, which will not be understood by “some of you,” the outsiders. “Ya Estuvo” identifies it as an alternation of two separate languages, Spanish and English, framed simultaneously as an in-group performance for “all the Latinos in the house” and as a display for Will, Frost’s African American buddy, of Latino bilingualism. “Al Estilo Mexicano” frames it as the way Mexicans talk with one another in Los Angeles and interact at local, Mexican-themed parties. “El Nuevo Sonido” identifies it as a new style, the sound of a modern urban generation that feels equally at home with ranchera and hip-hop. One can ignore those differences in favor of a discourse of shared bilingualism, lumping all four together as typical of Latino, Chicano, or Mexican American speech, but although that fifth frame is common in academic discussions of Latino culture (and is how “La Raza” in particular has tended to be framed in such discussions), in terms of the broader Chicano, Mexican, or Latino rap scenes the explicit foregrounding of bilingualism makes all four distinctly atypical—despite assiduous searching, I have been able to come up with barely a half-dozen comparable performances out of thousands of rap releases.⁶⁴²

The fact that these performances are atypical, and that each is atypical in its own way, suggests that any generalized discourse of bilingualism, and in particular of Latino, Chicano, or Mexican American bilingualism, should be treated with care. Both Frost and Jae-P, in combination with their producers, were

⁶⁴² There is nothing resembling a full survey of the Chicano or Mexican American rap scene, but I asked fans, programmers, and performers for help finding bilingual rap performances, and the results have been notably meager.

looking for ways to reach a large audience that they thought of as bilingual, and both were heard by plenty of listeners who had solid communicative skills in both Spanish and English and, at least in Jae-P's case, regularly listened to songs in both languages. That neither of them chose to perform songs that included similar language-mixing on later releases does not mean bilingual listeners were lacking, or even that these particular songs failed to please a lot of people—"La Raza" was a major hit, and "Al Estilo Mexicano" has garnered well over half a million Youtube views, which is way below Frost's or Akwid's numbers, but hardly negligible. However, the extent to which the four songs differ suggests the slippage between broad "third space" formulations and attempts to situate that third space as somewhere specific. Just because a large group of people has access to two systems and many group members appreciate having access to both and consider that a defining attribute of their group, that does not mean they access those systems in the same way or to the same degree, or recognize someone else's way of mixing the two systems as a third, shared system. They may, but it is equally possible for Frost's bilingual fans to hear Jae-P's bilingualism as typical of a bunch of *mojados*, *paisas*, or *nacos*—hick newcomers who listen to stupid clown music—and for Jae-P's bilingual fans to hear Frost's bilingualism as the language of *cholos* or *pochos*, degenerate gangbangers who can't speak proper Spanish. It is also possible for people to recognize a song as displaying a command of two language systems or a familiarity with two musical styles that is similar to their own, and even to enjoy that mix, without wanting to hear the two languages or styles mixed on a regular basis. The pleasure and power of having access to two systems of language, music, or culture is to a great extent the pleasure and power of mobility and choice, of being able to be one person in one situation and another in another. The fact that one sometimes feels that no place is

really one's own, that one is *ni de aquí ni de allá*, does not mean one wants to be settled in a new, third homeland in the middle of the Rio Grande.

Conclusion

This study has used the frame of three musical genres—New Mexico music, Chicano rap, and banda rap—to explore some varied experiences and formulations of Hispanic, Mexican, or Chicano identity as they relate to language and music in particular regions and contexts over particular periods of time. These genres have received relatively little scholarly attention and might be worth exploring simply for that reason, but I was also interested in the idea that juxtaposing them might provide a way of exploring broader issues—in particular by forcing myself and my readers to query and broaden our existing conceptions of identity in general and of Southwestern Latino identities in particular.

The United States Census Bureau projects that by the middle of this century a third of the country's population will be Latino.⁶⁴³ This study has been, in part, a meditation on what that might mean and how aspects of that demographic shift might be reflected in music. At the same time, it is an attempt to suggest how wary we should be of the formulations underlying that census projection. The way US Latino identity is currently understood has been affected by four decades of unprecedented immigration from Latin America, and in particular from Mexico. In 1960 the US census counted 575,902 residents who had been born in Mexico, fewer than from Italy, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, Poland, or the Soviet Union, and it was the only non-European country among the top ten sending nations. By 1970 a new wave of Mexican immigration had begun and that number was up to about 770,000, and over the next forty years Mexican and Latin American immigration soared, until by 2010 the Mexican-born population of the

⁶⁴³ 2014 National Population Projections, table 11: Percent Distribution of the Projected Population by Hispanic Origin and Race for the United States: 2015 to 2060. At

US was nearing twelve million (almost six times as large as the population from China, the next most prolific sending nation), the top ten sending nations included five Latin American and five Asian countries, and the total Latino immigrant population was twenty-one million.⁶⁴⁴

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the census bureau estimated that 55 percent of Latino adults in the United States were foreign-born, but immigration rates have declined precipitously since 2008 and by 2012 there were as many Mexican nationals moving from the US to Mexico (some voluntarily and some in a wave of deportations) as were coming north.⁶⁴⁵ Even before 2008, there were roughly as many children being born to Mexican immigrants in the US as were arriving from Mexico,⁶⁴⁶ and projections about the future Mexican American population—and about the US Latino population in general—assume that most growth will be internal rather than from immigration.

A potentially major flaw in all of those projections is that they assume current conceptions of Mexican (or Mexican American) and Latino will remain fairly stable into the future, whereas they are not even stable in the present. In 2010 more than a quarter of the newlyweds who identified as Hispanic in the census—and more than a third of those born in the US—married people who identified as non-Hispanic, and of all the newly married couples tabulated as racially or ethnically mixed, over forty percent were Hispanics marrying non-

<http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014/summarytables.html>, accessed 2/2/2015.

⁶⁴⁴ Elizabeth M. Grieco et al., “The Size, Place of Birth, and Geographic Distribution of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1960 to 2010,” U.S. Census Bureau Population Division Working Paper No. 96, 2012, 33.

⁶⁴⁵ Jeffrey Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less,” Pew Hispanic Center report, 23 Apr 2012, 19.

⁶⁴⁶ “The Mexican-American Boom: Births Overtake Immigration,” Pew Hispanic Center report, 14 Jul 2011.

Hispanic whites.⁶⁴⁷ Considering how many US Hispanics currently identify their race as white, it seems likely that in some of those couples the partners were not of notably different backgrounds, but simply identified differently, and it is an open question whether their children will identify as Hispanic or even as part-Hispanic. A larger question is what any variant of those identifications will mean at mid-century. Close analysis of current census responses shows that people identify differently depending on their age, their previous nationalities, their economic situations, and where in the US they currently live.⁶⁴⁸ They presumably also identify differently depending on how their friends identify, how various identifications are viewed in the broader culture, and their perceptions of how such identifications are viewed. Ethnic identifications and the reasons for making particular identifications are far from uniform and change as attitudes to race and ethnicity evolve. The meaning of *Latino*, and of the many identities currently grouped as Latino, will undoubtedly change as the Latino population (however it may be defined) of the United States becomes proportionately larger and more commonly distanced from a personal or familial experience of immigration.

Two of the musical genres explored in this study, New Mexico music and Chicano rap, have existed in roughly their present forms for fifty and twenty-five years respectively and suggest two ways in which consciousness of and pride in a localized heritage have been expressed and maintained through music: New Mexico music preserves Spanish-language songs, mostly adapted from mid-twentieth-century Mexican ranchera hits, played in a regionally specific way and understood as unique to a particular place and history rooted in the earliest Hispanic settlements in the United States. Chicano rap mixes elements of Spanish

⁶⁴⁷ Taylor, Paul, et al., "The Rise of Intermarriage," Pew Hispanic Center report, 16 Feb 2012.

and caló in a modern urban style, at times with music that references recordings and styles that were popular with an earlier Mexican American generation in the Southwest, and likewise marks a particular local identity. Banda rap was an attempt to create a music that referenced a new transnational identity, equally comfortable with urban modernity and Mexican traditions, fluent in Spanish, and maintaining ongoing cultural links to Mexico. It did not catch on, perhaps because of internal limitations, perhaps because the time was not right, but suggests another possible model.

There are of course many other Latino musical styles performed and heard in the United States, and none of the three discussed in this work is typical of what scholars and journalists tend to label “Latin music,” nor have any of them had a significant impact on the mainstream US Latin music scene. The US Latin music industry, by and large, continues to be dominated by producers and programmers from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and South America, and although Mexican consumers are by far the largest Latino group in the United States, Mexican music has rarely appealed to the Caribbean-rooted, East Coast audience and, popular as it is, continues to be viewed in that sense as a niche market. Although Regional Mexican or ranchera music is by far the largest segment of the US Latin market (it consistently accounts for over half of all Latin music sales, while tropical or Caribbean styles consistently account for less than fifteen percent), it is commonly positioned both by scholars and by marketers aiming beyond a limited Mexican American consumer base as secondary to tropical and romantic pop styles.

The biggest stars on the national and international Latin scene tend to be figures like the romantic bachata singer Romeo Santos, born in New York to

⁶⁴⁸ Merarys Ríos, Fabián Romero, and Roberto Ramírez, “Race Reporting Among

Dominican and Puerto Rican parents, who as of 2015 has been at or near the top of the US Latin recording charts for two years and has also had number one hits in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. (As a member of the group Aventura, he even had one of the biggest Italian hits of the 2000s.) Santos sings in Spanish but regularly signals an Anglophone US connection, for example murmuring, “Hey, listen, I know what you like,” in the midst of an otherwise Spanish lyric⁶⁴⁹ and recording duets with English-language artists like Usher and Drake. There is a long history of US Latinos, whatever their backgrounds, signaling their heritage with tropical or other pan-Latin styles—for example, Carlos Santana with “Oye como va”—and although there are no statistics on the national heritage breakdown of his US Latino audience, Santos has sold out major stadiums in Los Angeles and Houston and it is possible that more young Mexican Americans are currently listening to him than to any single Mexican or Mexican American artist. By the same token, though, it is possible that still more are listening to Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, or other Anglo music, while continuing to regard Mexican styles as their particular Latino heritage flavor—whether they personally prefer that flavor or not.

The identification of language or music with a particular heritage, ethnicity, or culture is not just a matter of who listens to which music or speaks in a particular way. Some Mexican Americans in the 1960s heard Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass as playing Mexican music, though none of the musicians was Latino, and did not hear Question Mark and the Mysterians as playing a Mexican style, though all the band members were Chicano and their distinctive organ riffs were based on norteño accordion. Nor is recognition necessarily affection: I hear klezmer music as linked to my Central European Jewish heritage, but the sense

Hispanics: 2010,” Washington DC: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014.

that some people think I should therefore feel a special connection to it has if anything made me less receptive to the style, and it is easy to find Mexican Americans who dislike ranchera while remaining acutely conscious of its links to their ancestral past. Such aversions are sometimes framed as assimilationist self-hatred, but that framing reveals more about the framers' fears than about the self-image of the framed: an aversion to being grouped with one's elders or a particular group of peers or predecessors is not limited to minority populations, and no one calls young Anglos self-hating if they recoil from the sounds of Guy Lombardo, Pat Boone, the Carpenters, or Katy Perry.

Generalized concepts like Mexican or Latin music, and the yet more generalized concepts of Mexican or Latin culture, must be understood as constructs that have different meanings for different people and more meaning for some than others, not necessarily because those people have more or less pride in or affection for their roots. Personal, familial, or regional conceptions of identity and heritage do not always map well with national, globalized, or politically expedient formulations. Both New Mexico music and Chicano rap are framed by many of their fans as signaling a non-Anglo but also a non-Mexican or non-immigrant identification, and although that framing may be influenced by Anglo prejudices it also reflects a desire to preserve unique and potentially threatened local identities. Fans of New Mexico music and Chicano rap often express parallel appreciation for Anglo-identified styles—respectively country music and hip-hop—rather than for contemporary Mexican trends, much less pan-Latin trends, and that makes sense both musically and culturally. Both styles have derived much of their strength and staying power from being connected to specific local identities, and although it may make sense to frame their

⁶⁴⁹ Santos, Romeo. "Propuesta Indecente," Sony Music Latin, 2013.

combination of identifications and disidentifications as self-hatred, denial, or assimilation if one is trying to shape a pan-Chicano, pan-Mexican-American, or pan-Latino identity bloc, any broad affiliation obscures narrower affiliations and resistance to that process is as much an assertion of identity as a denial. In terms of geography, lifestyle, and several centuries of history, it may be more of a stretch for someone from Northern New Mexico to identify with an urban bachatero like Romeo Santos than with a traditionalist southwestern country singer like George Strait—which is not to say one choice makes more sense than the other, or that someone can't identify with both, or that either choice is independent of broader cultural and commercial trends and power relationships.

A central theme of this study is the analogy of music to speech, and although that analogy works better in some contexts than others, distinctive styles of music and speech often stir similar emotions and serve as similar markers of identity. Although Tiny Morrie's version of "La del mōno colorado" is sung in Spanish and Eddie Dimas's "El mosquito" is an electric guitar instrumental that outsiders might not recognize as Hispanic, the two serve similar functions at a New Mexico dance and are recognized by their core audience as equally strong markers of local Hispanic heritage. When Lil Rob samples the Moonglows' "Sincerely" and raps over it in a mix of African American street slang and border caló, his music and speech are heard by Chicanos in Southern California as referencing a single, familiar sense of place and identity. The components of each style have multiple sources and valences, as do the identities they are recognized as referencing, and the divergences and overlaps form a Venn diagram of musical styles, languages, and other cultural markers: Spanish is an area of overlap for New Mexico Hispanics, California Chicanos, and immigrants from all over Latin America; surf guitar for rural southwesterners of varied ethnic backgrounds;

African American soul harmonizing for inner city urbanites. The mixing of Spanish and non-Spanish elements is common to all US Latin styles—as well as to jazz, soul, rock, and other styles not typically marked as Latin—and a Venn diagram of Caribbean culture would similarly show Spanish-language and non-Spanish-language circles overlapping in the shared rhythms, instrumentation, and historical interchanges of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Martinique, Haiti, Trinidad, and New Orleans. The choice to group an Afro-Caribbean New Yorker, a European-looking rancher in New Mexico, and a Oaxaqueño migrant who crossed the border last month as members of a single ethnic group labeled *Latino* is tactical rather than descriptive—which in no way diminishes the legitimacy of the label, but has to be kept in mind if we want to understand those individuals’ differing histories and experiences and why some people classified as Latino are at times uncomfortable about being grouped with others, or with the grouping process.

In her study of minority writing in the Americas, Doris Sommer proposed “a rhetoric of particularism that will appreciate artful maneuvers for marking cultural distance,” suggesting we gain more by engaging with the individuality of minority writers and grappling with their differences from us than by treating their work as authorless texts to interpret as we please.⁶⁵⁰ That process necessarily requires us to be particularly attentive to maneuvers that upset or conflict with our own beliefs and preconceptions. I began this project with a fairly clear idea of what I would be studying: two styles, New Mexico music and banda rap, each combining a US pop style with Mexican ranchera and Spanish with English. By juxtaposing the two genres, I planned to compare a bicultural fusion representing the oldest Hispanic population in the Southwest with one representing the most recent wave of immigrants from Mexico, looking at how each blended binational

⁶⁵⁰ Sommer, *Proceed with Caution*, x.

musical and linguistic sources to appeal to its particular audience. The styles had received little academic attention and seemed to me worthy of deeper study as well as providing ways to explore both the depth of what I characterized as Chicano culture in the Southwest and the excitement of what I perceived as a moment when Latinos are becoming a majority in the region and increasingly recognizing their power by choosing to embrace and assert their cultural uniqueness rather than assimilating to an Anglo norm. That is, I began this project with some broad generalizations, largely determined by my own interests and understanding of music, language, and social and political change.

As I researched the styles, those generalizations came to seem less like guidelines and more like impediments. Although I heard New Mexico music as a fusion of ranchera and rock 'n' roll, no one I met in New Mexico thought of it in those terms. The dual sources I perceived were easy to trace, but musicians, producers, and audience members all framed the music as traditional and local, and the more attentive I was to their understanding, the less comfortable I became with my own. As for banda rap, I had framed it as the sound of a vibrant new generation of Mexican-identified angelenos—exactly the way it was framed by its marketers—but as a trend or genre it had come and gone in a little over a year and to maintain my frame I would have had to ignore its failure to be embraced by the audience it purported to represent. Meanwhile, Chicano rap, which I had planned to mention in passing but did not fit my model of a ranchera fusion, became increasingly hard to ignore as a counterpart to banda rap that had succeeded in establishing itself with a large population of both multi-generational Californians and more recent arrivals.

The addition of Chicano rap warped my original frames of bimusicality and bilingualism. The style involves no ranchera, hardly any music that is

recognizably linked to Mexico, and very little music that sounds in any way “Latin,” nor does it require any fluency in grammatical Spanish either to perform or to understand the lyrics. Nonetheless, in cultural terms it shares some links with New Mexico music that banda rap does not—Tita Chávez, who owns the Que Pasa record store in Taos, said her teenage customers tend to buy both Chicano rap and New Mexico music, specifically mentioning Lil Rob and Al Hurricane as favorites, and when I asked about Akwid, said they had sold a little when they first appeared but nothing special, nor could she sell much current Mexican music.

The more I talked with people in New Mexico and Los Angeles, read the academic literature on sociolinguistics, bilingualism, and code-switching, and thought about how the musical and spoken languages I was hearing overlapped and interacted, the less happy I was with my original generalizations about the intersections of identity with speech and music. In particular I began to question what I might mean by *bilingual* and became increasingly convinced that, whatever the word might mean, it has to be understood in terms of how people think of their speech rather than by any abstract process of studying or measuring the speech itself. In objective structural terms, it is a simple fact that New Mexico music and banda rap are sung and rapped primarily in Spanish whereas Chicano rap is performed in a dialect of English, but in subjective, cultural terms it began to seem more meaningful that New Mexico music and Chicano rap both provide functionally Anglophone listeners with ways of remaining intimately connected to a Spanish-speaking heritage, while the Spanish of banda rap excludes them. One could argue that someone who sings “La del moño colorado” while thinking he is singing about a colored demon is demonstrating a lack of Spanish comprehension, or that someone whose idea of speaking some Spanish is “Órale vatos in the volo”

is not speaking Spanish at all, but in cultural terms both are signaling not only familiarity with Spanish, but native familiarity with particular forms of Spanish as their personal language.

From a different perspective one might argue that people who feel linked to their linguistic heritage by the Spanish-language lyric of “La del moño colorado” should feel similarly linked by the lyrics of current Mexican ranchera, Akwid’s rap recordings, or a banda or bachata hit—and there may be people who react similarly and personally to all those styles—but to many New Mexicans the first is intimately familiar and the others are foreign-sounding and incomprehensible. The mapping of official language divisions with felt cultural affinities is an abstraction that often fails to match individual realities: my mother heard educated French or Danish speech as the familiar expressive styles of fellow Europeans—people who talked in ways she could only intermittently understand but were otherwise like her—but heard the drawl of country music and the shout of gangsta rap as the unpleasant sounds of incomprehensible foreign cultures.

When I first arrived in Albuquerque I was startled to see local fans crowd the dance floor for New Mexico bands playing a mix of rancheras, cumbias, rock, country, and even funk, but leave when a nortño band came on and be replaced by a non-overlapping crowd of dancing teenagers—but the event’s organizer explained that this response was normal and he had never found a way to bridge the musical divide between New Mexico and Mexican styles. In such situations broad language designations or music genre categories do not help us understand people’s choices, affinities, and understandings, nor is it necessarily helpful to apply terms like immigrant, native, monolingual or bilingual. Most of the teenagers dancing to nortño were born in the US and I have no reason to think they spoke more Spanish than the older New Mexicans who preferred country and

rock 'n' roll. I would guess that if an Anglo electronica deejay had taken charge of the program, the young norteño fans would have been likelier to stay on the floor than the old New Mexico music dancers. My suppositions might be proved wrong in both cases, but that is my point—cultural affiliations are endlessly complicated and no matter how deep one's study or understanding of prior situations, one is not necessarily equipped to understand or judge an unfamiliar situation. Indeed, the more confident one becomes of one's ability to generalize from past experience, the likelier one may be to miss the particularities of a new situation.

A necessary corollary to engaging with the particularism and individuality of others and grappling with the ways in which they mark their cultural distance from us is engaging with our own lack of particularism and individuality, the extent to which each of us is embedded in shared systems that may seem universally applicable because they are so familiar. As the saying goes, "We don't know who discovered water but we can be pretty sure it wasn't a fish."⁶⁵¹ One of the benefits of experiencing other cultures is that they give us new insight into our own—a fish quickly notes the lack of water if it has the misfortune to be out of it—but we often treat what startles or troubles us in a foreign situation as an attribute of the new environment rather than of our old one. That is, understanding or adjusting to it seems to involve the recognition and acceptance of something new, not abandoning or rejecting something acquired in our previous experience. But as the music historian Charles Rosen said of the difficulty many classical concert listeners have with modernism, "The appreciation of a new style is as much an effort of renunciation as of acceptance."⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹ Often ascribed to Marshall McLuhan, but of earlier and uncertain provenance, <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/12/23/water-fish>.

⁶⁵² Rosen, Charles, *Critical Entertainments*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001, 285.

Useful as they may be, conceptual models like *Spanish*, *bilingual*, and *Latino* (or *English*, *monolingual*, and *Anglo*) are ways of fitting other people's behavior into our preconceived categories. In this study I have tried to use those terms sensibly, meaning both that I have tried to use them in ways that are familiar and helpful to readers and respectful to the people and styles I am writing about, and that I have tried to remain sensible to their inherent biases and limitations. As the varieties of people currently grouped as Latino make up an ever-larger proportion of the US population, it will inevitably become less useful to think of them as a single group and the term *Latino* may cease to have much meaning. Neighboring ranchers named Smith and González in New Mexico share many common attributes and experiences, though they may have different ancestral histories; so do phenotypically African New Yorkers with those same surnames, and Native Americans with those surnames. It is currently common to group the people named González within a single ethnic group labeled *Latino* and to group the people named Smith in three different ethnic categories. Similarly, in the present-day United States the term *immigrant* conjures up a picture in many people's minds that fits the phenotype of people whose ancestors have been in the Southwest for millennia—whether the reaction to that stereotype is positive, negative, or neutral—but not someone who arrived yesterday from Sweden. Some readers may be troubled by my choice of examples, and that is appropriate: they have power for me because they reference familiar social constructs in my own culture and should be regarded with skepticism for that reason. Our conceptual models are necessarily limited by our background and experiences, and while I am suggesting some ways in which I have tried to question or challenge my preconceptions, I am not placing myself outside the discussion. As Joseph Schloss writes, “From a purely logical standpoint, I cannot assess my own blind spots—if

I could, they wouldn't be blind spots."⁶⁵³

In this study I have tried to define three styles of music and explore their various evolutions, and in the process I have suggested some ways in which those evolutions match broader patterns. It seems to me that New Mexico music and Chicano rap derive much of their appeal and endurance from having evolved organically in local communities that existed before the musical styles were named or defined as genres, and were shaped by performers interacting with local audiences and finding ways to please and communicate with those audiences. It seems to me significant that each of those audiences already had a localized group identity rooted in a particular history and culture in a particular place. By contrast, banda rap seems to me to have been unsuccessful in large part because it was invented by record producers and artists to match a theoretical conception of an audience that would hear a particular fusion of styles as representing a modern transnational identity, and that audience did not in fact exist in the way the producers and artists conceived it or did not recognize that particular fusion in the way the producers and artists had hoped.

The ways I frame these musical and cultural processes is inevitably affected by my own process. I was excited by banda rap when it appeared in 2003 because I had predicted a fusion of corridos with gangsta rap, and I began this project intending to frame the style as a culturally significant fusion expressing an important modern viewpoint. When I decided the story of its failure to find an audience was at least as significant as the story of its brief success, that mirrored my own disappointment, and the way I frame the history may to a great extent be a way of explaining why I guessed wrong. As I was completing this study, I tested some of my conclusions on Jack Landrón, an Afro-Puerto Rican friend who has

⁶⁵³ Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*. Middletown, CT:

been engaged in music for over fifty years, and although he was unfamiliar with banda rap, he dismissed my analysis of how and why it failed as over-intellectualized and fundamentally wrong: “It didn’t catch on because the right person didn’t have the right hit,” he said. “That’s the reason any style catches on: someone makes a record that people like. This time that just didn’t happen.”

I think Landrón was oversimplifying and continue to believe that Akwid and Jae-P did make records people liked and the style failed to develop as a genre because its intended constituency did not embrace it as representative of their group identity. But we were arguing about different conceptual models, not about facts, and I could easily reframe my study according to Landrón’s model: without Al Hurricane’s hits, New Mexico music would certainly have developed differently and might never have been conceived as a distinct genre; and although there would undoubtedly have been Chicano rappers without Kid Frost or the group of teenage friends that included Mellow Man Ace, Sen Dog, and B-Real, or the cinematic boost of *Colors*, or all of those factors converging around 1990, Chicano rap might not have become established as a separate genre with its own distinct audience. Conversely, there is no way to say what might have happened if someone had mixed rap and ranchera and gotten bigger hits or inspired a different, larger wave of followers or captured the imagination not only of some Mexican Americans in the Southwest, but of East Coast caribeños. I can come up with solidly researched and argued explanations of why that didn’t happen and isn’t likely to happen, but if it happened tomorrow I could come up with equally solid explanations of the new situation.

Theories and models are ways of organizing and understanding information for particular purposes, and are valid to the extent they fit the facts and useful to

the extent they suit those purposes. I have two main purposes in this study: first, to explore histories of musical genre formation as a way of exploring how people frame their relationships to societal groupings, and in particular how people who are often grouped together as Chicanos, Hispanics, or Mexican Americans have employed music and language to suggest their differences within or in opposition to those groupings. And second, to situate myself within contemporary academic discourse on the interactions of identity and culture, particularly as seen through the frames of ethnomusicology and sociolinguistics.

It is a cliché that humans are pattern-making animals, and a ruling tendency of academia, at least since the mid-twentieth century, has been to celebrate pattern-making over—and sometimes at the expense of—observation. In the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin devoted most of his life to collecting, describing, and cataloguing tens of thousands of beetles, birds, reptiles, and mammals, and proudly claimed to have “worked on true Baconian principles, and without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale.”⁶⁵⁴ That quote is startling to many of us today because Darwin is best remembered for the theory he developed to explain patterns he perceived in his specimens, and it is easy to find writers who argue that his claim was false and his theorizing preceded and guided his collecting.⁶⁵⁵ Our surprise and the counterclaims reflect a sea-change in Western Academic culture: it is hard to imagine a modern academic claiming to have blindly amassed a collection of facts unguided by theoretical considerations, because that is no longer regarded as a worthy aim.

The analogy to Darwin is particularly relevant here, because my histories of

⁶⁵⁴ Darwin, Charles. *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, appendix to Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003, 438.

⁶⁵⁵ E.g., Sintonen, Matti. “Conceptual Change in Medicine and the Life Sciences,” in Wenceslao J. González, ed., *Conceptual Revolutions: From Cognitive Science to Medicine*. Oleiros, Spain: Netbiblo, 2011, 148.

New Mexico music, Chicano rap, and banda rap are all cast in Darwinian terms: I trace the styles as processes of evolution by natural selection, with variations constantly appearing and either being passed on or not, due to their fitness to an immediate cultural habitat—and in a circular process, that is also how I understand the various cultural habitats. This application of evolutionary theory seems appropriate to me and loose enough to allow for any new data or theories to be woven into its fabric. But I am aware that it is not the way everyone thinks or has thought in the past, and the fact that I find it universally applicable may just be another way of saying I'm a particular species of fish and it is my familiar water.

Granting for the moment that we are swimming together, the Darwinian analogy works only up to a point. I believe in the importance of testing and retesting any theory by amassing collections of facts on something resembling a wholesale scale, and that if a theory turns out not to match the facts it should be tweaked or abandoned. In both New Mexico and Los Angeles I tried to hear, see, and learn as much as I could, guided as much as possible by the perceptions of people within the worlds I was studying rather than by my own tastes and inclinations. I have not mentioned a song that I did not hear, and if what I heard did not match my expectations or other people's descriptions, I tried to explore those inconsistencies. Likewise, when someone said something that did not fit my experience, I tried to use this as a spur to expand my study rather than treating it as an irrelevant outlier. All of that seems to me in keeping with Darwinian practice, but I am aware that musical performances, languages, cultural habits, and ethnic identities are not beetles and finches. They are human behaviors and constructs, as is the process of studying, classifying, and writing about them, and in any exploration of contemporary US culture I am perforce a participant

observer, and also a participant observed—in the course of my research I was often reminded that I was being studied as well as studying, and classified as well as classifying.

In the early 1970s William Labov warned of the *observer's paradox* in ethnographic work, the difficulty of knowing how people behave when they are not being studied, since the only way to obtain data is by studying them.⁶⁵⁶ Labov believed he could transcend or at least minimize this problem by approaching a question from multiple directions, but later scholars have often made an analogy of his paradox to Werner Heisenberg's *uncertainty principle*, suggesting that observation always affects what is observed and any static description of an active process necessarily distorts it.⁶⁵⁷ Identities, languages, and musical styles are not discrete objects; they are relationships and processes, and as such can only be observed when they are in motion and can only be defined in terms of relationships and reactions to other processes, which are always subject to the observer's own relationships and reactions. Other writers have noted that even if one could be sure that one was not affecting an observed process or relationship, one's description of it would nonetheless be subjective.⁶⁵⁸

Such analyses are typically presented as cautionary warnings, suggesting that great care must be taken in ethnographic research and scholars must maintain a constant awareness of potential researcher bias. However, they also serve to situate ethnography within a discourse of contemporary "hard sciences," framing

⁶⁵⁶ Labov, William, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972, 209.

⁶⁵⁷ E.g. Meyerhoff, Miriam, *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011, 42: "The observer's paradox makes the same kind of generalization about studying language that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle makes about studying particles. That is, we cannot observe something without changing it.... [P]articles do not exist independently as *things*, they exist as sets of *relationships*. Sociolinguists, too, are actually studying sets of relationships."

the ethnographer as someone who is studying human interactions much as other scientists study the interactions of bird populations or subatomic particles, with the implication that if our methods are sufficiently rigorous we can discover laws that govern language or other human interactions in much the same way Newton or Einstein discovered laws governing the properties of matter and energy. The problem with this logic is that concepts like language, music, and identity are not physical properties, they are social constructs and groupings, defined for particular purposes and valid only to the extent we find them useful. Defining Spanish and English as discrete language systems is useful if one has a classroom of people who agree they speak English and one wants to equip them with the tools to communicate with a different group of people who agree that they speak Spanish. In reality, anyone walking out of a language class into a world of native speakers is confronted with the fact that the process of communication among those speakers does not match the model taught in the class—but the idealized approximation taught in the class can serve as a useful bridge to communication with people whose infinitely varied range of speech styles falls within the broad category defined as Spanish. (And, with somewhat less specificity, to understand much of the speech categorized as Portuguese, Catalan, or Italian.) Defining a style of music is similarly useful if we want to teach people the range of techniques they will need in order to play with a particular set of musicians, or if we want to signal to another musician's audience that our music is similar to hers, or if we want to signal to a group of people that the range of music we will play matches a range of music they know and enjoy. Defining a national, ethnic, or racial group is likewise useful for particular purposes, whether of inclusion or

⁶⁵⁸ E.g., Kretschmar, William A., *The Linguistics of Speech*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009, 236-7, who applies ideas from Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. New York: Macmillan, 1983.

exclusion.

There is clear instrumental value in defining and refining such concepts, but my aim in this study was to take the opposite tack, querying the stability of categories by exploring their evolution as tactical constructs of particular people in particular places and times for particular purposes, and exploring those processes. As the son of two biochemists I am inclined to think of my approach as broadly scientific, following the formulation of science as an accumulation of falsifiable beliefs, “an unending search for explanations in which the questioning process prevails and all answers are temporary—valid but only provisionally, pending a successful challenge by new findings.”⁶⁵⁹ In this formulation the intended product of rigorous research should not be increasing certainty, but on the contrary successively finer and increasing degrees of uncertainty—not in the Heisenberg sense, which might better be termed “indeterminability,” but in the sense Claude Shannon used the word in framing the core concept of modern information theory: “Information is closely associated with uncertainty.”⁶⁶⁰ Although seemingly paradoxical, this is simply a striking way of phrasing a common experience: any process of communication involves feedback loops of reinforcements and surprises, reassurance and information. We gain comfort and confidence from the reinforcements, but the warm comradeship of “I knew you

⁶⁵⁹ Dean, Cornelia, *Am I Making Myself Clear? A Scientist's Guide to Talking to the Public*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2009, 179. This quotation was found by searching the phrase “all answers are temporary” in Google Books, and is presented as a typical framing of the scientific process for non-scientists.

⁶⁶⁰ Shannon, Claude E., “Communication Theory—Exposition of Fundamentals,” *Transactions of the IRE Professional Group on Information Theory*, 1(1), Feb 1953, 44. He followed this key phrase with an explanation that relates directly to sociolinguistics: “The information I obtain when you say something to me corresponds to the amount of uncertainty I had, previous to your speaking, of what you were going to say. If I was certain of what you were going to say, I obtained no information by your saying it.” It is standard for physicists explaining Heisenberg’s principle to note that “uncertainty” was a poor choice of terminology and it would be better framed as “indeterminacy” or “indeterminability” (e.g. Lindley, David, *Uncertainty: Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, and the Struggle for the Soul of Science*. New York: Doubleday, 2007, 150).

were going to say that,” of dancers moving in synchrony, or of friends laughing at the same moment includes the understanding that other responses, movements, or reactions are possible and would change our perception of the interchange.

Feelings of group identity involve an accumulation of interchanges in which our expectations are met or fail to be met—both the expectations that particular people will react like us and the expectations that others will not—and their reactions constantly reshape our expectations, our reactions, and our sense of who is in our groups, who is “like us,” and who is not.

We often have to arrest or ignore the snowballing build-up of uncertainties for instrumental reasons: to teach a Spanish language class, we have to tactically accept a settled, simplified construct as Spanish speech; to tabulate census categories or form coalitions we have to tactically pretend that people’s complicated and shifting formulations of identity can be stabilized and codified; simply to talk with each other we have to tactically assume that we mean the same things when we use certain words and phrases and understand what each other means—though we regularly signify our awareness of potential misunderstandings by peppering our conversations with variations of “You know what I mean?” To recognize these tactics as tactics is not to deny their validity, and I have used all of them in the course of this study—often unconsciously and undoubtedly in some instances misleadingly—but my central aim was to query that process, to pose questions and come up with provisional answers that suggest further questions, and thereby to expand and improve the range of my own and my readers’ uncertainties. After four years of immersion in this project, I know far more about New Mexico music, Chicano rap, banda rap, hip-hop, ranchera, and the academic disciplines of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and sociolinguistics than when I began, but also am considerably less sure about some

opinions I held at the outset and some things I thought I knew, and those changes are complementary and reciprocal.

Reading over what I have written, I am struck by questions I missed during the research and writing. New Mexico music and Chicano rap share a conception of “oldies,” of songs from the late 1950s and 1960s that remain immediately familiar and are linked to localized, identity-based formulations of heritage. The period when those songs first became popular overlapped the period when modern concepts of Chicano and Latino identity were taking shape, influenced by the African American civil rights movement. It was a period when formulations of ethnicity that had been used to limit people’s opportunities were being reconfigured as sources of unity and pride, and also a period when the majority of Mexican Americans or Chicanos had been born in the United States, many of them to parents, grandparents, and earlier ancestors who were born here. So now I wonder: Is that temporal correlation relevant? Does that music have particular power as a marker of ethnic heritage and culture because it is associated with a period when people were formulating new relationships to ethnic identity? Is it significant that in Los Angeles the most popular oldies were almost all recorded by African American artists? Is it conversely significant that the most popular oldies in New Mexico were mostly recorded by Chicano or white Anglo artists, or is that simply due to how few African Americans were in New Mexico? Do fifty-year-old US pop hits have particular appeal for people whose families were already in the US in that period because they serve to mark those people as locally rooted and distinguish them from more recent immigrants?

I began this project as an extension of my earlier research on Mexican and Mexican immigrant culture, and expected it to suggest some ways in which the southwestern United States is being changed by Mexican and Latino immigration,

and some of the broader cultural shifts and reimaginings of a new era of globalization and interconnectedness. As the son of first- and second-generation immigrants to the United States, an anti-Zionist Jew, and a dual national, I tend to celebrate the collapse, erasure, or circumvention of national boundaries and see Mexican and Latino immigration as part of a broad shift that is reshaping the United States and the world. I read Latino writers quoting Walt Whitman's declaration, "I contain multitudes," and claiming it as a shared credo for a multicultural America,⁶⁶¹ and that fits my own inclinations. But while Whitman wrote of "growing among black folks as among white, Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff," and "groups of newly-come immigrants," he also described himself as "born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same."⁶⁶² Over the course of my research I was repeatedly struck by strong strains of nativism not only among New Mexico Hispanics but among Southern California Chicanos and even among recent immigrants. Whether heritage and tradition were traced to Aztec forebears or Spanish conquistadors, to Pachucos, Chicanos, or simply to a particular town or block, people regularly expressed stronger identifications with local roots than with any sense of transnational mobility or connection. Jae-P rapped "No soy de aquí ni soy de allá," but also about listening to local radio stations, dressing in local street styles, and throwing a "West Coast Party"—and though he added that the party was "Al Estilo Mexicano," he clearly and consistently situates himself north of the border and specifically in South Central Los Angeles.

The "immigrant dream" of legend is not to remain an immigrant. Jae-P

⁶⁶¹ E.g., Julia Alvarez in Bridget A. Kevane and Juanita Heredia, eds., *Latina Self-portraits: Interviews with Contemporary Women Writers*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2000, 22; Ilan Stavans in Stavans and Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Latino Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2014, 43.

⁶⁶² Whitman, Walt, "Song of Myself," 1892 version.

expressed a feeling of belonging neither here nor there, but added, “my son will be president of this fucking country,” and when I look at his picture and then at pictures of congressman Ted Cruz and governor Jeb Bush’s Mexican wife and Mexican-American children, I can imagine that dream coming true but wonder whether the son will identify as Mexican, Chicano, Latino, or simply as a white American. However he identifies—and however many different ways he identifies in various contexts—I wonder whether he will speak Spanish and what kind of music he will listen to, and what the language and the music will sound like, and what either will mean to him. And I wonder whether my musings will make much sense to him or anyone in another thirty years, or whether by then the formulations of the early twenty-first century will seem so archaic as to be virtually unrecognizable.

The mass immigration of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has already changed the United States and will undoubtedly continue to change it. But the same was true of the previous great wave of immigration at the turn of the previous century and the ripples of that wave are still far from uniform: some groups of immigrants assimilated more thoroughly than others, some conceptions of mainstream norms shifted, and some immigrant imports continue to be marked as foreign or ethnic (pizza, bagels) while others do not (frankfurters, cole slaw). That wave of immigrants brought accordions, brass bands, and polkas to both the United States and Mexico, and if we are studying the complexities of assimilation and musical identities it is interesting to note that Mexican polkas, accordions, and brass bands are now understood in the Southwest as markers of Mexican identity while Lawrence Welk’s polkas and accordions and John Philip Sousa’s brass arrangements are emblematic of the most resolutely mainstream, white,

middle-American identity.⁶⁶³

Mexico shares a two thousand mile border with the United States and a history and prehistory extending back for millennia before that border existed. The shared history includes overlapping indigenous cultures followed by overlapping waves of conquest and immigration, and can be read and interpreted in myriad ways. There is no figure in American mythology more redolent of atavistic whiteness than the cowboy, whose language is distinguished by its many borrowings from Spanish and whose songs are often strummed in Mexican rhythms. In the same mythology the opposing character, representing strange otherness, is the savage Indian, whose role is replayed daily in scare stories about murderous, brown-skinned drug traffickers swarming the border region—while in popular Mexican corridos those traffickers are refigured on the model of Hollywood gangster films and narco-themed DVDs consistently cast European-featured actors in the leading roles. The Mexican music industry is now largely based in Los Angeles, and that geographical shift is affecting Mexican music on both sides of the border and producing new links across the border. If it continues to account for the majority of Latin music sales in the US, it may increasingly affect the concept of “Latin music”—or, conversely, may become a separate market, marked as Mexican rather than Latin. Spanish may become more common in the speech of the US as Latinos become a larger share of the population or may become less significant as a marker of Latino identity as that

⁶⁶³ Though Sousa and Welk are typically positioned as emblematic of a white mainstream, both could easily be repositioned as exemplars of immigrant and ethnic pride. Sousa’s mother was from Bavaria and his father was born in Spain to parents from Portugal. His music more obviously references his German than his Latin heritage, but he is occasionally included in lists of prominent Hispanic Americans and John Storm Roberts (*Latin Tinge*, 32) describes his march “New Mexico” as including “Indian, military and Mexican elements.” Welk’s parents were German immigrants and his television show was popular across all ethnic and racial lines and often highlighted non-Anglo music: prominently featured band members included the Tejano clarinetist Henry Cuesta,

identity is increasingly linked to local roots—or it may become (or remain) a way for some people now grouped as Latino to mark particular identities within or outside a shifting Latino mainstream. This study was intended to broaden the understanding of some current musical styles and their cultural settings, and to question some familiar formulations. I have finished with more questions than I had at the outset, less certain of what I know or what the future holds, and I can imagine no more satisfying conclusion.

who had recorded with Beto Villa, and the Mexican-born singer Anacani, who frequently performed in Spanish.

Interviews

New Mexico:

Ernie Montoya, Chamita, 11 Oct 2012.

José Merlin Trujillo, Española, 11 and 15 Oct 2012.

Tita Chávez, Taos, 13 Oct 2012

Darren Cordova, Taos, 13 Oct 2012.

Nick Branchal and Norbie Martínez, Taos, 14 Oct 2012.

Jerry Dean, Albuquerque, 18 Oct 2012.

Herman Martínez, Albuquerque, 18 Oct 2012.

Al Hurricane, Albuquerque, 19 Oct 2012.

Louie Pérez, Albuquerque, 20 Oct 2012.

Kevin Otero, Albuquerque, 23 Oct 2012.

Henry Ortiz, Santa Fe, 25 Oct 2012.

Perfección de Chimayó (Henry Martínez, Sr.; Mathew Martínez; Janice Martínez), Chimayó, 26 Oct 2012.

Casey Gallegos, Española, 26 Oct 2012.

Rockin' Rick Padilla, Española, 26 Oct 2012.

Steve Leger, Las Vegas, 29 Oct 2012.

Diane Geoffroi Monroe, Las Vegas, 29 Oct 2012.

J.P. Baca, Las Vegas, 29 Oct 2012.

John Montoya and family, south of Las Vegas, 29 Oct 2012.

Al Hurricane Jr., Albuquerque, 31 Oct 2012.

Roberto Martínez, Albuquerque, 1 Nov 2012.

Michael Brasher, Albuquerque, 2 Nov 2012.

Sidro Garcia, by telephone, 9&10 Dec 2012.

Eva Nuanez, by telephone, 4 Sept 2013.

George Tomsco, by telephone, 14 Sept 2013.

Others interviewed, but not quoted in this work: Gene Chávez, DeZi

Cisneros, David García, Maria Garduña, Roberto Griego, Socorro Herrera, Archie Maestas, Ernie and Nité Márquez, A.J. and Taralynn Martínez, Kim McDonald, Carlos Medina, Roberto Mondragon, Val de la O, Dick Stewart, Eva Torrez, Daniel Vivian.

Los Angeles:

Lupillo and Jenni Rivera, Long Beach, Jun 2000.

Jessie Morales (telephone), Jul 2004.

Byron and Cecelia Brizuela, Los Angeles, 6 Apr 2005.

Jae-P (Juan Pablo Huerta), Los Angeles 22 Feb 2010.

Ernesto Fernández, Moreno Valley, 25 Feb 2010.

Akwid (Sergio and Francisco Gómez), Los Angeles, 20 Nov 2013.

Others consulted, but not formally interviewed: Little Willie G, Pepe Garza, George Prajin, Luís Rodríguez, Guillermo Santiso.

Selected Bibliography

Note: Works quoted twice or more are included here. Works quoted only once are fully cited in the relevant footnotes.

Ali, Lorraine. "Latin Class: Kid Frost and the Chicano Rap School," *Option: Music Alternatives* 53, 1993.

Alonso, Ana María. "Conforming Disconformity: 'Mestizaje,' Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 19:4, 2004.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Auslander, Philip, "Musical Personae," *The Drama Review* 50(1), 2006.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

Bernal-Enríquez, Ysaura, and Eduardo Hernández-Chávez, "La enseñanza del español en Nuevo México: ¿Revitalización o erradicación de la variedad chicana?," in Ana Roca and M. Cecilia Colombi, *Mi Lengua: Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2003.

Berrios, Reynaldo. *Cholo Style: Homies, Homegirls & La Raza*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2006.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas, 1981.

García Bedolla, Lisa. *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "What Talking Means" [1977], in Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage, 1993.

- Campa, Arthur L. *Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1946.
- Carrizosa, Toño. *La Onda Grupera: Historia del Movimiento Grupero*. Mexico, DF: Edamex, 1997.
- Coleman, Brian. *Check the Technique: Liner Notes for Hip-Hop Junkies*. New York: Villard, 2007.
- Corona, Caprice Antoinette. "Representations of ethnicity in the Chicano/Latino rap music and hiphop culture of Los Angeles, California," AB Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1997.
- Cross, Brian. *It's Not About a Salary...: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles*. New York: Verso, 1993.
- De la Torre, Renée. "Estética azteca de las danzas concheras," *Versión 20*, 2007.
- _____. "Tensiones entre el esencialismo azteca y el universalismo *New Age* a partir del estudio de las danzas 'conchero-aztecas,'" *Trace* 54, 2008, at <http://trace.revues.org/480>, uploaded 27 July 2009, accessed 3 Feb. 2013.
- Duran, Richard P., ed., *Latino Language and Communicative Behavior*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981.
- Fernández, Celina. *Los Panchos: La historia de los embajadores de la canción romántica contada por su voz Rafael Basurto Lara*. Madrid: Martínez Roca, 2005.
- Fought, Carmen. *Chicano English in Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- García, Peter J. "La Onda Nuevo Mexicana: Multi-Sited Ethnography, Ritual Contexts, and Popular Traditional Musics in New Mexico," Ph.D. diss, University of Texas at Austin, 2001.

- Gardner-Chloros, Penelope, *Code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009.
- González Ramírez, Eulalio. *Autobiogr...ajúa! y anecdo...taconario*. Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1999.
- Gorman, Lillian, “‘*Todos me llaman El Gringo*’: Place, Identity, and Erasure within the New Mexico Hispano Music Scene,” in Alejandro L. Madrid, ed., *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. New York: Oxford, 2012.
- Guerrero, Lalo, and Sherilyn Meece Menten. *Lalo: My Life and Music*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 2002.
- Gurza, Agustín, Jonathan Clark and Chris Strachwitz, *The Arhoolie Foundation’s Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings*. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2012.
- Gutiérrez, Félix F., and Jorge Reina Schement. *Spanish-Language Radio in the Southwestern United States*. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1979.
- Hall, Stuart. “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,” in Anthony King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*. London: Macmillan, 1991.
- Haney, Peter Clair, “Carpa y Teatro, Sol y Sombra: Show Business and Public Culture in San Antonio’s Mexican Colony, 1900-1940, Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2004.
- Harris, Roxy. *New Ethnicities and Language Use*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Harris, Roy, “On Redefining Linguistics,” in Hayley G. Davis and Talbot J. Taylor, *Rethinking Linguistics*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

- Heller, Monica, ed. *Codeswitching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988.
- Herrera-Sobek, María. *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1993.
- Hinrichs, Lars. *Codeswitching on the Web: English and Jamaican Creole in E-mail Communication*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1983.
- Hutchinson, Sydney. *From Quebradita to Duranguense: Dance in Mexican American Youth Culture*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 2007.
- Iglesias, Norma. *Entre yerba, polvo y plomo: Lo fronterizo visto por el cine mexicano*. Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1991.
- Jáuregui, Jesús. *El Mariachi: Símbolo musical de México*. Mexico: Santillana Ediciones Generales, 2007.
- Kun, Josh. "What Is an MC If He Can't Rap to Banda? Making Music in Nuevo L.A.," *American Quarterly*, 56:3, 2004.
- _____. "The Tijuana Sound: Brass, Blues, and the Border of the 1960s," in Madrid, *Transnational Encounters*.
- Lara, Luis Fernando. *Diccionario del español usual en México*. Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1996.
- Loeffler, Jack, with Katherine Loeffler and Enrique R. Lamadrid. *La Música de los Viejos: Hispano Folk Music of the Río Grande del Norte*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1999.
- López Castro, Gustavo. *El Río Bravo es charco: cancionero del migrante*. Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1995.
- Madrid, Alejandro L., ed., *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. New York: Oxford, 2012.

- McFarland, Pancho. *Chicano rap: gender and violence in the postindustrial barrio*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- McWilliams, Carey. *North from Mexico*. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1949.
- Mendoza-Denton, Norma. *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.
- Molina, Rafael, "Carlos Santana: Magia y mística de una historia irrepetible," in Valenzuela Arce, José Molina, and Gloria González Fernández, *Oye Cómo Va: Recuento del Rock Tijuanaense*. Tijuana: Centro Cultural Tijuana-Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud, 1999.
- Molina, Ruben. *Chicano Soul: Recordings & History of an American Culture*. La Puente, CA: Mictlan, 2007.
- Montaño, Mary Caroline. *Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas: Hispano Arts and Culture of New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2001.
- Morales, Ed. *The Latin Beat: The Rhythms and Roots of Latin Music from Bossa Nova to Salsa and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2003.
- Moreno Rivas, Yolanda. *Historia de la música popular mexicana*. México, DF: Alianza, 1979.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. "Code-Switching as Indexical of Social Negotiations," in Monica Heller, ed., *Codeswitching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988.
- Nostrand, Richard L. *The Hispano Homeland*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1992.
- Quiñones, Sam. *True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2001.
- Palomar Vereá, Cristina. *En cada charro, un hermano: La charrería en el estado de Jalisco*. Guadalajara: Secretaría de la Cultura, 2004.

Paredes, Américo, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*.

Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976.

Peña, Manuel. 1999. *The Mexican American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Pérez-Torres, Rafael. *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture*.

University of Minnesota, 2006.

Poplack, Shana. "Sometimes I'll Start a Sentence in Spanish y *Termino en Español*: Toward a Typology of Code-switching," *Linguistics* 18 [1980], reprinted in Wei, *Bilingualism Reader*.

_____. "Contrasting Patterns of Codeswitching in Two Communities," in Heller, *Codeswitching*.

Price, Patricia L. *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion*.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004.

Pulido, Isaura Betzabe. "Knowledge—the Fifth Element of Hip Hop Music: Mexican and Puerto Rican Youth Engagement of Hip Hop Music as Critically Rac(ed) Education Discourse," PhD. Diss, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008.

Ragland, Cathy. *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations*. Philadelphia: Temple University, 2009.

Rampton, Ben. "Language Crossing and the Redefinition of Reality," in Peter Auer, *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Reyes, David, and Tom Waldman. *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1998.

Ritter, Joe, and Fred Sherman, dirs. *Heroes of Latin Hip Hop*, Cult DVD 1335,

2002.

Rivera, Raquel Z. *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Roberts, John Storm. *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Roberts, Shelley. *Remaining and Becoming: Cultural Crosscurrents in an Hispano School*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001.

Rodriguez, Luis. *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

Rodríguez, Richard T. *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University, 2009.

Rodríguez, Sylvia. "Tourism, Whiteness, and the Vanishing Anglo." In David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long. *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001.

Romaine, Suzanne. *Bilingualism*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

Sahlins, Marshal. *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985.

Sanchez, Rosaura. *Chicano Discourse: Socio-historic Perspectives*. Bowley, MA: Newbury House, 1983.

Santamaria, Francisco J. *Diccionario de mejicanismos*. Mexico City: Porrúa, 1992.

Sapir, Edward. "Language" [1933], in Sapir, *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*. Berkeley: University of California, 1958.

Simonett, Helena. *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2001.

_____. "Quest for the Local: Building Musical Ties between Mexico and the United States," in Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, eds.,

- Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008.
- Slobin, Mark. *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. Hannover, CT: Wesleyan, 1993.
- Sommer, Doris. *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999.
- Stark, Richard B. *Music of the "Bailes" in New Mexico*. Santa Fe: International Folk Art Foundation, 1978.
- Sublette, Ned. *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.
- Ullman, Char. "English matters? Undocumented Mexican transmigration and the negotiation of language and identities in a global economy," diss., University of Arizona, 2004.
- Valdés Fallis, Guadalupe. "Code-switching in Bilingual Chicano Poetry," *Hispania* 59 (4), 1976, 877-886.
- Vasquez, Jessica M. *Mexican Americans across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*. New York: New York University, 2011.
- Vega, Héctor. "La música tradicional mexicana: entre el folclore, la tradición y la world music," *HAOL* 23, 2010.
- Vila, Pablo. "The Polysemy of the Label 'Mexican' on the Border," in Vila, ed., *Ethnography at the Border*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002.
- Wald, Elijah. *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas*. New York: Rayo, 2001.

_____. *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of Popular Music*. New York: Oxford University, 2009.

Walker, Mary Jane. "Family music and family bands in New Mexico music."
PhD. Diss, University of Illinois, 2008.

Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Wei, Li, ed. *The Bilingualism Reader*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Weigle, Marta, and Peter White. *The Lore of New Mexico*. Albuquerque:
University of New Mexico, 1988.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan, 1958.