
A Beautiful Thing: Mariachi and Femininity in Jalisco, Mexico

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Abstract: In Mexico, the western state of Jalisco is popularly represented as the birthplace of mariachi. An excessively circulated national symbol, performances and performers of mariachi embody two important tenets of Mexican nationalism: machismo and *mestizaje*. In addition, Jalisco is also famous for its beautiful women, known for their light skin and piety. In this article I examine the increasing popular performance of women in all-female mariachis. Specifically, I am interested in how these *mariacheras* embody, mimic and contest their femininities in a highly gendered and racialized context in Jalisco.

Keywords: mariachi, embodiment, femininity, performance, popular culture, Mexico

Résumé : Au Mexique, la perception populaire située dans l'État occidental du Jalisco l'origine du mariachi. Symbole national surexploité, les représentations et les performeurs de la tradition mariachi incarnent deux dimensions importantes du nationalisme mexicain : le machisme et le métissage (*machismo* et *mestizaje*). De plus, Jalisco est aussi réputée pour la beauté de ses femmes, reconnues pour la pâleur de leur peau et leur piété. Dans cet article, je m'intéresse à la popularité croissante des performances de groupes mariachi exclusivement composés de femmes. Je m'intéresse particulièrement à comment ces *mariacheras* incarnent, imitent, et contestent leurs féminités dans le contexte hautement genré et racialisé de Jalisco.

Mots-clés : mariachi, incarnation, féminité, performance, culture populaire, Mexique

Introduction¹

In Mexico, the western state of Jalisco is popularly represented as the birthplace of well-known Mexican traditions and important national symbols including tequila, *charrería* (horsemanship, similar to rodeo) and mariachi.² As a result, Jalisco is famous for being home of the authentic Mexican macho. In addition, Jalisco is also famous for its beautiful women as venerated in numerous mariachi songs and films from Mexico's golden age of popular culture. The legendary beauty of women of this region emerges from a post-colonial context wherein narratives of religion and race work together to produce an idealized femininity characterized by piety and a racial constitution heavily influenced by European (as opposed to indigenous) heritage. In Jalisco, colonial religious and racial hierarchies linger to shape idealized images of masculinity and femininity wherein women are praised for their piety and their beauty. In this context of idealized masculinities (macho mariachis) and femininities (light-skinned, pious women), the performance of women in mariachi, a genre heavily dominated by men and packed with national ideals of race, gender, sexuality and region, is both complex and compelling.

In my other work, I conceptualize state-sanctioned performances of mariachi as cultural performances wherein notions of race, ethnicity, history, gender and nationhood are fashioned and redefined on a terrain of unequal power relations (Mulholland 2007). Here, I argue that *mariacheras* (female mariachis)³ mimic and reproduce notions of beauty, piety and dependability that are entangled in general performances of *mexicanidad*, including race (*mestizaje*),⁴ gender, region and religion. I understand gender as performative (Butler 1990), in that its naturalized and inevitable aura is produced through a series of reiterative performances. I further argue, drawing on Taussig (1993), that these performances are mimetic in that they mime other performances of masculinity, femininity and race that *mariacheras* experience in their daily lives. Central to

Taussig's concept of mimesis is alterity: through a continual process of copy and contact, specifically in the colonial context, the distinction between self and other is blurred in a struggle for representation.

In this article, I examine the ways in which the participation of women in mariachi ensembles is neither a subversive nor a stabilizing force in the construction of an idealized Mexican femininity in the state of Jalisco.⁵ Specifically, I am interested in how these mariacheras embody, perform, mimic and contest their own femininities in the everyday. Initially, I was curious if they were perceived by themselves and by others as subversive or, more subtly, as courageous skirt-wearing women who invaded a supposedly masculine genre. In short, would these women be considered by themselves or by others as cross-dressing, genre-crossing bodies out of place that subverted normative discourse of gender and sexuality in Jalisco? Would these women be considered controversial; criticized as loose, butch or un-Mexican? In the end, none and all of these seem to be true. Indeed, the performance and embodiment of female mariachis is much more contested, complex, hybrid and ambivalent. However, these women also slip into the in-between spaces of normative identity constructs, sometimes overtly but most often subtly, to challenge and undermine the reproduction of stable mutable categories of gender and sexuality. These in-between spaces exist between and outside of the extensively circulated and copied images of the mestizo macho mariachi and the mestiza pious folkloric beauty.

Femininity and Mexican Nationalism

In Mexico, early essays and analyzes of Mexican nationalism and the Mexican character, such as those by Samuel Ramos (1962) and Octavio Paz (1961), were always formulated as descriptions of a Mexican male identity. As literary critic, Jean Franco, has argued, "national identity was essentially masculine," and women were the obstacles or foils of the development of such a character (1989:xxi). In particular, it was the role of woman-as-mother that had the largest influence on the development of the Mexican (male) character. The adoring, caring and indulgent mother creates and condones her son, the macho, whose sense of inferiority stems from the emasculating presence of foreign domination, colonial authority and superiority.

At the centre of the construction of the Mexican woman as mother of the nation are two of Mexico's most controversial and salient mythic figures and archetypes: the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche. Symbol of motherhood, nation, morality, righteousness, tradition,

virtue, purity and indigenismo, the Virgin of Guadalupe is patron saint of Mexico and in many ways the idealized Mexican woman. Conversely, Malinche (also known by her Spanish/Christian name of Doña Marina, or Malintzin, her given name, as well as La Chingada, which literally translates into "the fucked one") was the Indigenous mistress to Cortés who is believed to have been instrumental in the eventual defeat of the Aztecs by the Spanish. Octavio Paz describes the distinction between these two female images:

In contrast to Guadalupe, who is the Virgin Mother, the Chingada is the violated mother. . . . Both of them are passive figures. Guadalupe is pure, receptive, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passions. The Chingada is even more passive. Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood, and dust. Her taint is constitutional and resides . . . in her sex. [Paz 1961:85]

In Mexico, *malinchismo* is the term used to refer to a perceived inferiority complex in Mexico that leads to some Mexicans privileging or preferring foreign things (as did Malinche apparently). In the studies of Mexican gender roles, the concept of *marianismo*, the cult of the Virgin Mary and the counterpart to machismo, became a popular method to capture the manner in which the adoration of the Virgin determines the parameters of acceptable femininity in Mexico and much of Latin America (Stevens 1973). In this construct of ideal femininity, women are passive, stoic, spiritual, moral, loyal and devoid of sexual desires. Moreover, particularly in Mexico, idealized women's roles are not only understood to reside solely in the realm of the private and domestic but also in the spiritual and religious.

Despite the pervasiveness of the virgin/whore binary, the representations and the lived experiences of women in Mexico are far more complex and nuanced. The notion that Mexican women are regulated and categorized as either virgins or whores is as misleading and illusory as Mexican men existing exclusively in the mutually exclusive categories of macho and *maricón* (pejorative for gay). In his detailed history, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (1997), Steve Stern demonstrates that gender roles and relations in Mexico were far more complex and context contingent, influenced by a multifaceted matrix of power including race, class, community, state and region. In particular, he argues that the division between women's space as private and men's space as public simplifies and misrepresents the way in which a

multitude of actors were involved in the production and regulation of gender roles, including family, community elders, the church and the state.

In addition, Jean Franco (1989), Anne Rubenstein (1998), Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera (1998), Tuñón-Pablos (1999), Rebecca Lester (2005) and the contributors to Olcott, Vaughn and Cano (2006) have argued that women do not fall into categories of either conformity (pious) or deviant/resistance (treacherous), but rather there are multiple ways that women are both abstractions and agents in the imaginings of Mexican identity. Moreover, the concept of *marianismo* as formulated by Stevens (1973) has been extensively criticized (Ehlers 1991; Melhuus and Stolen 1996; Navarro 2002). Undeniably, the construction of the virgin/whore complex is a dominant narrative in Mexican nationalism. Although the virgin/whore complex is overly simplistic, certain characteristics emerging from that complex do influence the parameters of an idealized femininity in Mexico—in particular, notions of piety, dependability, hygiene and beauty.

Jalisco is Mexico: Mariachis, Machos and Beautiful Women

Jalisco, and the capital city Guadalajara, are recognized within Mexico for their political and religious conservatism and strong economy and as the birthplace of tequila and mariachi. Not only are these traditions purported to be authentically *jalisciense* (Jaliscan), but they are also understood as being quintessentially Mexican and representative of *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness). As a result, Jalisco is known for and promotes itself as the cultural hub and birthplace of the authentic Mexican macho.⁶ Jalisco is also famous for its beautiful women. My broader research project examines mariachi as a performative site (culturally, historically, socially and discursively) where racial, regional, classed, sexual and gendered identities are produced and contested in the state of Jalisco. The significance of mariachi as an important site of inquiry is largely due to its entanglement with national and nationalist discourses (Mulholland 2007, 2012).

The emergence of mariachi as a symbol of Mexican identity and *machismo* is linked to the wildly popular singing cowboy films of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s that featured cowboys singing *ranchera* music (country music) backed by famous mariachis of that era.⁷ Often referred to as the “golden age” of Mexican culture and nationalism, this era produced several important cultural icons, most importantly the *comedia ranchera* (country comedy) genre of film and its star, the *charro cantor* (or singing cowboy).⁸ Combining the music of mariachi and

the cowboy tradition of *charros*, these films produced an image of the idealized Mexican man: a rural, mestizo cowboy who possesses a loyal, brave and stubborn character. In these films, such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (*Over on Big Ranch*, 1936) and *Así se quiere en Jalisco* (*That is How They Love in Jalisco*, 1942), Jalisco became the mythic home to *charros* and *mariachis* who lived rugged and honourable lives tied to working the land (predominantly in the state of Jalisco), drinking tequila and longing for the love of a good woman (Gradante 1982; Jáuregui 1990; Mulholland 2007; Nájera-Ramírez 1994; Rubenstein 2001; Serna 1995). It was also during the golden age that many *mariachis* adopted the now standard *traje de charro*; a stylized cowboy outfit that includes a short jacket, bowtie, tight-fitting pants that are decorated down the leg with silver or gold buckles (*botandura*), cowboy boots and matching *sombrero*.⁹

Partnering with the macho *charros* and *mariachis* are the famous “*lindas mujeres*,” or beautiful women, of Jalisco. The beauty of Jaliscan women refers to both a physical embodiment—they are known to be tall—with lighter skin and striking eyes, and a temperamental one; they are known for their piety and goodness. In regard to the latter, women of Jalisco, in fact all Jaliscans, are known to be some of the most devout Catholics in Mexico.¹⁰ The Catholicism of many Jaliscans is demonstrated by the popularity of three locally venerated Virgins (Virgen de Zapopan, Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Talpa and the Virgen de la Asunción San Juan de los Lagos) and the ongoing memory of the *Cristeros*, Christian rebels who fought the anticlerical revolutionary government of the 1920s.¹¹

In addition to piety, there is also a racialized component to the beauty of the women in Jalisco: the people of Jalisco are generally considered to have lighter skin than Mexicans from other regions, such as the south. Whereas some states in Mexico are considered indigenous, such as the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and the Yucatan, Jalisco is considered to be a state that has more European racial influences than indigenous ones.¹² For example, the state and, in particular, the region known as Los Altos (the highlands), is famous for having a population that is taller, with light-coloured skin and light-coloured eyes (Orozco 1998). Some attribute the strong European presence in this area to the thousands of French troops stationed in this region during the French Occupation in the mid-1860s (Tuck 1982). Women of the state are famed for their legendary beauty and “*ojos tapatíos*” (eyes from Jalisco), which are immortalized in the song and film of the same name, *Ojos Tapatios* (1936).¹³ José Vasconcelos, the influential writer and public intellectual who formulated the notion

of mestizos as the “cosmic race” in the 1920s, commented on the racial composition of Jalisco’s population in his later work *El desastre* (*The Disaster*, 1938):

Jalisco, in reality, is the most successful of the Mexican provinces. The race over there is purer than, for example, in Puebla. The men are tall and striking and from Andalusian origin; the women have black eyes, flexible waist, clear complexion, full of softness, they seduce by the refinement of their characteristics and their fluent and graceful walk. [Doñán 2000]

The cultural memory of Jalisco as Catholic and mestiza/o speaks to the colonial legacy of religion and race that works to erase the historical and contemporary presence of indigenous and African people in the state (Chamorro 2000; Ochoa Serrano 1997).

Although rooted in nostalgia and imaginings, this image of Jalisco as home to beautiful women and rugged macho men is still popular today. While the films of the golden age introduced and solidified this image in the national imagination, it continues to be reproduced and circulated today by festivals, tourism campaigns and the ongoing popularity of ranchera songs from this era. These songs are performative (Butler 1990). They evoke and reify this mythic image of Jalisco as home to the almost European, but not quite, mestizo, the macho and the pretty and pious woman. For example, the ranchera song “Ay, Jalisco no te rajes,” popularized by Jorge Negrete, boasts the virtues of Jalisco, including its beautiful women, macho men, mariachi, tequila and charros. Performed in the movie of the same name (1941), the song typifies the nostalgic imaginings of Jalisco by partnering horse-riding charros who “are macho and true to their word” with “lovely women with beautiful faces.”

Traje de Charro and the *China Poblana*: The Idealized Mexican Couple

In September 2003, I was sitting in the Sanborns restaurant in downtown Guadalajara about to interview three mariacheras, still dressed in their *trajes de charros* from an earlier show, as the waitress, dressed in the standard issue mock *china poblana* (colourful folkloric dress for women) held together by Velcro, brought us our drinks. Sanborns is a slightly upscale restaurant chain found throughout Mexico’s larger cities that prides itself for its high regard for Mexican culture, cuisine and a place in Mexican history and nationalism. The waitresses dress in the colourful mock *china poblana* outfits, the menu offers “typical” Mexican food, such as *moles* and *tacos*, and most restaurants are typically located in historical buildings near the city core. Amidst this montage

of Mexican national symbolism, the promotion and reproduction of the *china poblana* is particularly interesting, not only as an important Mexican symbol but also as a representation of an idealized Mexican femininity. In state-sponsored and popular representations of Mexican culture, the *china poblana* is, for women, what the *traje de charro* is for men: the national folkloric dress. The heteronormative image of a woman dressed in a *china poblana*, her long dark hair braided with red, green and white ribbons, grasping her skirt, swaying it from side to side while dancing the *jarabe tapatío* (the Mexican hat dance) with a man dressed in a *traje de charro*, is a prominent Mexican image. Just by looking at the picture one can hear the mariachi playing in the background.

Sitting in Sanborns, being served by a waitress in a *china poblana* while I interviewed female mariachis dressed in *trajes de charros*, many of the archetypes that circulate in Mexican national mythology about idealized femininity, masculinity, heteronormativity, race and class were set in an unruly juxtaposition. The imagined feminine folkloric partner to the *traje de charro*, the *china poblana*, embodies important feminine characteristics such as religiosity and mestiza beauty (Gillespie 1998). The image of the Mexican couple, the woman in a *china poblana* and the man in a *traje de charro* dancing the *jarabe tapatío* was suddenly interrupted by the three young women dressed in *trajes de charro* with their mariachi instruments resting under the table. This unruly juxtaposition exposed the heterogeneous, fluid and mimetic nature of gender performances (Butler 1990; Taussig 1993). The *traje de charro* and the *china poblana* are important Mexican symbols that have been extensively mimed, mined, copied and circulated in Mexican popular culture. Key to my argument is the manner in which women wearing *trajes de charro* playing in such an overtly masculine genre are understood by themselves and by others. Is this performance of mariacheras in *trajes de charros* a form of drag? Are these women mimicking men in an attempt to access and critique the privileges and power of patriarchy through a process described by Michael Taussig (1993) as similar to sympathetic magic?

***Mariachis Femeniles*: A Beautiful Thing**

When I tell Mexicans that I have interviewed all-female mariachis, particularly Mexicans not from Jalisco, they often respond with surprise. Not that there are women in mariachi per se, as women have always been involved in ranchera as vocalists, but very few mariachis in Mexico have female musicians. Occasionally, a mariachi

will have one or two female violinists who also perform as vocalists, but it is not that common. This is a marked difference from the participation of women in mariachi in the United States, where there are several mariachis, particularly those associated with public school or university programs, which are mariachi *mixtas*—meaning a mixture of women and men. In fact, many of the leading pioneers in the world of women in mariachi are in the United States, including Laura Garcíacano Sobrino, founder of two mariachis femeniles, and Rebecca González, who was the first and one of the few females to play with a major mariachi show band (in her case she played with Los Camperos de Nati Cano). As a result, the majority of the academic and journalistic coverage of women in mariachi has been in the United States context. For example, anthropologist Cándida Frances Jáquez (2000) undertook research with female mariachis in the United States, Leono Xóchitl Pérez (2002) has written about her own experiences playing in mariachis, and Laura Sobrino has written and lectured extensively on the history of women in mariachi in Mexico and the United States. However, the coverage of women in mariachi in the Mexican context, including Jalisco, is scarce.

Partly due to the association of mariachi with “un ambiente bajo” (a seedy environment), including drinking and overtly male spaces, such as plazas, cantinas and fiestas, the inclusion of women musicians into mixed mariachis is not very common in Mexico. However, in the past 20 years there has been an increase in the number of mariachis femeniles. In Guadalajara, the number of mariachis femeniles fluctuates between eight and 12 as groups have a tendency to form and reform. There are also mariachis femeniles located throughout the state in small towns with a particularly strong mariachi presence, such as Tequila and Tlajomulco. The most established mariachi femenil in Guadalajara is Mariachi Femenil Las Perlitas Tapatías, which formed in 1989 under the leadership of Alma Rocío Corona Ortiz.¹⁴ Las Perlitas claims to be the first mariachi femenil in the world, although in reality the first mariachi femenil was Las Coronelas in Mexico City, directed by Carlota Noriega in the 1940s. Other early mariachis femeniles in Mexico City included the Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Michoacano in the 1950s and Mariachi Las Estrellas de Mexico in the 1960s (Sobrino and Pérez 1997).

Although there was some reference to the idea that being a mariachi was not an appropriate occupation for a “lady,” these mariachis femeniles are strikingly uncontroversial. When I asked fans, male mariachis and local

experts how they felt about women playing in mariachis, most replied with the same approving response: mariachis femeniles are “una cosa bonita” (a beautiful thing). In fact, this acceptance of mariachis femeniles is further demonstrated by their busy schedules. These groups do well economically and are hired to play for a variety of occasions, including public events, parties and serenades, and some have fixed weekly gigs at hotels or restaurants.¹⁵ While doing my fieldwork in Jalisco with both male and female mariachis, the most striking difference I observed was the manner in which the performance of each mariachi was judged and assessed. Whereas the performance of male mariachis is judged first and foremost for their ability to capture the gritty sentimentality of the music, female mariachis are assessed by their presentation, which is based on the perception that mariachis femeniles are comprised of beautiful women who are responsible and dependable performers. This not only plays into Jalisco’s claim to be the land of beautiful women but also reproduces and represents traditional and conservative notions of Mexican femininity such as piety, stability, sacrifice and reliability. Therefore, female mariachis were not viewed by themselves, male mariachis, fans or local lay folklorists as butchy or women of ill repute but rather as “lindas mujeres” (beautiful/nice women). For example, the Web site for Las Perlitas captures this notion:

Full of beauty, sensibility and affection, these women win applause wherever they perform. To listen and see Las Perlitas Tapatías is always a great spectacle. From the attractive *trajes de charro*, the respect for Mexican music, and the performance of various genres we create an emotional and sensible environment that is totally different. [Las Perlitas 2004]

In fact, it is this combination of the “beauty” and “sensibility” of mariachis femeniles that these women assert as the reason behind their success in finding work. Specifically, the presentation of mariachis femeniles as clean, pretty, sober and dependable distinguishes them from the male mariachis who have an unflattering reputation of being associated with an *ambiente bajo*, which includes drunkenness leading to unpredictable behaviour.¹⁶ Male mariachis and their female *comadres*, *mariacheras*, are understood as being very distinct by performers and audiences alike. The differences embodied by *mariacheras* are the beauty of musicians (the *traje de charro*, hair and makeup), the style of play (without flavour), manner of becoming a musician (education versus family) and comportment (sober and dependable).

Becoming Mariachera

Sitting at Sanborns with the three mariacheras from Mariachi Mujeres de Guadalajara, I was curious to see how these different representations of femininity would influence their everyday life, their performances, their identities as mariacheras and their reception by Jaliscans. Dressed neatly in their black *trajes de charro* including floor length skirts and short jackets with gold embroidery, white blouses and bowties, gold belt buckles, boots and sombreros with their hair pulled back tightly in ponytails and matching bows, the women explained the history, successes and obstacles of mariachis femeniles. Listening to Christina, Marta and Julia talk about mariachi, I notice the absence of the passionate discourse of “blood, sweat and tears” expressed by male mariachis I interviewed as central to the authentic and high-quality performance of mariachi music (Mulholland 2012). Rather, these women were more reserved in their emotions, discussing instead the practicalities of learning an instrument, respecting the tradition and being professional in their appearance and behaviour.

Cristina, Marta and Julia told me that the first obstacle female mariachis must overcome is learning an instrument and realizing that women *can* play in a mariachi. Unlike their male counterparts, female mariachis generally do not start playing mariachi music until they are in their teens, learning how to play instruments and mariachi music at school and from music teachers. Conversely, male mariachis generally learn to play an instrument as children, five or six years old, from a male relative. In many families, being a mariachi is a family tradition and is passed down from generation to generation. Even if a woman comes from a mariachi family, she does not learn from her father, uncles or brothers as part of the family tradition but chooses to become musicians when she is older. This was the case with all members of Mariachi Mujeres de Guadalajara. While a few of the women came from families where the father, uncles and brothers played in mariachis, none of them learned the craft from a relative. Rather, most of them were music students who decided to join a mariachi because of their love of music, mariachi and the ability to make good money while playing music.

This was the same for the members of two other female mariachi groups I interviewed: Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco (discussed further below) and Las Flores. Of Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco, only two musicians came from families of mariachis, and none from Las Flores reported having mariachis in their family. Most were music students who heard about the opportunity to join a female mariachi through friends or advertisements at school, and a few decided to join the groups

because of a friend or sister and picked up an instrument at that point. One member of Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco, 17-year-old Ana, did come from a family of mariachis. While growing up it never occurred to Ana that she could play in a mariachi like her brothers. However, because she grew up in a musical family, she was inspired to study music in school where she met women who were playing in a mariachi femenil. When she told her father that she wanted to join a mariachi, he was pleased that she was part of the family tradition but was also concerned about her playing in “un ambiente muy abajo.” Although this environment was appropriate for her brothers and male cousins, Ana’s father (like many of the mariacheras’ parents) was concerned that alcohol-induced mariachis and the parties they played might lead to men treating his daughter in a disrespectful way. Thus, her participation in an all-female mariachi alleviated most of her father’s concerns.

In fact, many of the women report that the biggest concern their parents, particularly the fathers, have with them performing in a mariachi is the association of mariachi with un ambiente bajo. Most of the work for mariachis is at night and is associated with fiestas and tequila. In particular, at private parties and plazas, there is usually a great deal of drinking associated with mariachis and, in the case of the plaza, drug-dealing and prostitution. Generally, working mariachis have a bad reputation as drunks who are active participants in the ambiente bajo. Needless to say, many parents are concerned for the safety of their daughters working in such situations. The leader of the mariachi Las Flores, Alejandra, told me that,

it is very difficult being a woman in a mariachi because other mariachis do not take us seriously and the association with tequila. Mariachi and tequila always go together and sometimes playing at fiestas it is possible that people will fail to show proper respect. The parents of the girls trust me to take care of their daughters and that I will not accept work in inappropriate places.

Likewise, Lina, a mariachera from Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco, stated, “The plaza has ‘un ambiente muy abajo.’ We want nothing to do with this part of mariachi. We prefer to play at weddings, baptisms, graduations and private parties.”

Many of the mariacheras with whom I spoke had parents who supported their participation in a mariachi group *because* it was all women. Their participation in a male mariachi, or worse, a mariachi working in the plaza, would be out of the question for most young women.¹⁷ Although all-female mariachis generally did

not perform in the more conventional sites for mariachis, such as plazas, they did very well. They had steady work performing in sites more acceptable to parents and young women, such as restaurants, weddings, civic engagements and promotional events for small businesses.

Dependability: Sobriety and the Traje De Charro

According to mariacheras and their clientele, one of the leading factors in their success is the reputation of female mariachis for abstaining from drinking (in opposition to the stereotype of male mariachis as drunks). This sobriety is linked to their other two main attributes: their tidy appearance and timely arrivals for gigs. In short, female mariachis do not indulge in drinking and partying, and, as a result, they are far more dependable and professional than their male counterparts. The discussion on dependability came up time and time again in discussions with and about mariacheras—in particular, when I asked if they were they were able to make a living as mariachis and if there was much demand for their business. All three groups I interviewed indicated that, in fact, they do very well and work up to 40 hours a week.

Cristina from *Mariachi Mujeres* explained to me that mariachis femeniles do better than many male mariachis because of their reputation. “People like all-female mariachi because they are more attractive, their trajes are clean and matching, they are sober, dependable, and clean.” Marta admitted that many of the female mariachis do not play as well as some of the men because of lack of experience; yet, female mariachis get more work because they are dependable, leading to the jealousy on the part of some of their male *compadres*. When I asked Marta how they were received by male mariachis, she comments, “Other male mariachis are unhappy with female mariachis mostly because we get more work than they do. They think that we get more work because we are a novelty and we don’t drink.” Similarly, Pati, another young mariachera stated, “Men mariachis are jealous because we get lots of work, even though we may not play as well. It is because we are more dependable.”

As much of the success of the female mariachis is situated in their presentation of dependability, there is a focus on maintaining a sober, reliable and clean professional image. As part of this professional image, the mariachera’s physical performances of being tidy and beautiful are important. On this subject, there are two reoccurring themes regarding the mariachera’s presentation: their trajes de charro and their hair and makeup. Their costume, particularly the selection of colour and

style of the traje de charro, has become a means of articulating beauty, respectability and authenticity among mariachis femeniles. The adoption of the traje de charro by predominantly male mariachis in the 1930s was controversial, and there is still much debate surrounding the adoption of an upper-class landowning outfit by musicians who play rural workingman’s music.¹⁸ The adoption of the traje de charro by women mariachi has been no less contentious, creating a contested and unstable quality to the image. The early female ranchera singers, such as Lucha Reyes and Lola Beltrán, and the early mariachis femeniles began performing in various versions of folkloric dress associated with femininity, including the *china poblana*. However, as the traje de charro became increasingly standard for male mariachis and ranchera singers, female ranchera singers and eventually the mariachis femeniles followed suit.

Although there are photographs of mariacheras wearing the traje de charro in the 1950s, it did not become standardized until the 1990s. Laura Sobrino and Leonor Xóchitl Pérez (1997) attribute the adoption of a female version of the traje de charro with a floor-length skirt to Rebecca González. While playing with the *Mariachi Los Camperos*, the director, mariachi legend Nati Cano, encouraged Rebecca González to wear a floor-length skirt as part of the traje de charro that matched the trajes de charro of his mariachi. This look was preferred over the various experimentations with the women’s traje de charro in the 1970s, which included hot pants, three-quarter length skirts, miniskirts and folkloric dress. The brief incorporation of miniskirts as part of the outfit had been particularly controversial. For example, at one of the earlier international mariachi festivals held in Guadalajara in the early 1990s, one international mariachi mixta from Latin America caused quite a scandal when the female member of the mariachi wore a miniskirt to the inaugural parade. Many female mariachis and local folklorists commented on this incident, and all believed that her behaviour demonstrated a lack of respect for the institution of the traje de charro. In an interview with María, a female employee of a local mariachi museum and member of a local traditional mariachi, she echoed the concerns expressed by the others stating, “Women can play in modern mariachis or traditional mariachis as long as they don’t wear miniskirts or show disrespect for the tradition.”

By the 1990s, the traje de charro with a floor-length skirt was standardized in Mexico and the United States for mariacheras. However, the choice of colour is more of a contentious issue. Traditionally, the traje de charro is made of dark material, most often black; however, other dark colours, such as brown and dark blue are also

acceptable. Some mariachis—male, mixta or femenil—choose to wear pastel or bright colours to distinguish themselves from other mariachis. This is particularly true (but not limited) to mariachis femeniles, who often perform in brighter colours. For example, Las Perlitas are famous for high-energy performances in white, bright blue, and pink *trajes de charro*, while performing *sones*, *jarabes* and tropical music, such as *cumbia* and *salsa*. In an article on women mariachis in the United States, “Mariachi Muchachas: Pink Trajes and all!” reporters Laramie Trevino and Alejandro Betancourt (1996:92–93) report:

One show-stopping highlight of Las Perlitas’ show is a variety number where the lights dim and the members whip off their snug *traje skirts* to perform in tight leggings. Scandalized audience members have often failed to see a link between leggings and mariachi. But founder Corona claims their style of entertainment is done *en una forma correcto*, adding: “El *traje de charro se debe de respetar*” (The *traje de charro* must be respected).

Other mariachis, such as Mariachi Mujeres de Guadalupe, pride themselves on their choice of dark, more traditional and “authentic” colours for their *trajes de charro*. In fact, this was one of the reasons Cristina left Las Perlitas in the first place. She felt that the pink *trajes* and leggings had little to do with an authentic performance of mariachi.

Beauty and Piety: Hair and Makeup

During my fieldwork, the notion that a mariachera’s merit as a performer was completely entangled with her appearance was a constant theme. This was a double-edged sword for working mariacheras because they were both appreciated for the clean and feminine presentations of self but were also excluded from “authentic” performances of mariachi based on this same point. That is, male mariachis were judged based on their ability to play gritty sentimental music with guts (induced by tequila, heartache and struggle), something descent women could not embody. Thus, beauty (read as clean and dependable) is their entry into the working world of mariachis but the site of their exclusion from authentic performances. In addition to the *trajes de charro*, mariacheras were also expected to embody a femininity characterized by decency, morality and beauty. This was most articulated through the importance of hair and makeup.

Women in mariachis almost always wear their hair slicked back with gel in a ponytail secured together with matching bows. In her personal reflections on playing in a mariachi in the United States, Leono Xóchitl

Pérez (2002) comments on the increasing pressure for mariacheras to tie their hair back in bows, a style that emerged in the late 1990s. Upon returning to the world of mariachi after a ten-year break, she was surprised by the new emphasis on the presentation of women’s hair. She was reprimanded several times by female and male colleagues about keeping her hair tied back in a bow. She remarked, “I was approached by a female performer who said it wasn’t ‘mariachi’ to wear my hair loose. I was speechless. I wondered how she got the notion that female mariachi identity includes such a hairstyle” (2002:157). In part, this idea comes from a broader discourse on hair and a performance of decency and femininity in Mexico.

In Mexico, the phrase “*pelo suelto*” (loose hair) immediately and unquestionably conjures up images of one of Mexico’s most popular and controversial popular music figures, Gloria Trevi. Often called the “Mexican Madonna,” Gloria Trevi was a wildly successful pop icon in the 1990s who deliberately challenged dominant Mexican ideals of gender, sexuality, piety, family and “*buenas costumbres*” (good values) (Correa 1995:78). Her most famous song, “*Pelo Suelto*” became a symbol of liberation and freedom for many young women. In the song Trevi vows to be true to herself, whether that be “sleepy as a lion” or “aggressive as a cat in heat” and indifferent to those who may call her “indecent.”¹⁹ For mariacheras, loose hair is associated with another performance of femininity; that of the sexualized pop star. For these young girls, this type of performance would undermine their claims of dependable and descent presentations and performances that they see as the main reason for their ability to get gigs as musicians.

One example that stands out from my fieldwork, comes from when I met Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco. This group was recommended to me by a local folklorist as a talented group of musicians who honoured the tradition of mariachi. I called the mariachi and was invited to the group during one of its rehearsals held in backyard of the group’s leader and business manager. When I arrived, there were eight women between the ages of 17 and 25 who were excited to talk to me about their experiences but slightly disappointed that I did not have a video recorder and only carried with me a pen, notebook and tape recorder. These mariacheras told me that their “every moment” was dedicated to playing music and performing mariachi. They practiced 15 to 20 hours a week in addition to all their gigs at private parties, serenades and businesses. Predominantly music students, these women were committed to their craft and were critical of the complaint that “women only play mariachi until they get married.”



Figures 1 and 2. The Mariachi Makeover. Copyright Mulholland 2003.

After the rehearsal, the manager, Teresa, and her best friend and trumpet player, Rosa, asked me if I had ever worn a traje de charro. When I replied that I had not, they invited me to the house the following day to try on a traje de charro and to take some pictures. My expectation was that I would simply try on the outfit; what happened instead was a complete mariachi makeover. When I arrived, Rosa and Teresa began to assemble all the necessary tools to facilitate my transformation. First, the two mariacheras had to do my hair. This involved slicking my hair back with gel into a ponytail. During this rather sticky process, Teresa apologized joking that I must prefer to wear my hair “suelto” (loose) or “Canadian style.”

The next step of my mariachi makeover was makeup. Although I was wearing makeup at the time, both mariacheras commented that I must like a “natural style” and that I must not be accustomed to wearing makeup. Teresa applied my makeup, including blush, eye shadow and mascara with a particular focus on lip-liner and lipstick. While I was in the field, the look of an exaggerated, heavy, dark lip-liner filled in by a lighter coloured lipstick (usually red) was quite popular among young

Mexican women. Finally, after lending me a pair of silver hoops and a blue bow for my hair, Rosa lent me one of her trajes de charro, including a floor-length blue skirt with silver botanadura (buttons down the side of the skirt), a white blouse and blue bowtie, a blue bolero jacket, boots and sombrero. The mariacheras took several pictures of me posing with the jacket and sombrero alternatively on and off, with different instruments (Figs. 1 and 2), joking that I looked just like Lola Beltran.

The day following my makeover, I travelled with this same mariachi to a gig for the opening of a furniture expo. I met Rosa and Teresa at Rosa’s house, and then we travelled in the mariachi’s official van picking up the various musicians throughout the city. In the van, the women fixed their hair, makeup and trajes de charro, sharing gel, lipstick and hairbrushes in preparation for the event. They were talking about one of the mariacheras (who had not been picked up yet) who had appeared on a popular TV variety show as a ranchera vocalist the night before. Meanwhile, two young musicians, both in their mid-teens, yelled out the window at a young good-looking man walking down the street,

“Aye, papi, que guapo!” (Hey baby, you are good-looking!). One of the final musicians we picked up was Ana, a 17-year-old violin player and member of a well-known family of mariachis. The leader of the mariachi told Ana to fix her hair, saying it looked like she had slept in it. Ana pulled her hair back in a ponytail without gel. The leader and the other women started to tease her, telling her to at least put some gel in her hair. She begrudgingly took some gel and said, with a smile, “I prefer my hair Canadian style.” Seemingly “pelo suelto” is more likely foreign than Mexican.

Sin Sabor: Without Flavour

Despite the fact that mariachis femeniles have achieved a great deal of success, this does not mean the increase of women in a traditionally male occupation has gone unnoticed and without criticism. For example, although many remark that female mariachis are a “beautiful thing,” this is also the basis for excluding women from an authentic performance of a Mexican national symbol of machismo. Moreover, the idea of women mariachis as sober and dependable prevents them from performing that tequila induced, gritty sentimentality that is key to the authenticity of male mariachis. To a lesser extent, women are also criticized for choosing such an unfeminine vocation; the sentiment being that “good girls” should not be involved in this profession. At the heart of the critique, that women are merely “pretty things” who “just carry their instruments,” is that they play “without flavour.”

The focus on presentation in the mariachis femeniles has also become the central critique of the mariacheras. For example, much of the criticism regarding mariachis femeniles is that they are too “soft,” that they do not have the grit or strength to play the music, that they are more concerned with lipstick and having children, and that they play without “flavour” or sentiment. An example of this sentiment can be found in the following newspaper article commenting on the different changes to the mariachi:

They celebrated the advent of female mariachi groups ... although, in light of the mysterious phenomenon that there is more demand for their pictures than their discs, there is a theory that they are appreciated more for libidinous criteria than folkloric ones, in other words, more for the visible than the audible attributes of these revolutionary mariacheras. [Rumayor 2003]

The criticism that women have few “audible attributes” as mariachis is partially attributed to the fact the women play too “soft” and that they do not have the force or the

strength to play the instruments as they are meant to be played, particularly the *guitarrón*, harp and trumpet. Cornelio García, a well-known local folklorist, exemplifies this perspective when he claims that women are not capable of playing mariachi with the same sentiment or force as men and that it should remain a “cosa de los hombres” (a man thing). Speaking during the *9th Annual Encuentro del Mariachi y la Charrería*, he stated,

Female mariachis are something very modern. Yes, there were some groups of women in the forties and fifties. But, look, in order to pull the cords of a guitar-rón, one needs the composure, muscles and temperament of, well, a macho. [González Vega 2002]²⁰

This perspective is not only reserved for the mariachis in Jalisco but is also found in the United States, as American mariachi musician and historian Jonathan Clark similarly comments,

Right now most can't compete seriously with males. A lot of male groups are concerned about the competition, but in all honesty the female groups sound weak... Just when the group starts sounding good the women get married and quit. [Trevino and Betancourt 1996:92-93]

Cristina from Las Mujeres also mentioned this critique:

It used to be, well, people still say this, that female mariachi is all about image; makeup and pretty girls. That they play too soft, they just get married and have kids. Pretty things and makeup. They play just to play, without flavour.

Commenting on some of the feelings of male mariachis, Marta states, “Some male mariachis don’t accept women, they say we don’t play the instruments that we only carry them. We are just pretty things.” In short, the critique is that women cannot play mariachi with the same guts, sentiment or flavour as male mariachis. This feeling, not surprisingly, is linked to the highly charged drinking atmosphere, mariachi’s perceived history and the themes of many of the songs. Thus, the idea of women mariachis as beautiful is both a means of excluding them from the masculine spaces of mariachis and reifying an ideal Mexican femininity and, by extension, Mexican masculinity.

The opinion that only men can capture the essential feeling of mariachi is not uncommon, particularly when mariachi is associated with drinking, the land (that presumably the men worked) and matters of the heart (caused by the actions of women). In other words, hiring a female mariachi for a municipal celebration is fine, but

when your lover has left you, you are lonely and you want to go the local plaza or cantina to console yourself with tequila and a mariachi, a male mariachi is best. Thus, the dependability and sobriety of the mariachi femenino is both the reason for their success and the reason that excludes them from the categorization of “authentic mariachis.”

Women are keenly aware of this double standard: criticized for being either too feminine or not feminine enough. Marta, the lead singer from Las Mujeres, suggested that this double standard may lead to the early end of their careers: “I don’t think that we will play mariachi forever. Women can’t play into their 40s and 50s because they are no longer pretty and it loses its appeal. Men can get fat and old and still play in a mariachi.”

Similarly, Teresa, the trumpet player from Mariachi Femenil Real Jalisco, noted the contradiction in the critique. “Some say women who play are not real women because they don’t want children and a house, others say they are no good because once they get married they stop playing.” The inability of women to perform an “authentic” version of mariachi is their lack of flavour and sentiment that comes from the blood, sweat and tears of being a land-working man. Some of the women I spoke with were very critical and insightful of this assumption. For example, Cristina remarked that many of the mariachis argue that you have to be “from the land” to truly feel the music, but she felt it was hypocritical since most mariachis today live in the city. “The men don’t work the land anymore either. They live in the city where they work as mariachis. In fact, the only calluses male mariachis have now are from their instruments—not from working the land.”

It is important to note that some of these mariacheras who were excluded from authentic performances of mariachi due to their inability to embody the blood, sweat and tears of a Jalisco macho use that same discourse to mark other bodies as outside an “authentic” performance. For example, while these women are quick to point out that male mariachis are no longer land-working men anymore, they also argued that foreigners, and even Mexicans from outside of Jalisco, are unable to perform authentic mariachi. Specifically, they commented on the Japanese mariachi, whose female performers dressed in the china poblana, and a Latin American mariachi from a few years ago, whose female member wore a miniskirt. As Rosa remarked, “mariachis internacionales pronounce the words—they do not feel them.” Another, Ana, noted, “A mariachi from Jalisco has a certain style, the way they pronounce things. A mariachi from Mexico City is not the same.”

In turn, that same logic is applied to legitimize the exclusions of Others in what amounts to a complex and contested performative terrain concerning what it is to be male, female, Jalisco and Mexican. Yet, the boundaries of mariachi were not always seen to be bound by time or place, and in fact, many of these women embraced the idea of social change, process and fluidity. As Cristina astutely observed,

Women don’t play as well as men, because they have not they same history or practice. Some mariachis have been playing 60 years or more, we have only been playing a few years. We need time and history to create our place and sound. Women do not have to play the same, we need their own sound, style and character—but with *sabor mexicano* [Mexican flavour].

Into the Plaza

This is not to say that all of the performances of mariachis femeniles fall into safe and traditional notions of femininity in Mexico. By their participation in a performance that is often essentialized as quintessentially macho and Mexican, these women are transgressing the boundaries and representations of normative feminine constructs. These women are also making an income, granting them both freedom (through money) and status as real musicians and artists able to make a living through their art. They are also subverting and reversing some gender expectations, as we saw with the two young women in the van yelling *piropos* (cat calls) to the young man walking down the street. Female mariachis are also getting more requests to play at private parties and serenades, jobs that generally happen at night or in the early mornings. The serenades that mariachis femeniles are hired for are particularly interesting because, in a role reversal, they are being hired by women who want to take serenades to their boyfriends. The mariacheras told me stories of some of their more humorous serenades, including one where the mother of the young man did not approve of the girlfriend and refused to let him leave the house to acknowledge the serenade.²¹ Another time, one of the mariachis was hired by an angry girlfriend who wanted to break up with her boyfriend by having the mariachi play only those songs popularized by Paquita la del Barrio, full of bitterness toward men.

Lastly, since many of the mariacheras (and their parents) have no desire to associate themselves with an ambiente bajo, none of the mariachis femeniles work in the Plaza de los Mariachis. However, there are a few mariacheras who choose to work in the plaza with mariachi mixtas. I met two such mariacheras, a pair of sisters: Susana, the 21-year-old *vihuela* player from

Las Mujeres, and her 18-year-old sister, Alicia, who played violin. During the day, Susana plays with Las Mujeres, and then at night she and her sister work with their family's mariachi led by their father in the plaza. The two sisters told me that, while their father taught their brothers to play at a young age, there was no expectation that the women would also play in a mariachi and were not taught the craft by their father. However, once they began to play music and show an interest, the father was very pleased and the women joined the family mariachi. Susana told me that while the plaza definitely has an "ambiente feo" (ugly environment), she enjoys the sense of camaraderie she shares with other mariachis.

The fact that Susana and Alicia played in the plaza with their father's mariachi was raised by several mariacheras whom I interviewed. Many commented on the bravery and gutsiness of the two to accomplish such a feat. However, none were particularly envious expressing a desire to join them there.

Conclusion

While mariachi is a performative site for the production of both conservative notions of Mexican masculinity and femininity, it also becomes a site where those notions of gender and sexuality are disrupted. Mariacheras are, at once, a safe embodiment of Mexican and, in particular, Jalisco identities because they are "dependable," "moral" and "beautiful," thus reproducing Jalisco's claim to be the home of piety, European lightness and beauty. The women are reflexive of this stereotype and are happy to use it to gain entry into a masculine space. In Mexico, dominant identity narratives of nationalism and, by extension, mariachi have always been imagined as masculine. Female mariachis situate themselves in the national landscape by way of entering the most national of spaces, the performance of mariachi. To accomplish this, they have not entered as threatening female bodies marked by aggression or as butchy but rather as feminine. Thus, their performance becomes an unruly juxtaposition of beautiful and dependable women with the masculine macho mestizo image of mariachi. Here, I reminded of Michael Taussig's notion of mimetic excess: "Stable identity formations auto-destruct into silence, gasps of unaccountable pleasure, or cartwheeling confusion gathered in a crescendo of what I call 'mimetic excess' spending itself in a riot of dialectical energy" (1993:246). Their femininity affords a space to slip into the performance and disrupt it in subtle ways, revealing its duplicity and dialectal nature. So, while women in mariachi are, to be sure, located in relations of power concerning gender, they are neither complacent nor

rebellious. Rather, they are beautiful women enjoying new freedoms as artists while challenging, appropriating and invading a macho space.

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Notes

- 1 This article is based on 15 months of fieldwork in Jalisco from 2002 to 2003 funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Any translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- 2 In Spanish, the word *mariachi* generally refers to a musician or an ensemble, not a genre or a song type (rather, it is an adjective for songs and music). However, in English it can refer to the music, musician or ensemble. Throughout this article, I will use *mariachi* to refer to the music, a musician, or an ensemble. *Mariachi* as a musical ensemble consists of eight to 12 performers dressed in traditional cowboy outfits, called *trajes de charros* in Spanish, who play a range of string instruments (guitars, violins, harps, *guitar-rón* and *vihuela*) and one or two trumpets. *Mariachis* are most commonly comprised of men and are heavily associated with drinking, overt emotionality, fiestas and cowboys; they are virtually interchangeable with the stereotype of the Mexican macho. Although there are variations of *mariachis*, including traditional *mariachis* (sometimes referred to as *mariachis antiguos* or indigenous *mariachis*), *mariachis femeniles* (all-female *mariachis*) and *mariachis mixtas* (*mariachis* comprised of men and women), the overwhelming majority of *mariachis* in Mexico are all male.
- 3 *Mariacheras* are female *mariachi* musicians. The masculine version of the term, *mariachero*, is used infrequently compared to *mariachi*.
- 4 *Mestizaje* is the racial and cultural mixing of Spanish, indigenous and African peoples said to create the Mexican people and culture.
- 5 The work of María Teresa Fernández-Aceves (2006) on women's labour movements and other secular organizations in the 1920s to 1940s and Valentina Napolitano's (2002) work on religion, urbanization and gender in Guadalajara are also significant interruptions of the representation of women of Jalisco as uniformly conservative and Catholic.
- 6 Guadalajara is also known as the "gayest" city in Mexico. In Mulholland (2012), I examine the seemingly competing masculine landscapes of machismo and homosexuality in *mariachi* performances in Guadalajara.
- 7 The style of music most associated with *mariachis* is *ranchera* (country music). Solo vocalists who sing in this genre backed by *mariachi* ensembles are often referred to as *ranchera* stars, not *mariachis*.
- 8 For a detailed analysis of popular culture in the golden age, see Joseph, Rubenstein and Zolov (2001).
- 9 The adoption of the *traje de charro* was somewhat controversial. Originally, the outfit was worn by elite ranchers and still today, many *charro* associations object to the use

of the traje by mariachis. Moreover, mariachi aficionados object to working-class peasant musicians adopting the outfit of their likely oppressors (see Jáuregui 1990 for further discussion).

- 10 Jalisco is one of the most Catholic states in Mexico with 95.4 per cent identifying as Catholics in 2000, compared to the national average of 88 per cent and ranking third only behind the neighbouring states of Guanajuato and Aguascalientes as the most Catholic states in the country.
- 11 Jalisco and, in particular, the region known as Los Altos (the highlands), were considered the heart of the Cristero Rebellion, an uprising of Catholics against the revolutionary government's enforcement of several anticlerical articles of the Constitution. The clashes between the federal troops and Cristeros were bitter and marked by atrocities on both sides.
- 12 According to the 2004 Mexican Census (INEGI), Oaxaca (35.3 per cent), the Yucatán (33.5 per cent) and Chiapas (26.1 per cent) have the largest numbers of people who speak an indigenous language, in comparison Jalisco, with only 0.7 per cent. The national average was 6.7 per cent.
- 13 *Tapatío* is a word used to describe someone from the state of Jalisco.
- 14 *Las Perlitas Tapatías* can be translated as the Little Pearls from Guadalajara. Guadalajara is often referred to as the "Pearl of the West" or the "City of Roses." Members of this mariachi were not interviewed as part of this project.
- 15 Most of the mariacheras are between the ages of 16 and 25, unmarried and are also students. As a result, they do not work full-time but, between work and practice, they are playing music an estimated 40 to 50 hours a week.
- 16 The stereotype of male mariachis as drunks is also deeply gendered, racialized and classed.
- 17 An exception, however, was Susana, the vihuela player for Mariachi Mujeres de Guadalajara, who also played with her father's mariachi in the plaza along with her brothers, cousins and sister, Alicia. I will return to discuss these two women later.
- 18 See Jesús Jáuregui (1990, 1995) and Arturo Chamorro (2000).
- 19 Measuring and judging a woman's morality, virtue and patriotism based on the manner she styles her hair, although not unique to Mexico, does have a particular history. In her article, *The War on Las Pelonas: Modern Women and Their Enemies*, Mexico City, 1924, Anne Rubenstein (2006) tells the story of public anxiety and censure of the "pelonas," women who cut their hair short in bobs and wore flapper clothing that accentuated athletic, rather than curvy, feminine bodies.
- 20 The guitarrón is a large bass guitar unique to the mariachi. It is not unusual to see women playing violins in mariachi mixtas (both men and women) or, to a lesser extent, guitars. However, the idea of women playing the guitarrón, harps and trumpets is less normalized (although only Cornelio García stated this explicitly).
- 21 In Mexico, part of the tradition of the serenade is that the mariachi will keep on playing, annoying the neighbours, until the intended acknowledges the serenade by coming to the window. At the same time, the intended does not want to look too anxious to respond to the serenade too quickly.

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