ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: FROM MÚSICA DE CARRILERA TO CORRIDOS PROHIBIDOS AND NORTEÑA: MOBILITY, MEANING, WAR, AND THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF MEXICAN MUSICAL STYLES IN COLOMBIA

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This dissertation analyses the adoption and multiple layers of recontextualization of Mexican musical styles in Colombia since the 1930s, particularly *música norteña* and *corridos*, story-songs that narrate current events perceived by listeners to be "the pure truth" about the Colombian conflict involving insurgent guerrillas, paramilitary squads, military officials, and drug traffickers that plagued the country for nearly six decades. The dissertation analyses the processes of music production, circulation, and reception that enabled the rise of a Colombian genre family of Mexican-inspired musical practices that thrives today, in spite of being dismissed by the Colombian culture industries for their supposed lack of artistic value and authenticity.

Through a historic and spatial perspective the dissertation examines long-standing rhetorics of class and race difference in Colombia, from the nineteenth-century elite's conceptions of nation, modernity, and civilization to the project of multiculturalism that

currently undergirds Colombia's peace and nation building efforts. The dissertation highlights how these enduring discourses have been implicated in the disenfranchisement of both the musical practices and the participants that are the subject of this study.

A boom in the production of *corridos* in Colombia coincided with the intensification of the conflict throughout the 1990s. Named "*corridos prohibidos*" (forbidden corridos), the production and distribution of these compositions has since relied in the informal economy, since they continue to be shunned by Colombian mass media channels. The political economy of corridos prohibidos thus provides an apt case study of how contemporary musicians and audiences have forged relationships with musical piracy that they view as a beneficial partnership, differing drastically from the attitudes of the traditional recording music industry and its professionals.

The dissertation presents the current practices of corridos prohibidos and Colombian música norteña as vibrant spheres of cultural production from which participants derive a range of meanings and ways to mediate their lived experiences of violence and disenfranchisement, as well as pleasure and respite.

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by

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Dedication

In memory of Rogelia Susano Banegas, Laureano Vergara, Otto Schöne, and Maria Cecilia de Jesus, my grandparents.

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Table of Contents

List of Images

List of Transcriptions

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing Scenes and Discourses

The bullfight just ended as the sun begins to set behind the mountains. Some of the spectators leave while others rearrange their chairs and blankets under the nearby trees and on the slopes surrounding the open-air rink. Moments later, the sound of Ferney Bernal's amplified accordion powerfully rises above those of children playing, adults talking loudly, and a few vehicles attempting to make their way around the crowds. Set up inside of the bullfight rink, Ferney Bernal y El Grupo Zeta begin their live show with Dos Pasajes (Two Tickets). The audience immediately reacts to the corrido.*"This is a classic!" shouts singer and accordionist Bernal over the microphone: "let me hear you make some noise!" Electric bass, drums, and Bernal's vocals join in as they deliver a spirited performance of a song that has been popular with fans of the genre since the early 1980s, before any of the band members were born. Bernal's skillful accordion embellishments during the instrumental interlude elicit cheers from the audience, many of whom are now in the center of the dusty rink singing along, drinking, and dancing to the infectious polka-like rhythm.* (Field notes. Puli, Cundinamarca, August 21, 2012)

As it happens every Friday night, Las Aguilas del Norte take the stage at El Rancho de las Aguilas, where they've been the house band for over five years. Habitual customers are on every table in the dimly lit restaurant, and laughter and conversation are almost as loud as the band. I see mostly familiar faces, and notice one man I've never seen before that looks to be in his thirties or forties when he stands up and walks toward

the stage. Las Aguilas are almost done with their rendition of La Cruz de Marihuana (The Marijuana Cross), a corrido that became very popular in Villavicencio in the mid-1990s and is a staple in their repertoire. As soon as the song is over, the man asks for the microphone and gets up on the bandstand. He starts singing La Cruz de Madera (The Wooden Cross), an older corrido that tonight has an interesting effect on the audience. Everyone quieted down, and he sings to fully captive audience members, some of whom sing along almost inaudibly. (Field notes. Villavicencio, Meta, December 10, 2012)

Uriel Henao, the King of Corridos Prohibidos, is on stage in front of a multitude that came to his show, the culminating event of the festivities for La Virgen del Carmen, the patron saint of truck and taxi drivers that is celebrated throughout the month of July in Villavicencio and every small town in the rural Andes. A boy approaches the stage and Henao pulls him up. The boy starts singing one of Henao's most popular corridos, El Hijo de la Coca, a corrido that features a rags to riches tale of a boy left orphaned after his parents are killed in the conflict, and grows up to be a powerful drug lord. I watch a woman that I assume is his mother, who arrived with him and is standing now next to the stage. Her eyes are glued on the young performer and her face is almost motionless. She notices I'm next to her and says very softly and without looking at me: "His clothes were the gift of a relative. We have to go, it took us three hours to get here on the bus." The crowd excitedly sings along to the last verses of the song, and Uriel Henao has also joined the boy in singing." (Field notes. Villavicencio, Meta, July 15, 2012)

These examples illustrate some of the settings in which live performances of *música norteña colombiana* and *corridos prohibidos* take place, mobilizing thousands of fans every weekend across small rural towns in the Colombian Andes, working class neighborhoods in Bogotá, and the like in the regions of the *llanos* and the *amazonía* (Colombia's eastern plains and Amazonian regions respectively). Performances such as the ones described above challenged my initial ideas about the development of these music scenes as well as their repertoires, musical practices, contexts, spaces, and social significance in important ways, two of which are summarized below. The situations outlined above raised new questions for me regarding music, politics, and socio-economic relations in Colombia more broadly, which provided the basis for this dissertation.

First, the performances above are examples of a vibrant sphere of Colombian popular music that thrives in live events, which usually does not come within purview to people who are not part of or in proximity to their communities of participants, geographically and socio-culturally. Like other academics and journalists interested in the topic, I first learned about the musical groups mentioned above through the compilation CD series *Corridos Prohibidos* (Forbidden Corridos), which gave their music broader circulation since the late 1990s, but not enough to gain them exposure to larger Colombian audiences.

Colombian print media outlets of high circulation, as well as mainstream radio and TV, do not publicize nor acknowledge the existence of this sphere of musical activity. Concurrently and, I believe, also as a consequence, the scarce existing scholarly literature focuses primarily on the analysis of lyrics from compositions in the CD series

through various disciplinary lenses. This has, like dismissal from the media, contributed to obscuring the existence of these live music scenes, and also to limiting awareness of who the participants and repertoires are, and the range of meanings they may derive from listening, performing, and participating in various ways.[1]

Second, upon studying the limited existing sources, including journalistic and scholarly writings, and the tracks in the *Corridos Prohibidos* series in addition to conversations with Alírio Castillo – the ideator and producer of the compilation CDs – I was inclined to follow the lead of previous writings and consider the advent of *música norteña* in Colombia as a 1980s phenomenon, consolidated by the intervention of Castillo's marketing strategies ten years later. Upon focusing my research on live performances and extensive "hanging out" with musicians and fans, however, I came to realize that the repertoire in the compilation CDs Corridos Prohibidos allowed previous studies only a very partial idea of what participants sing, write, listen and dance to, and what they may think and feel about it.

Castillo prioritized compositions with topics about Colombia's rampant drug trafficking, including original compositions he sometimes commissioned from musicians with no other means of producing and distributing their music, as well as covers of Mexican "*narcocorridos*," which narrate stories of the drug trafficking in the Mexican-

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[1] Educated Colombians who have written about and circulated ideas about Corridos Prohibidos and their perceived audiences live mainly in cities like Bogotá, in "the good part of town," and in general do not frequent the places where these musical events take place, which are generally construed as dangerous and inaccessible. Thus the main sources of data for these studies have been the compositions, particularly the lyrics, in the above-mentioned compilation CD series, with little or no attention to the participants and practices that make-up their socio-musical contexts.

U.S. context.[2] Mexican *narcocorridos* came into vogue in the 1970s and 1980s, marketed by large international music circuits based in the U.S. and Mexico, and produced major stars such as the world-famous and multiple Grammy award winners *Los Tigres del Norte* (The Tigers of the North). Scholars and other writers utilizing Castillo's series and the producer's personal accounts as their sole data treated the Colombian songs and recordings as a novelty in response to the escalating drug economy and decades long Colombian war, and a derivation from the contemporary Mexican musical trend. What else can be inferred from the name of Uriel Henao's band which he formed in 1993 – *Los Tigres del Sur* (The Tigers of the South)?

That the Corridos Prohibidos recordings have become the main source, if not the only one in some cases, upon which academic arguments and popular opinions about the music and musicians in question have been constructed is telling of how little access to modes of popular music production and dissemination these groups of musicians have had, and how little academic interest their musical practices have attracted. The resultant writings about Corridos Prohibidos and música norteña colombiana, scholarly or not, is thus limited in quantity and scope, and works to blur much larger histories and significances of the circulation and recontextualization of música norteña in Colombia.

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[2] Although detractors argue otherwise, several Mexican scholars have stressed that *narcocorridos* are only the latest strand of what they see as a long-lived Mexican tradition of *corridos*, narrative ballads that portray current events and convey the anxieties of the participating communities. The term *narcocorrido* is contested by these scholars on this ground, as a sensationalist term that only serves to marginalize the genre (McDowell 2000; Valenzuela Arce 2003; Ramírez-Pimienta 2004; 2011).

Attention to performance styles and spaces, musical repertories, and interactions between participants during live musical performances and everyday life, in addition to countless conversations with participants and other Colombians – a typical ethnographic approach – revealed that the current practices of música norteña colombiana are without doubt embedded within the translocal circulation of Mexican musical styles, but reach back much further than the 1980s. They happen within a larger sphere of musical experience, within a continuum of reterritorializations of Mexican musics in Colombia which have fed into musical expressions that are deeply significant for many Colombians, while ignored in Colombian music histories, taxonomies, and studies of popular music.

These observations and realizations were the starting point for this study. This dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: what are the roots and routes of música norteña to and through Colombia? When, where, how, and why did Colombian adaptations emerge, and how did they articulate with particular social, political, and economic conjunctures at the time, at regional and national levels? Why has this long-standing sphere of Colombian popular music activity been historically dismissed by the intellectual elites and shunned by mass-media outlets? Who listens to corridos prohibidos and how are they meaningful for fans? Given that some of the most popular corridos among listeners in contemporary música norteña colombiana explicitly reference all facets of the long-standing Colombian war, how do these musical practices articulate their personal experiences of the war?

One of the assumptions in this dissertation is that addressing these questions and tracing the trajectories and multiple instances of recontextualization of música norteña in

Colombia from the 1930s to the present provide a lens for the critical examination of Colombia's complex political and cultural spaces, particularly regarding the unrelenting conditions of war plaguing the country for over sixty years.

The Issue of Naming

The musical practices examined in this dissertation do not have *a* name; in other words, they have not been validated as one identifiable musical genre among Colombian popular musics, and have been referred to with different appellations by different audiences in different temporal and spatial contexts, which is reflected in the title of this dissertation, which I chose to suggest a range of musical activity rather than one genre.

Mexican and Mexican-American música norteña as well as their Colombian covers and Mexican-inspired original compositions have been given an array of names in Colombia since the 1930s. *Música campesina* (peasant music), *música guasca* (also translated into "peasant music"), *música de cantina* (cantina music), *música montañera* (mountain music), *música de antaño* (music of yesteryear), *música de carrilera* (railway music), *música de despecho* (music of spite), *música para tomar* (drinking music), are all labels created by the Colombian music industry for Mexican musics and the fusion styles they inspired in Colombia.

Only since the mid-2000s have groups of musicians begun to refer to themselves as representatives of *música norteña colombiana*, a category that, at the time of this writing, has not been picked up by the Colombian music industry and traditional channels of mass media such as radio and TV. *Música norteña colombiana*, the term and the musical practices, coalesces through live performances, homemade recordings, and

within websites, blogs, Youtube, and other social media outlets created and maintained by communities of participants – mostly musicians and fans.

Genre names and classifications do not appear and stick spontaneously. The practice of naming is usually embedded in exercises of power, as famously suggested by Jacques Derrida (1995) that naming is always a political act. In this study, I refer to all of these categories as a Colombian "genre world" (Frith 1998), highlighting the continuities as well as the innovations that continuously shape and reshape them. My choice of *música norteña colombiana* for the title of the dissertation, however, is meant to prioritize a name nurtured by participants rather than capitalist entrepreneurs, thus highlighting the political and affective work that this particular formation accomplishes for them.

Encountering the Topic

I travelled to Colombia for the first time in January 2006, invited by Colombian friends that, like me, lived in the Washington D.C. area and enjoyed getting together with other Latin American expats to socialize, eat, drink, and dance. *Salsa* dancing on Wednesdays at a venue with a Colombian DJ was a habitual get together for us, and no social gatherings at their homes ended without dancing to *salsa*, *vallenato*, and occasionally *cumbia*, genres that became my primary sonic references for Colombia. My friends' families who were going to host us lived in Bogotá, the capital, and in Villavicencio, a mid-sized city in the Colombian region of the llanos, the eastern plains, about a five hour drive from Bogotá, which shaped my expectations of what kinds of music I could anticipate hearing.

My *cachaco* (native of the city of Bogotá) friends, mostly in their late-twenties to mid-thirties, mainly listened to rock and danced to the Colombian dance styles mentioned above. The references to *música llanera* in association with the *llanos* that we had planned to visit were overwhelming in the travel guides and music encyclopedias I consulted. At the time, I was at the beginning of the masters program in ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland and had no intentions of conducting research in Colombia, but as a professional musician specialized in other Latin American styles I saw the trip as an opportunity to learn more about and experience familiar and new Colombian genres.

My two-week trip to Colombia was spent mostly on the road, as the three cousins I was travelling with were exhilarated by being able to drive across the country for the first time after many years. Without the limitations of curfews and road closures announced unexpectedly by the guerrillas or the military, which had been constant over the previous ten years, there was a relative feeling of safety, in spite of the heavy military presence on the roads – war tanks and soldiers holding machine guns were stationed every three to five miles all the way from Medellín to our first stop, the town of Manizales.

When we arrived in Manizales, a mid-sized Andean town located in the heart of the Colombian coffee belt, we had a surprise. We had been unaware that the *Ferias de Manizales*[3] was taking place that week, and the town was so packed with tourists that we

[3] Manizales is a mainly agricultural town located in the center of Colombia's coffee belt. The *Ferias de Manizales* is an annual weeklong event including agricultural fairs and competitions, cultural presentations, bullfights, and a beauty pageant that every year elects *La Reina del Café* (The Coffee Queen). Different types of musical performances happen each night during the festival.

could barely find a hotel room. That night the *Festival del Despecho* (Festival of Spite) was taking place. It was my first time hearing about *música de despecho* (music of spite). One of my companions explained it as "music people sing when they are feeling very, very spiteful and want revenge." Another one said: "It is more like music that people drink with until they cry and swear against the person who did them wrong." My friends were laughing while explaining *música de despecho*, and it was obvious by their mocking gestures that they viewed the whole thing with contempt.

Advertisements for the festival announced stars of música de despecho that my friends had never heard of. Yet, they knew well a few verses of a song we heard on the street over loud speakers announcing the festival, and which they told me was a representative song of the genre:

Si no me querés/ te corto la cara *con una cuhilla/ de esas de afeitar*	*If you don't want me / I'll cut your face* *with a blade/ of the kind that's used for* *shaving*

I confirmed my friends despised música de despecho when they absolutely refused to go with me to the festival, when in every other way it seemed they were striving to help me have a good time.

La Cuchilla (The Blade), as I found out later the song was called, sounded unexpectedly familiar to my ears. Unexpectedly because it seemed far removed from my expectations of Colombian soundscapes. Familiar because it immediately reminded me of many summers spent in Bolivia visiting my paternal grandmother and extended family, who have ties to the eastern region of Vallegrande Province in the department of Santa Cruz, locally known as "Mexico Chico" (Little Mexico).

Birthdays and anniversaries on my Bolivian side of the family were celebrated with mariachis, easily found in every corner in their neighborhood. Mariachis were usually summoned by the elders in the family after enough eating, drinking, and dancing had taken place and it seemed that there was nothing left to do but listen to and attempt to sing along to songs that compelled everyone to embrace, drink more, and sometimes cry. A foreign visitor just dropping into one of my family's gatherings in Bolivia would probably feel as surprised as I was in Colombia by the realization of such a strong and significant presence of Mexican music in the areas I was moving through.

We travelled from Manizales to Bogotá, and from there to Sogamoso, a town surrounded by fertile agricultural lands in the department of Boyacá, in the eastern Andean *cordillera*. We stopped at a few roadside *tiendas* along the way, and I continued to be amused by the predominance of Mexican-sounding music - mariachi music, música norteña, styles I recognized but made me feel confused as I experienced a high degree of "schizophonia" (Feld 1994; 1996).[4] Were they Mexican or Colombian like *La Cuchilla*? My friends were no help, as they did not know how to name what we heard, while not feeling confused at all. "This is music for drinking," said one of them while shaking his hand in the air in a gesture of dismissal.

Upon arriving to the lowlands of the Colombian plains – the *llanos* – we were sitting at a curbside tienda in the outskirts of Villavicencio, the largest city in the region,

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[4] Initially coined by Murray Schafer, the term *schizophonia* was reformulated by Steven Feld (1994; 1996) to refer to the circulation of sounds that, through recording technology and dissemination, get separated from their places of production and stimulate new dynamics of identity as people recontextualize these sounds.

when a girl who could be about ten years old approached our table with a stack of CDs for sale in hand. Pictures of soldiers in camouflage and scantily dressed women holding machine guns provided the cover art for the mp3 CDs, which I did not buy but never forgot. As we left to continue our trip further into the llanos, a few partial verses of the song that was just playing in the background at the tienda continued to spin in my mind and I took note of them:

Mi patron es Tirofijo,	*My boss is Tirofijo,*
soy guerrillero de las FARC	*I'm a FARC guerrilla fighter*

Although the song was obviously a Mexican-style *corrido* and the accompaniment sounded like Mexican música norteña, this time there was no confusion; it was undeniably Colombian, as it referenced the longest-lived Colombian guerrilla organization, the *FARC* (acronym for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in Spanish), and its legendary commander Manuel Marulanda, alias *Tirofijo* (Sureshot). During that first visit to the Colombian llanos, I heard plenty of Mexican-style music, but not a trace of *música llanera*.[5]

[5] I saw a group playing and dancing música llanera live for the first time when I went back to Villavicencio two years later in 2007 to attend a friend's wedding. The reception took place at a farm and everything about it was meant to evoke a sense of *llanero* identity, including the open-fire llanero-style barbecue, the "llanero peasant" attire of the waiters and waitresses, and the music, all of which seemed to enchant the many foreign guests. Throughout the years I've been to Colombia before and during research, I only witnessed live performances of música llanera as part of folkloric displays of some kind, as the one in my friend's wedding, and in the only dedicated venue for the musical genre in Villavicencio. Recordings, on the other hand, are enjoyed for listening and dancing to in different types of social situations, as I experienced with Colombian friends.

In 2008, I travelled to Colombia again during the end of the year holidays. On New Years Eve, I joined friends and their extended family for a typical night of celebrating, in which there was much cooking and eating, playing with the children, drinking, and dancing. Around 4 am, I was about to retire when Jaime Segura, a man in his forties and one of my friends' uncles, called me from the corner where he was seated in the living room. Most of the other family members were either half asleep on the couches or had already left to their rooms. A few were still talking and drinking. Segura's hand gesture was unsure and it took me a few seconds to understand he was really signaling to me. He said in a slurred voice: "Come here, come here! I want to show you something." And pointing to his family members, he said: "They don't understand, no. You do, I know you will understand."

Segura gave me a pair of earphones, pushed the button of his mp3 player, and there it was! The corrido I had heard a year earlier at the tienda in Villavicencio. I asked the question I had been itching to get the answer for: "What is this?" "Corridos prohibidos. *El Guerrillero y el Paraco* (The Guerrilla and the Paramilitary)," answered Jaime Segura. I couldn't ask much more from Segura that night because he was very drunk and had a hard time talking. He continued playing corridos prohibidos, one after another, and we just listened quietly.

The story-songs were like mini tales of the war, with the many characters of the Colombian conflict as protagonists: poor war orphans turned into powerful drug lords; brothers fighting in opposing camps; outrageous contraband operations; corrupt politicians. Jaime Segura was drunk, but also listening intensely which I could tell by

small gestures and facial movements he was making as slight remarks during the climax of the stories, as if to call my attention to them.

Segura's wife, Claudia, came to check on us and smiled when she noticed what we were listening to. She said with a jovial tone: "This man is a *campesino* (peasant)! Look at what he likes to listen to! Don't pay attention to him, he is drunk and has no taste." I found interesting that Claudia attributed her husband's musical preferences to being a *campesino*. For a while, I didn't understand the connections between corridos prohibidos, música norteña, and música de despecho – musics that for me seemed to be in relationship with broad circles of transnational musical networks – and being a "peasant' in Colombia.

After this encounter with corridos prohibidos, I searched for recordings in the few remaining music stores in Bogotá at the time, but as I tried to describe the genre the best I could, the staff had no idea of what music I was talking about. At the time, corridos prohibidos and música norteña made in Colombia were not on Youtube and online searches yielded no results.

Two years later in 2010, I did not think twice when I had to select a topic for my dissertation. The fortuitous musical encounters I had experienced in the previous years in Colombia had sparked my curiosity and generated sets of initial questions that, however, changed after I began fieldwork, as discussed earlier in this introduction. However, two main themes that arose during pre-fieldwork continued to animate this study. First, the question of how production, reception, and performance of Mexican-inspired musical styles articulate dynamics of social class and rural-urban difference in Colombia. The second has been a driving force for this dissertation and was inspired by Jaime Segura's

moment of deep listening to corridos prohibidos that he invited me to share. Jaime Segura is an attorney and judge, who for many years worked in one of the units for kidnapped persons in Bogotá and had to constantly travel through and be stationed in areas ravaged by violent confrontation between guerrillas and paramilitaries. I've strived to understand what meanings and emotive attachments listeners may derive from moments of intense listening, especially as possible ways for the mediation of traumatic experiences of violence.

Organizing Threads

Music and Violence

A basic assumption undergirding this study is that culture and politics do not only mutually constitute each other, but also operate in continuity as extensions of each other (Hall 1997; Stokes 2004; Street 2012). This synchronism is exceptionally operative in contexts of violent conflict, and attention to it is crucial to an understanding of how it shapes cultural production and regulates its public presence. Keeping this in mind is helpful as one considers the multiple ways in which music and violence may be associated, and what types of related questions one might ask.

Contexts of violent conflict heighten the ways in which music can be instrumentalized in different ways, and ethnomusicologists have increasingly been attracted to these topics. Musical activity during war and political conflicts may serve as a tool of governmentality (Attfield 2012) as well as a form of dissent (McDonald 2012, 2013; McDowell 2009; Pettan 1998) and a tool for torture (Cusick 2006; Pieslak 2009). Music practices can also be scapegoated, based on the idea that certain kinds of music

incite violence and thus must be censored and kept outside the public cultural sphere (Cloonan and Garofalo 2003; Cloonan and Johnson 2008). In post-conflict situations, music has been examined as a potential medium for memorialization and reconciliation (Ritter 2009, 2012; Vicente 2012), and the idea that music provides a forum for peaceful coexistence has attracted the attention of ethnomusicologists as well (O'Connell 2011; O'Connell and Castello-Branco 2010).[6]

Three of the strands mentioned above are recurring threads in this dissertation. In spite of the name, corridos prohibidos have never been officially sanctioned in Colombia. Yet, their circulation and participation in the public cultural sphere has been restricted in a number of ways, one being the acts of self-censorship by radio and TV professionals that fear retaliation through physical violence if they play them. This sort of silencing of a cultural practice occurs as a direct response to the state of fear that for a long time became naturalized in Colombian life.

Corridos prohibidos, comparable to certain strands of rap, Buenos Aires' cumbia villera, and Rio's proibidão, are condemned and shunned on the basis of glorifying violence. As Vila and Semán (2006) highlighted in relation to cumbia villera, this type of musical prohibition has become more noticeable because these musical practices address topics that were not expressed before. They go against the grain of what Michael Taussig (2003) suggested in relation to paramilitary violence in Colombia and termed the "public secret:" those things that everyone knows but refrains from saying and doing.

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[6] For critical analysis of the idea of music as a natural medium for the promotion of peace see Araújo 2006; Birenbaum Quintero 2006; Ochoa 2006.

The third form of association between music and violence that has a direct impact on the production, circulation, and reception of música de carrilera, corridos prohibidos, and the other styles within this genre family has to do with the popular belief in music's redemptive power and capacity to promote peace. The instrumentalization of music with the purpose of stimulating reconciliation and peaceful coexistence has grown through festivals, concerts, and large events around the world, and has also been at the core of an array of musical coexistence projects sponsored by government agencies and NGOs in Colombia.

These projects are embedded in the new Colombian cultural politics ushered in by the new Constitution of 1991 created by a political alliance which, in an attempt to appease the uncontrollable escalation of the war, declared the multilcultural and pluriethnic nature of the nation (Wade 1995) in order to foster social integration and venues for civil participation. Cultural projects under this rubric include sponsorship of large festivals in which musics considered traditional and regional are promoted, as well as of a variety of smaller musical coexistence projects. The latter tend to prioritize two spheres of musical activity: Western classical music, which is uncritically deemed to be an apt vehicle for stimulating peace, and regional musics and those associated with minority groups, with the purpose of strengthening regional identities and expressive practices.

These discourses of music and peace have the effect of marginalizing even further types of music such as corridos prohibidos which, in addition to addressing violence too explicitly to be considered "peaceful," are not considered Colombian enough to be part of the sphere of validated Colombian popular musics and cultural projects.

I suggest, however, that another crucial reason for the denigration of the music genre family examined in this study is its rural and working class associations and the violence of representation against the poor and rural workers, which has been prevalent in Colombian politics. This sphere of marginalization has to do with violences that are not directly related to physical force, although they most definitely have harmful effects on the body because they can cause malnutrition and lack of adequate housing and medical care. They are "symbolic" and "systemic" violences, as proposed by Slavoj Zizek (2008); the first embodied in discourses of difference (race, class, region, gender) exercised mostly through language; the second referring to exploitative economic conditions. Zizek conceptualizes both these spheres of violence as constituting what he calls "objective" violence, which is the violence of everyday life, and that can become naturalized. "Subjective" violence refers to physical force, a type of violence primarily generated by objective violence. This study looks to prioritize a focus on objective violence, which is related to one more layer of violence, epistemic violence, the violence of knowledge production (Spivak 1993) that has been an intrinsic element of politics and power in Colombia throughout the post-colonial period (Castro-Gómez and Restrepo 2008; Rojas 2001; Róldan 2002).

Even if this project looks to prioritize a focus on the types of violence that are not necessarily articulated with direct physical harm, the social and political circumstances that engendered the spaces and conditions of mobility for the musical practices studied here have been for the most part acutely vulnerable to physical violence, in spaces of living removed from the protections of the state: the urban peripheries and rural areas. Throughout the dissertation, there are instances when subjective violence is directly

implicated in the precarity of these circumstances, but also in the maintenance and production of musical activity.

Mobility

This dissertation is a study of music and mobility. I do not deploy the trope of mobility as a theory to be applied in order to explain socio-musical phenomena. Instead, mobility is an organizing framework that provides a language and a prism to consider the workings of globalization, migration, different types of transnational and translocal networks, and movements of people, ideas, and material goods.

The music expressions examined in this study were in the past and continue to be enabled by various types of human and musical mobilities, as will unfold in the chapters of this dissertation. Música norteña and corridos in Mexico coalesced at the crossroads of transatlantic moves, transnational migrations, and the circulation of sounds through recordings and radio. Their arrival and recontextualization in Colombia provide a prime study of mobility, considering the circulation of sounds through recordings and radio, trains, and jukeboxes, while participating intensely in the movements of people through rural-urban migrations and forced displacement due to war. The newer generation dedicated to the sphere of musical activity they call música norteña colombiana forges new spaces for the circulation of sounds and ideas making use of social media and distributed recording techniques.

In this study, I lean on a notion of mobility in a broad sense, referring to both spatial and musical mobility, and find Tim Cresswell's and other cultural geographers' ideas very useful to consider "mobilities alongside moorings" (Hannam et al 2006),

which highlights movement without doing away with the importance place and space have for people. As Cresswell (2006) suggests, focusing on mobility highlights processes, trajectories, practice, and performance while considering the importance of place and of feelings of belonging: "Practices of mobility animate and co-produce spaces, places and landscapes […] "through the movement and enfolding of a myriad of people and things" (9). Practices of mobility, noted Cresswell (2006), "have also come to be associated with different ways of being and thinking, and different ethics, aesthetics and ecologies" (6).

The contemporary attention to place as a productive site of humanistic inquiry grew in the 1970s, mostly with the work of human geographers such as Yi-Fu Tan (1977) and Edward Relph (1976) seeking to refocus on human activity and their relationships with place. The following statement by Edward Casey synthesizes well the emphasis on place that animated the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s: "To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the place one is in" (1996:18, quoted in Verstraete and Cresswell 2012:12).

In the 1990s, the world conjunctures of globalization and mass migrations stimulated a shift in academia towards a heightened attention to movements led by global economic and political forces. Edward Said (1994) commented that the current moment is marked by mobility and migration, yet, calling attention to institutional forces of "confinement" that restrict movement such as nationalism, asylums, and lack of education (402-403). James Clifford (1997) proposed an approach to social analysis that prioritized "roots and routes," in order to avoid thinking of locales, people, and cultural practices as static and bounded to a stable place, considering that people are no longer "here" nor "there." The influential works of Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Gupta and

Ferguson (1992) have contributed greatly to shift the idea of identity located in authentic, bounded places towards locating identity and culture within various forms of mobility rather than fixed places.

The focus on mobility in the way described above prioritizes both movement and moorings, recognizing that mobility has always been a part of place. There have never been pure places to begin with, to paraphrase James Clifford (1997). In her work *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, anthropologist Anna Tsing (2005) highlights how mobility cannot be taken as a fluid process, and that "friction," the forces detaining mobility, occurs everywhere and is part of processes of mobility.

Considering the politics of mobility and friction as a continuum has focused my attention and provided a framework to address various types of mobility but also restrictions to movement, and movement that is forced upon people, such as forced displacement by poverty and violence.

Genre

This dissertation maps the emergence in Colombia of a continuum of musical practices inspired by Mexican styles, to which the Colombian music industry has given labels that change continuously, underlying the commercial purpose of marketing musical novelties to consumers. In a way, this practice has served to de-historicize this vibrant sphere of Colombian musical activity, and I contend, to stigmatize them even further on the grounds of being purely commercial products that lack artistic value.

I chose to conceptualize these musical practices as belonging to a "genre world" (Frith 1987), in order to highlight not only a musico-historical continuity but also the

constellations of listening modes and habits that have become attached to them, and provide habitual listeners with the "horizons of expectation" (Jauss 2000) that allows for understanding these musical styles as belonging together in various ways.

I draw from a notion of genre grounded in reception theory, such as the work of literary scholar Hans Jauss (1982, 2000), who argues for attention to the experiences of recipients (listeners in this case) as they do the work of recognizing and grouping texts (songs in our case) within genres and categories. This approach is meant to highlight the agency of recipients, rather than attributing complete power in the process of categorization of musical practices to producers and distributors such as music industry and media professionals. The creation and recognition of music categories is necessarily a process of negotiation, and recipients always have their own means to categorize the music their hear according to present and past sonic experiences.[7]

Although continuities are important to map and provide frameworks for recognition, like places and identities, genres are not bounded stable entities, as the emphasis on a musical continuum in this study's genre highlights.

As suggested by Fabian Holt (2007), an approach to genre focused on practice and performance and grounded in fieldwork shifts the aim from defining genres towards understanding them. In this study I at times attempt to demonstrate musical continuities, which is part of my project of historicizing the musical practices discussed. I am more interested, however, in understanding the ways in which these musical styles encode

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[7] Some popular music scholars like Simon Frith (1998) and Keith Negus (1999) have emphasized the role of listeners' expectations, mostly drawing form film scholar Steven Neale (1980, 1990) who in turn also draws from literary theorists like Hans Jauss.

particular habits of listening and particular ways of feeling associated with them, which bounds them as a broader continuum within a genre world. “Definitions and categories serve practical purposes and tell us something about how people understand music,” noted Holt (2007: 9). However, attention to reception and practice opens up windows into “how musical categories operate in cultural processes and how people make sense of them” (ibid).

An underlying assumption running through my approach to thinking about genre is that modes of listening become attached to musical sounds, songs, and styles, and that this is partially why genres can also accumulate particular ways of feeling that make them meaningful. Modes of feeling associated with sound, texts, or songs are often part of mutually shared codes among habitual listeners; they are also part of the “horizons of expectation” that allow habitual listeners to group musical sounds they haven't heard before into familiar categories. In her work on Portuguese fado, Lila Gray (2013) wrote about: “the stickiness of fado as a genre in circulation and […] genre as an object around which affects, histories, life worlds, and social practices coalesce” (9).

One of the inquiries that guide this dissertation is about the meanings that recipients derive from listening to corridos prohibidos. I examine how the initial reception of corridos prohibidos was embedded within listeners’ and participants’ already familiar modes of listening and feeling that were attached to other styles within the style’s genre world. Considering that both collective and individual meanings can be attached to genres as music styles, sounds, repertories, and texts are flexible vehicles for the production of meaning. Different spheres of experience and musical meaning are explored in relation to the collective sentiments that arose at particular historical and

political moments, such as the peasant marches in the Colombian Amazon region during the 1990s. As Feld and Fox (1994) suggested, "concrete acoustic signs (e.g., musical pieces, techniques, styles, tones of voice, phonetic and instrumental icons and sonic poetic tropes) become public, articulate, and powerful symbolic condensations of diffuse or inchoate social sentiments and identities" (34). In the case of corridos prohibidos however (see Chapter Five), during a three-month long march by campesinos in the Putumayo region in a context of acute violent confrontation, the mobilization of the emergent musical genre aggregated not diffuse, but very palpable social and personal sentiments that acted in the world.

Outlining the Field and Methodology

As I arrived to Colombia for fieldwork in 2012, I had to deal with the problem of access, which I knew in great part would determine the inquiries I would be able to pursue. The year before, during a summer research trip, I had travelled to Velez, a small town in the Andean department of Santander, to attend a live performance of música norteña colombiana for the first time. After travelling for over four hours, on roads that were barely marked, I realized that getting to live performances would pose a problem. Performances happen every weekend, spread all over the departments of Boyacá, Santander, Cundinamarca, and Bucaramanga; in other words, all over the eastern Andes region of Colombia. That time, I went with Alirio Castillo, the producer of Corridos Prohibidos, and a friend of his who is also a music producer. It was a nice weekend away from the city for them, but obviously that type of ride was not something I could count on for my fieldwork.

This was one of the reasons why I chose to live in Villavicencio, in the plains region of Colombia about five hours by bus from Bogotá, mainly because of the accessibility of the venue mentioned at the opening of this chapter, El Rancho de las Aguilas. Located in the center of Villavicencio near other restaurants and bars, the place attracts a regular clientele that comes every Friday and Saturday nights to socialize and listen to the house band, Las Aguilas del Norte. I envisioned that living nearby would allow me to conduct a traditional ethnography in one place and with a stable group of participants including musicians and fans. This happened to a certain degree, and every week when I was in town I frequented El Rancho, where I came to know and work with quite a few people. The venue was a gathering place for all of the norteño musicians in town, who were about 35 to 40 at the time, which provided me with an entry point to get to know them quickly.

Yet, very soon I realized that many of the live performance opportunities for *norteño* musicians in Villavicencio were actually in the form of private functions that happened in the outskirts and in the surrounding countryside, on farms and in cantinas. The musicians did not feel comfortable to bring me along, no matter how much I insisted.[8]

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[8] I only came to fully understand the reasons why I wasn't welcome to attend these performances when I understood the dynamics of everyday economics and social life in Villavicencio. These performances, like any other type of private music performance and not only of this type of music, brought together people of various backgrounds, including people involved with the illicit drug and emerald businesses. As one musician told me many months into my time of fieldwork, they felt it was not safe to bring me.

Differently than in Villavicencio and the llanos region, most rural towns in the Andes have town festivities that are sponsored by local government and private citizens, which happen very frequently. Grupos noreños based in Bogotá make their living by performing at these public festivals which can be agricultural fairs, beauty pageants or celebrations for the towns' patron saint. Alirio Castillo, my first contact into the music scene that he helped create, helped tremendously by providing me with phone numbers and sometimes phone introductions to dozens of groups based in Bogotá. At the time I began fieldwork in 2011, most musicians in this scene were not active users of Internet resources.

Attending live performance as explained earlier in the chapter, I became acquainted with the repertories musicians performed live which were drastically different from the recordings through which I got to hear about them. Both their repertoires and their stated musical influences pointed to a continuum between their practices and those of older groups they categorized as *música de carrilera*, which I had not heard of before. Upon not being able to find existing written sources on those musical practices and the artists my interlocutors mentioned so emphatically, aside from one paragraph references in works by other music scholars in Colombia,[9] I had to come to grips with the need to expand the scope of my "field" even more, this time not only spatially but temporally.

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[9] These sources are by ethnomusicologists based outside of Colombia (Waxer 2002; Wade 2003; Santamariá-Delgado 2006). There was no literature on música de carrilera to be found by Colombian scholars, and no mentions in guides about "Colombian music."

Corridos prohibidos and música norteña performances also happen in Bogotá, but in areas that were also fairly inaccessible for me, as a woman transiting alone and coming from more affluent areas of the city. The venues that feature these musics live or recorded are mostly located in El Sur de Bogotá (southern Bogotá), which holds the neighborhoods considered dangerous and best avoided by “gente de bien” (good people). I didn't have my own place in Bogotá and whenever in the city, I stayed with friends who all lived in areas categorized as “extrato 6 “ and “extrato 5,” which correspond to the most affluent parts of the city, within a system that numbers every neighborhood from 1 to 6 according to the cost of real estate. My upper class Colombian friends were never short of horrified whenever they saw me trying to venture into getting to “extrato 1” neighborhoods, which I accomplished by learning to use the Transmilenio, a superb transportation system that connects all of urban Bogotá. In this way, I was able to visit and spend time at the homes of musicians and fans I became closer to during fieldwork. I only went to a few live performances in El Sur, when I employed the same strategy I used to get out of town, travelling with the musicians.

So, my “field” changed drastically from what I had envisioned pre-fieldwork. It involved travelling constantly through the towns of the rural Andes, the city of Villavicencio in the eastern lowlands where I lived and occasional trips to surrounding farms and towns, stays in Bogotá in between my weekend trips to the countryside, and a two-week trip to Medellín, the center of the Colombian music industry at the time of the rise of música de carrilera. My own experience of mobility in Colombia during research also impacted my choice for the trope of mobility employed in this dissertation.

I will now summarize my methodology, which is intrinsically related to the needs that arose from and the conditions of fieldwork and the field. My fieldwork was multi-sited, including several locations in Colombia over a total period of fourteen months, and an additional four weeks in Mexico. I engaged in participant-observation, attending live performances and participating through dancing, selling the musicians' CDs to the public, and socializing with musicians and fans. In the town of Villavicencio where I chose to live, I interacted often with a core group of about twenty musicians and dozens of fans.

Travelling often to other regions of Colombia, primarily to small towns in the Andean countryside, I attended performances and met other groups of musicians and participants. I was able to access these venues by contacting the musicians, who mostly lived in Bogotá, during the week and scheduling the weekend trips ahead of time. I attended dozens of live performances and conducted over two hundred "formal" (recorded through audio and/or field notes) interviews with musicians, fans, non-fans, and producers, in addition to many instances of informal conversations, socializing, and music-making. The data was collected in the form of field notes, audio and video recordings, and photographs.

My fieldwork also included archival research at the libraries in Bogotá and Villavicencio to collect data from newspapers and other printed media. Nonetheless, as the styles I study have been seldom documented, the historical portion of my research was accomplished mostly through gathering oral histories from older record collectors, musicians, and cantina owners in Medellín and surroundings, who held a wealth of knowledge about the early Colombian music industry, particularly about the development of the genre family featured in this study. The information I gathered from Mexican,

Mexican-American, and Colombian recordings that circulated in Colombia, some dating back to the 1930s and kept by record collectors, was also invaluable for tracing the routes of Mexican música norteña to and through Colombia over time.

I examined Colombian, Mexican, and Mexican-American recordings dating back to the 1930s extensively, as well as journalistic reportage, and writings by Colombian *cronistas* (chroniclers) of social life. Youtube provided me with invaluable insights into the fandom of older música de carrilera as well as current trends, particularly through the examination of threads of comments posted by listeners. It also allowed me to contact groups and music collectors which in some cases became close collaborators.

About Mexican Música Norteña and Corridos

Música Norteña

Música norteña (northern music) refers to a set of stylistic performance features and a type of ensemble that took shape and has continued to transform for nearly a century, through complex crossings of people and cultural practices converging from and pointing towards diverse geographical places. The significations it holds for different groups of people are equally multiple. Many northern Mexicans consider it a traditional musical expression emblematic of Mexico's northern region, hence the name música norteña.[10] In the transnational context of the Mexico-U.S. border crossing, as Catherine Ragland (2009) argued, it articulates forms of belonging and collective memory for

[10] For a critique of the categories "north" y "northeast" and an analysis of música norteña as a regional construction see García Flores 2006. For the construction of identities and cultural symbols of nation and region in Mexico since the postrevolutionary period see Pérez Montfort 1994.

immigrants. And because of internal and transnational migrations, the constant development of new modes of musical production and circulation, as well as the growth of networks that facilitate various forms of connectivity, música norteña has been recontextualized in new millieus and geographies, acquiring new meanings and styles as examined throughout this dissertation.

Centered on the accordion and *bajo sexto*, a 12-string Mexican instrument that resembles an acoustic guitar but is larger and deeper, the emergence of the norteño ensemble and style can be mapped by examining the trajectories of its two core instruments and the movements of musicians and audiences that brought it into being.

The term accordion designates a variety of instruments that share formal characteristics but can vary significantly in mechanism and design, and thus timbre and stylistic possibilities. Patented in 1829 in Austria, the first instrument to be named *akkordeon* was a perfected version of similar technologies at the time, constituting an innovation as it allowed for the possibility of producing chords, hence its name. Artisanal accordions were used for a variety of European regional musical styles during a good portion of the nineteenth century, before giving way to mass-made instruments. Mass-production facilitated their commercialization at a multinational scale, which had an impact on reformulating musical practices and tastes in the last decades of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth (Harrington, Helmi and Kubick 2013).[11] Mass-produced accordions were affordable, versatile, and portable, and made possible

[11] For a thorough history and analysis of the social life and mechanics of accordions, see Marion Jacobson 2011.

substituting large musical ensembles for smaller ones, as they allowed musicians to play melodies and accompaniment simultaneously and loudly. Convenient for travellers and easily adaptable to the popular musical styles of the time such as polka, waltzes, and marches, accordions were widely commercialized in Europe and abroad (Jacobsen 2011).

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the most significant waves of migration out of Europe took place mostly among rural workers. Accordions then had already become central to many European popular music practices and, in the context of migration, came to profoundly impact cultural production in the places they settled in.[12] A significant number of German immigrants, most of rural background, settled on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border in the Rio Grande Valley region of southern Texas and northeastern Mexico (Barrick 1987). With them came diatonic accordions that quickly became very popular for the performance of local repertoires.

Accordions were initially played in the Rio Grande Valley region with no other instruments, or sometimes with a *tambora de rancho* (type of drum) or one violin, and occasionally accompanied by a six or seven-string guitar, or a *bajo sexto*. They became more common early in the twentieth century and turned into a staple in weddings, cockfights, and other social gatherings, providing music for dancing and popular

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[12] George Lipsitz views the accordion as a fundamental vehicle for the expression of European immigrants; a repository of memory and of various ways of interpreting the world. Concurrently, brought over by immigrants, accordions quickly became central to several new musical cultures such as cumbia and vallenato in Colombia, norteña in Mexico, merengue in the Dominican Republic, chacarera in Argentina, and baião in Brazil. For more on the various music cultures spurred by the accordion as it arrived to the Americas in the hands of migrants, see *The Accordion In the Americas: Klezmer, Polka, Tango, Zydeco, and More!*, edited by Helena Simonett (2012).

melodies and rhythms, which included both local styles as well as recontextualized musical forms of European derivation: *redovas*,[13] schottishes, waltzes, and polkas previously performed by *orquestas típicas* (typical orchestras) composed of clarinets, *tamboras*, violins, and an array of string instruments common in northern Mexico at the time.

By the early 1930s, the pairing of accordion with *bajo sexto* had become a preferred combination for the performance of these styles for musicians who were often seasonal agricultural workers and performed on both sides of the border. Their audiences were other migrant rural workers and communities of Mexican immigrants who had settled in southern Texas, particularly during and after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). This wave of migration from Mexico into southern Texas only intensified the already steady movement of *norteños* going north, and often crossing back to Mexico (Peña 1986 and 1999; Ragland 2009).[14]

Little is known about the bajo sexto regarding place of origin and historical development, and much of what has been written about it is speculative.[15] What has been

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[13] *Redova* is an adaptation of the European waltz usually played in 9/8 meter and in the lower register of the accordion. Also referred to as *vals bajito* ("short waltz") on both sides of the southern Texas- northern Mexico border, it is an instrumental dance music with a fast waltz feel. It is usually a showpiece in an accordionist's repertoire due to its complex rhythm (García Flores, 1991).

[14] For the early history of accordion playing in the Mexico-Texas border, see also Ayala Duarte, Alfonso. 1998. *Músicos y música popular en Monterrey (1900-1940).* Monterrey, Mexico: Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo León, and Strachwitz, Chris. 1993. Liner Notes to the CD *Narciso Martinez: Father of the Texas-Mexican Conjunto.* El Cerrito: Arhoolie.

[15] For examples of speculations about the bajo sexto's origins and history, see Peña 1986:39, Ragland 2009:205, and Medrano de Luna 2014:19.

agreed upon among scholars and is more relevant to my study is that the bajo sexto was one of many Mexican chordophones used in *orquestas típicas*, a type of string and wind ensemble that was widespread in Mexico since the mid-nineteenth century, in which the role of the bajo sexto was to provide bass lines and accompaniment. A few references have been found as well to the bajo sexto as an accompanying instrument used by street *corridistas*.[16] What scholars of the bajo sexto also seem to agree with is that the instrument held strong associations with proletarian and rural practices and people, and that by the 1930s it was easily identifiable as a companion of the two-row button accordion popular in the Mexico-Texas border (Díaz Santana 2014).[17]

The emergence of the norteño ensemble coincided with the rise of new technologies of musical production and distribution, namely recordings and radio, which undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation of the core norteño instrumentation and the delineation of some of its early stylistic features in which the role of pioneer musicians was paramount. In the 1920s, large U.S.-based recording companies such as Brunswick,

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[16] Street *corridistas* were itinerant performers not uncommon in central and northern Mexico in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century who sang and often also composed *corridos* – narrative ballads about current events, catastrophes and popular heroes– whose social standing was comparable to beggars.

[17] Prior to the 1920s, one-row diatonic button accordions were predominant, being mostly left aside in favor of the two-row accordion by the 1930s. Since he 1950s, most accordionists have adopted the diatonic accordion with three rows of buttons for the right hand. They usually have 31 buttons, and some contemporary models have 34. Diatonic means that when pressing a button, two distinct pitches are produced, one when opening the bellow and another when closing it. The left buttons produce bass notes and chords and can vary from 8 to 48 buttons. The use of the left hand buttons fell into disuse in the norteño ensemble as initially the bajo sexto took over the bass function. Later the *tololoche* (a Mexican adaptation of the contrabass) fulfilled this role and eventually was substituted by the electric bass.

Vocalion, Okeh, and Bluebird [18] began operations to record Mexican and Mexican-American musicians and singers under the new "ethnic music" category, following an already proven model of musical market segregation. Encouraged by the commercial success obtained from producing "hillbilly" and "race" records, marketing labels for music recorded by and intended for poor rural whites and African Americans respectively, these record labels established recording units, usually in restaurants and hotels, in San Antonio, Texas, and soon after in Dallas and Los Angeles, ushering in a boom of recordings by Mexican and Mexican-Americans who performed a variety of styles.

The first commercial recording of Mexicans in the United States is attributed to *Los Hermanos Bañuelos* (The Bañuelos Brothers), a duet that sang with guitar accompaniment and recorded the corrido *El Lavaplatos* (The Dishwasher) in Los Angeles in 1926 for Victor. Recordings by other singing duets with guitar accompaniment became widely popular among border audiences, such as Pedro Rocha y Lupe Martinez, Maya y Cantú, Los Madrugadores, and Chicho y Chencho all of whom became well-known in rural towns of Antioquia, Colombia.

Lydia Mendoza, the Mexican-American singer and guitarist who became widely known as "the poor people's song bird" and had a prolific career for over fifty years also made her first recordings with her family in a San Antonio hotel for the Okeh

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[18] Okeh and Bluebird were subsidiaries of the large multinational companies Columbia and Victor-RCA respectively, specialized in producing "hillbilly" and "race records," labels for music recorded by and marketed to poor rural whites and African Americans.

Phonograph Corporation in 1928.[19] As a family they recorded as *Cuarteto Carta Blanca* White Letter Quartet), and for many years, Lydia, her mother Eleonora, and her sisters María and Juanita also formed different duets that recorded extensively as *Las Hermanas Mendoza* (The Mendoza Sisters). Lydia Mendoza started recording solo albums in 1936 and throughout her career recorded for many established companies in Los Angeles as well as for smaller regional labels based in Texas such as Discos Ideal, which established her as a celebrity of border music with enduring hits which many other singers and groups recorded again later. Her repertoire was immense and she sang many songs she learned while growing up in northern Mexico and from her mother, including *corridos*, *huapangos*, and *canciones* (Broyles-González 2001; Koegel 2002).

Although her recordings appealed to Mexican Americans of various social standings, Mendoza deliberately catered to rural workers and the working classes. The following text of a song composed exclusively for her to sing exemplifies how her songs conveyed the working class sensibilities she chose to promote:

> Cancionera de los pobres/ cancionera y nada más;
> mi guitarra es mi compañera/ de mis cantos de arrabal.
>
> I am a singer of the poor/ a singer, nothing more;
> my guitar is my companion/ of my songs from the slums
> (Strachwitz and Nicolopolus 1993:251)

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[19] Lydia Mendoza recorded more than 1,000 songs in many different styles popular with Mexicans and Mexican Americans. She did, however, consider herself and her music "norteña" because she learned the majority of her repertoire as well as her style of guitar (12-string) accompaniment by listening to and watching norteño musicians while growing up (Broyles-González 2001).

The first recordings of accordion and bajo sexto were made by accordionist Narciso Martinez, born in Reynosa, Mexico, and by Mexican-American bajo sexto player Santiago de Almeida. In their first recordings in 1936 Martinez devised a way to play the accordion in order to leave the bass parts and chords to the bajo sexto. The duo made dozens of recordings of instrumental music, as neither of the musicians sang. Their performance style, however, was paramount in the development of the new norteño sound. They became the house musicians for Discos Ideal, a small regional label in Texas, and made dozens of recordings accompanying various singers (Peña 1986; Strachwitz 1993).

One of the first duets that sang and accompanied themselves with the emerging norteño style were Jesus Maya (bajo sexto) and Timoteo Cantú (accordion), whose repertoire was mostly composed of corridos about border crossing, confrontations with the Texas rangers, and contraband, which decades later would become a major strand of música norteña in the 1970s epitomized by the contemporary norteña super stars *Los Tigres del Norte*. Maya y Cantú were among the most popular grupos norteños of the early 1940s, also due to their appearances on regional radio stations. Other groups popular at the time were the larger ensemble Los Madrugadores, based in Los Angeles, and various duets formed by members of the group such as Chicho y Chencho, who started to record as early as 1931 (Peña 1986, 1995; Strachwitz 1991, 1993; Ragland 2011). The group's recordings feature various string instruments and accordion, as well as occasional flute and clarinet.

In the 1930s, female duets became very popular in música norteña, among them Carmen y Laura, and the duets formed by the women in Lydia Mendoza's family. The

most successful female duet to emerge at the time was *Las Hermanas Padilla*, whose family imigrated from northern Mexico to Los Angeles in the 1930s (Salem, Nicolopulos, and Strachwitz 1991). Their repertoire included corridos and canciones rancheras, many of which became staples in the repertoires of Colombian groups that recorded covers and made new arrangements of the songs popularized first by Las Hermanas Padilla. Mexican and Mexican-American female duets were accompanied by different types of ensembles, including norteño style duos and mariachi bands, and the mixing of accompaniment style was characteristic of the recordings produced by many of the duets that became popular in Colombia at the time..

One of the duets most associated with consolidating the norteño sound of the Mexico-U.S. border in the 1940s was *Los Alegres de Terán*, who were seasonal agricultural workers and musicians who sang and accompanied themselves on the characteristic button accordion and bajo sexto, and also made dozens of recordings accompanying other singing duos.[20] They made recordings with Las Hermanas Padilla, Dueto Rio Bravo, and Las Jilguerillas, which I saw in record collections of Medellín's *coleccionistas* (collectors). One of the innovations that made Las Hermanas Padilla successful was their adaptations of boleros into the norteño style. Their recordings feature

[20] While both the norteño and the tejano conjunto styles emerged from similar roots and where developed by the same groups of musicians transiting on both sides of the border, since their meanings, audiences, and eventually some stylistic features changed beginning in the 1950s. Música norteña became mostly associated with Mexico, seasonal workers, and recent Mexican immigrants in the U.S., while the conjunto tejano developed more grounded in the Mexican-American experience in Southern Texas. For a social history of música norteña, see Ragland 2009. For an analysis of class, Mexican-American identity, and music grounded on the development of the conjunto tejano, see Peña 1985 and 1997.

various types of accompaniment, which had a great impact on the development of Colombian *música de carrilera*.

Música norteña, considered a working-class music both in Mexico and in the U.S., gained more mass-media exposure after the 1960s, and exponentially more in the mid-1970s with the meteoric rise to success of Los Tigres del Norte, a group of young musicians from Sinaloa, Mexico, who scored two major hits that crossed over to broader audiences and also internationally. Both were corridos that narrated the exploits of border crossing contraband, at a time when drug trafficking across the border was just beginning to gain public attention. The first, *Camelia La Tejana* (Camelia the Texan), has a woman as the protagonist, a momentous twist in a very male dominated world of corrido tales. The second hit was *La Banda del Carro Rojo* (The Gang of the Red Car), which became a foundational corrido for Colombian groups in the 1980s, yet not in the version of Los Tigres del Norte, as will be explored in Chapter 2.

Corridos

Corridos, alongside *romances*, *villancicos*, *décimas*, and *coplas*, belong to a constellation of song types of poetic-narrative character transported by the Spanish and the Portuguese through colonial routes which, although differentially according to time and place, were "cultivated by both popular and learned circles" (Loza 2004:848). At the height of their popularity at the moment of Iberian colonial expansion, romances and corridos were widely disseminated in the form of *pliegos sueltos* (broadsides) and *romanceros* (printed collections of romances). The term corrido first appeared in the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy (DRAE) in 1729, defined as follows:

> . . . a certain sound that is played on guitar or another instrument, to which the so-called *jácaras* are sung. It was given this name due to the light and fast manner in which it is played (Vol 2: 617).

Jácara is in turn defined as:

> . . . joyful *romance* in which happenings of the immoral life were commonly sung; tale; story; reasoning; tall-tale; lie or gibberish (DRAE Vol 22, 2001: 878).

Definitions of corridos in scholarly studies across place and time almost invariably link them in some way to the Spanish romance, and appear in works by researchers interested in outlining the origins of many localized forms of corridos in Latin America and other areas of Iberian influence (see Simmons 1957). Ramón Menéndez Pidal, the leading researcher of the Spanish romance during the first half of the twentieth century, characterized Spanish romances as "brief epic-lyrical poems that are sung to the sound of an instrument" (1928: 9). Typically structured in octosyllabic verses, romances descend from older *cantares de gesta* in vogue in the XI through XIV centuries when they were spread by ambulant *juglares* and *trovadores*. This older Spanish genre and the analogous French *chanson de gestes* belong to a body of epic-narrative song forms common in many regions of medieval Europe, such as British and Scottish ballads (ibid).

More than in any other place, corridos have a central position in Mexico's cultural imaginary, which is evidenced by their quantities, popularity, and longevity, as well as by the prominence they have had in the interests of scholars of various academic fields over time. The narrative ballad genre has also generated unending controversies ranging from determining its origins and definitions to, most recently, heated debates surrounding

narcocorridos, which have been subject to censorship in many stances, official and unofficial.

Although with considerable divergences, many researchers of Mexican corridos agree that the genre has roots in the Spanish romance ballads that spread throughout Latin America during the colonial period, a view that was advanced by Armando Duvalier (1937) and Vicente T. Mendoza (1939). Their work strived to establish the parameters of the genre in terms of lyrical form, structure and thematic content, such as the use of octosyllabic verses grouped in stanzas of four, with assonant or consonant rhyming in every other verse. Duvalier suggested that some of the following primary formulas should be present as well, in order to characterize a corrido: the singer's opening address to the audience; place and time of action and name of the main character; main message; main character's farewell; composer's farewell. Later studies deriving from abundant collection efforts and research based on regional corrido traditions challenged the views of Mendoza and Duvalier by emphasizing that indigenous contributions to the development of the Mexican corrido led to great regional variances of corridos (see Serrano Martinez 1973 and Catherine Héau 1991). Many scholars came to agree with the proposition by Merle Simmons (1957) that:

> . . . the corrido is characterized by a lack of precision which makes definition or precision most difficult [and] this impression is heightened by the extreme confusion that exists relative to the nomenclature which is employed in labeling the compositions grouped under the general heading of *corrido*. The latter is at best a generic term (22).

There are, thus, many different regional varieties of corridos in Mexico, which sometimes have little more in common than their denomination. However, the largest body of corridos composed until the 1950s comes from the central Bajío region and from

northern Mexico, arguably because this was the epicenter of the Mexican Revolution, which sparked the composition of thousands of corridos. These corridos also correspond to the main selection of songs examined in the early works of Vicente T. Mendoza and A. Duvalier (Avitia 1997). The clear similarities with the Spanish romance prevailing in corridos from the Bajío and in corridos norteños and their greater numbers may thus explain the basis for the view that there is in the first place a homogeneous "Mexican corrido" and that it is a "direct descendent" from the Spanish romance, as proposed by Mendoza (Héau and Giménez 2004: 629). Defining corridos thus refers more to their cultural bearings than to aesthetic considerations, being dependent on the perceptions of those who compose, perform, and listen to them. The basic parameters of form and structure outlined by scholars may serve as guidelines, but cannot stand as strict models.

Mexican corridos have served to narrate key moments of Mexican history, and to convey happenings of importance to local communities. As popular narrative songs, they served as vehicles for the feats of popular heroes of the days of the independence war in the early 1800s and during the Mexican-American war (1846-1848) and the increased border conflict it generated. The Mexican Revolution involved the armed uprising of large portions of the peasantry and workers of the mining and textile industries that challenged the ruthless dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, and sparked a peak in corridos' production and popularity, spreading news of the battles for a largely illiterate rural population. The themes of what scholars often call "historical" or "traditional" corridos (Avitia 1997; Ragland 2009) include the exploits of pre-revolutionary Robin Hood-type figures who confronted the authoritarian Porfirian regime, tales of border conflict and

smuggling, and stories about revolutionary heroes such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

The corrido is thus deeply entwined with Mexican society and culture, as from the time of the Mexican Revolution it became strongly associated in the collective imaginary with the history of upheavals of the rural masses. Héau and Giménez (2004) stress that during the post-revolutionary period, the corrido became strongly associated with the struggles of campesinos, "to the point of turning into a sort of metonymic symbol of them" (629). It became emblematic of a facet of an "authentic" Mexican identity furthered by rising nationalist state policies that came to rely on the affirmation of cultural expressions that valorized, although arguably much more symbolically than through practical social and economic measures, rural and working class Mexicans. This was done through the works of educators, politicians, folklorists and musicologists, and aided by the growth of powerful media outlets - especially radio, recordings, and cinema (García de León 2009: 33). Mexican corridos therefore have become part of the idea of a cultural patrimony of the nation, a collection of practices that, as put by Ruth Hellier-Tinoco (2011), "were molded as national repertoires and as representations of *lo mexicano*" (61). Corridos of the revolution and even older ones are still recorded today by popular groups of música norteña, which attests to the enduring presence of the genre.

Aside from local, community-based repertoires, the best-known older corridos are those that appeared in hit movies of the Mexican cinema's golden age in the 1940s-50s, and those that gained commercial recorded versions. Corridos may be accompanied by various types of ensembles. In the heyday of corridos that served to spread the news throughout nineteenth-century Mexican rural communities, they were performed mainly

by poor, rural singers who accompanied themselves on string instruments common in Mexico at the time, the Spanish guitar, *guitarra septima*, bajo sexto, or harps of various sizes (Simmons 1957; Peña 1985).

Corridos may be performed by mariachi ensembles, by solo singers or duets with guitars, by grupos norteños, and by *bandas Sinaloenses*, a style of brass band performance originally from the Northwestern state of Sinaloa that since the 1980s became highly commercialized. Incorporating electric instruments, its huge popularity in Mexico and among Mexican Americans in the US furthered the appeal of corridos for new generations (Simonett 2001).

The growth of the Mexican recording industry since the 1930s brought transformations as corridos became increasingly commercialized, such as shorter formats. In the 1940s and 50s, influential norteño recording groups such as Los Alegres de Terán further contributed stylistic and compositional changes that became predominant in newly-composed corridos, such as the *canción-corrido* format, which, although maintaining the corrido's strophic form and rhyme scheme, often features a refrain and excludes the corridistas' opening address and farewell (Ragland 2009:9). At the time, these groups also helped reinforce the increasingly popular norteño ensemble with accordion and bajo sexto as the primary vehicles for the modern corrido, which in many ways was decisive for the continuity of corridos' popularity and vigor (ibid). These innovations also included the establishment of a repertoire that became standard for commercial grupos norteños, with corridos of outlaws and smuggling as an important component.

Although smuggling has been a common theme in corridos since the nineteenth-century with the establishment of the new, contested political border between Mexico and the US, corridos specifically addressing the smuggling of illicit drugs have been recorded since the 1930s, and provide an antecedent to the wave of drug traffic corridos that rose exponentially beginning in the 1970s (Herrera-Sobek 1979; Ramírez-Pimienta 2011). Aided by a transnational recording industry overlapping Mexican and US-based musicians, producers, promoters, and audiences, corridos about the drug traffic, or narcocorridos, as the media refers to them, have not only driven the growth of audiences for corridos and the music styles that accompany them, but also of a vast amount of writings about them, in the popular media and in academic circles.

Corridos in Colombia

In Colombia, survivals of Spanish romances exist in oral tradition across the country, but, rather than called romances, they are most commonly known as *versos*, *coplas* or *cuentos*, being often recited rather than sung (Beutler 1969; Farid 2012:48). However, in the Colombian llanos, the *corrido* or *corrio llanero* has flourished as a regional oral tradition shared with its neighboring Venezuela. With examples dating from the days of the independence campaign in the 1820s, there have been epic corridos corresponding to periods of violence and political turmoil since, such as the *Guerra de los Mil Dias* (Thousand Day War) and the *Revolución Llanera* (Revolution of the LLanos) of the early 1950s (Ortegón 2012). In spite of undergoing processes of folklorization and efforts to bringing these practices to larger audiences, corridos llaneros have not reached a broader sphere of dissemination outside of local, community-based

performances, and recently-established folkloric regional festivals that aim to foment new compositions and spark interest in the younger generations.

Most typical Colombian corridos llaneros exalt rural life and work in the llanos, with references to brave men on horses, bucolic landscapes and animals, transmitted by oral tradition. They may be recited or sung, and the *joropo*, a syncopated local music genre, provides the accompaniment, performed with *cuatro*, *capacho*, and *harpa llanera*. However, during the wave of generalized violence of the late 1940s to early 1950s ("La Violencia"), a body of corridos was composed, inspired by the clashes among campesino rebels, and legal and illegal armed forces organized by *caudillos* (authoritarian rulers), partisan interests, and the military. In the 1950s, these corridos were sung during the armed insurrection in the llanos and among rural guerillas in Boyacá, Cundinamarca, and Santander, where violence was most acute. Their melodic content and performance style with vocal duet and guitar indicate a clear influence from Mexican-style corridos, which were very popular at the time in those regions (Castro Hernández 2000:177). Even if few commercial recordings of this repertoire have circulated, the corridos of Efraín González, a pivotal figure in the conflict, and of *Sangre Negra*, a popular bandit immortalized by the composition, are well remembered (Riveros 2012a). Some recordings did well commercially at the time, for example, the corrido "*Somos Indefensos*" ("We are Helpless") for recording label Vergara from Medellín, which sold the impressive amount of one hundred thousand copies (Castro Hernández 2000:176-177).

As the llanos have been one of the regions where corridos prohibidos reached most popularity and many performers and composers have ties to the area, I became interested in examining any possible correlation between corridos llaneros and corridos

prohibidos. I asked Norberto Riveros, who has composed dozen of corridos for the label Corridos Prohibidos, to what degree the regional corridos had been a part of his musical life and influential in his composition practices. Riveros was born and raised in a small *vereda* in a rural area two hours away from Villavicencio, the largest city of the llanos, where he currently lives. Growing up in poverty, he began singing at age twelve in exchange for any small amount of cash he could earn. Although familiar with the long, half-recited, half-sung corridos llaneros he heard from men in the fields and in nearby pueblos, Riveros sang mostly popular songs that were in demand in the cantinas and tiendas where he found an audience, which led him to learn a good number of Mexican *rancheras* and corridos, and later to join a mariachi ensemble at 13 years old when he made his way to Villavicencio. Riveros said that, although he composes in many genres, including joropos and other Colombian styles, his inspiration to create the corridos recorded in Corridos Prohibidos comes from the older Mexican corridos he heard in movies and on the radio while growing up and later interpreted as a mariachi singer.

Riveros' remarks exemplify what I heard from other musicians I interviewed or had informal conversations with in Colombia. For musicians I talked to, Mexican corridos and música de carrilera have been their model and inspiration to compose and perform their own corridos, and have also provided a large portion of the repertoire that Colombian grupos norteños currently perform live.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 1 continues with a section on Mexican música norteña and corridos, with the purpose of providing the reader with references for some of the conventions and

associations attached to them. I draw from secondary sources to briefly outline the roots and routes of these genres prior to their arrival to Colombia.

Chapter 2 examines the processes of reterritorialization of Mexican música norteña in Colombia beginning in the 1930s with the rise in international circulation of musical sounds through recordings, radio, and jukeboxes. The chapter also examines how since the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth, governmental initiatives and the work of intellectuals charted a Colombian musical map that articulated hierarchies of region, race, class, and gender that mediated the formation of local audiences for emerging popular musics. These practices had the effect of validating certain spheres of cultural production, while marginalizing others, as was the case with the emerging recontextualized practices of Mexican-inspiration such as *música campesina* (peasant music), and later *música de carrilera* (railway music). The latter part of Chapter 2 examines the work and style of two groups that became the main musical influences for the musicians I worked with primarily.

In chapter 3, I examine the rise of a thriving scene of música norteña in Villavicencio, at a time when the drug economy had a grip on all aspects of life in Colombia. I provide a close examination of how this scene emerged in a context where previous Mexican and Mexican-inspired musics were predominant in the city, and compare it to the rise of música llanera, which by the 1960s and more so in the 1990s came to represent regional identity. My main argument is that the consolidation of a musico-regional identity centered in Villavicencio, fueled by discourses of multiculturalism, displaced other musical practices to a marginalized position that

translated into lack of economic opportunities and social stigma for musicians and their audiences, many of whom were people who had been displaced by war and poverty.

Chapter 4 examines closely the emergence of corridos prohibidos, considering the phenomenon as a synergistic process between the commercial enterprise of the producer Alirio Castillo, and the reception of the new genre among audiences, which fueled their popularity. I look at the rise of corridos prohibidos in relation to the peasant marches happening in 1996 in the Colombian amazon region, and utilize the concepts of critical event (Das 1996) and structure of feeling (Williams 1977; 1981) to provide an analysis of the relationship between music and political struggle, and the sentiments that were mediated through the new emergent musics. Using an approach to genre that highlights the agency of recipients (Jauss 2000), I also situate the emergence of corridos prohibidos within the continuum of musical practices of Mexican-inspiration that sustained it.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between music and the mediation of traumatic experience. While pondering about the work of historical memory-building projects, often through music, in Colombia, I consider how the narratives in corridos prohibidos may open spaces for particular ways of knowing, remembering, and narrating a violent past. The latter part of the chapter highlights the new generation of Colombian musicians and on "música norteña colombiana," the term they choose to refer to their musical practices, which they see as embedded in a Colombian musical tradition that can be traced back to earlier groups and styles of música de carrilera, and also as part of a transnational circulation of musical styles within Mexico, the U.S., and Colombia.

Chapter 2: Música Campesina, Música de Carrilera, Música de Despecho

Introduction

October 24, 2012. *A mild breeze blows in as Ramiro Arias and I reach Parque Berrío, an old park full of large trees and monuments in the heart of the commercial center of the city of Medellín. On my first day in the capital of Antioquia, the pleasant weather is a reminder of why it is called "the city of eternal spring." The park, surrounded by high rises and traffic-jammed streets, is packed with people coming and going, children playing, vendors, teenagers on their cell phones hanging out, and adults of all ages quietly sitting on benches or socializing in different ways. Arias and I are attracted by a small multitude gathered around the fountain in the center of the park and by the music barely audible, mixed in with the sounds of the metropolis. Getting closer, we see and hear the two men whose voices and instruments fill the soundscape:*

> Perjuro mis copas pero no por vicio,/ tampoco por frio menos por calor/
> Perjuro mis copas si estoy aburrido/ porque he perdido mi querido amor."
>
> I swear by my shot glasses but not because of vice/ not because of the cold or the heat/
> I swear by my shot glasses if I'm bothered/ because I lost my dear love.

The musicians are middle-aged and wear 'alpargatas' (peasant footwear) and visibly worn out clothes and hats. They sing in parallel thirds, and at the end of each stanza the last syllable is sung in a melisma outlining a descending second, strikingly resembling to my ears of melodic contours typical of Mexican música norteña and ranchera composition and performance practices. Maybe the duo is singing a rendition of an actual Mexican song, one of many that I've never heard before. Or perhaps this is a Colombian music style that I'm not familiar with, which shares stylistic features with

Mexican music but does not have any relation with it. I don't want to make assumptions. I continue listening just as many people around me. The two men accompany themselves with guitar and tiple*, the latter providing melodic interludes every two verses and melodic fills between the vocal lines:*

> A nadie le importa si soy un borracho/ a nadie le importa mi amargo dolor.
> A nadie le gusta/ tener desengaño/ a nadie le gusta perder un amor.
>
> Nobody cares if I'm a drunkard/ nobody cares about by bitter pain.
> Nobody likes to be disillusioned/ nobody likes to lose their love.

*To my ears, the distribution of bass lines and chords in the guitar accompaniment to the song in triple meter, the tiple's melodic interventions, as well as the lyrics and melodic content, sung and instrumental, continue to sound patently similar to many typical Mexican norteño-style valses I have heard before, but played with a Colombian tiple fulfilling the role of the accordion. "How do you call this music?" I ask Ramiro Arias. "*Música campesina paisa *(peasant music of Antioquia)," says Arias immediately. "Or* música guasca *(also translated as peasant music), or* montañera *(of the mountains). There are always campesinos singing here at Parque Berríos," he explains. "Where else can I hear this music? Are there recordings?" I continue asking. Arias shakes his head slightly as he answers: "Here and maybe* 'en el campo' *(in the countryside) or in some cantina where a couple of campesinos like these two might decide to sing. Recordings?"(short pause) "Yes, but only old recordings. I don't think anyone records this kind of music anymore. You will find newer recordings with the name* música guasca *but the music will sound very different, with more instruments. Nowadays there is no difference between what people call* música guasca *and* música de carrilera*. This here is*

real música campesina*, the way it was done by campesinos when recordings of this music began."*

As I hear Arias categorizing the music we just experienced as 'música guasca*' and* 'música campesina*,' I immediately recall the blog of Fabio Moncada, a young paisa (native of Antioquia) music collector with whom I exchanged several emails and phone calls before deciding to travel to Medellín for research. Moncada's blog entry about* 'música guasca*' states:*

> Música guasca: name used in Antioquia (Colombia) to refer to música campesina or montañera […] In the decades of 1930 and 1940 Mexican music was (and still is) very heard in Antioquia, Colombia, specially by the campesino population. This Mexican music by artists such as Ray y Lupita, Lydia Mendoza and Las Hermanas Padilla was known as 'música campirana' as in reference to música campesina or from el campo (countryside). At the time campesinos were called 'guascas' [and] for this reason this 'música campirana' also started to be called 'música guasca.' In addition, música campirana or guasca was distributed by sellers through the Ferrocarril de Antioquia (Antioquia Railways) (inaugurated in 1929); therefore this music that was sold and heard in the carrileras del tren (train railways) was baptized with the name 'música de carrilera.' In the decade of 1940 and in the following years, because of the taste for Mexican popular music disseminated by the radio and Mexican cinema, the Antioquean campesinos took it to themselves the work of creating their own corridos, rancheras and huapangos.

Through the musical performance I had the fortune to come across that afternoon at Parque Berríos, for the first time I had a sonic glimpse of the creative work of musical recontextualization that Antioquean *campesinos* "took to themselves" since the 1940s, as described in the passage above. This excerpt from Moncada's blog is a quote he took from the book *Música del Pueblo, Pueblo* (Music of the Real People) by Alberto Burgos Herrera (2006), a doctor, occasional radio host, and prolific chronicler of Antioquia's musical life in the twentieth century. His book is not found in Medellín's bookstores, but rather sold in establishments owned by record collectors and circulated among

aficionados of *música guasca* such as Fabio Moncada and Ramiro Arias. It is, however, one of the scarce attempts done as yet to document a large piece of the musical lives of a lot of 'people people' of Antioquia during the twentieth century. Written in a sympathetic tone, *Música del Pueblo Pueblo* features mostly anecdotal accounts and a series of brief biographical entries for over 300 musicians who performed and recorded during a span of over 50 years for Medellín-based record labels. Although lacking in historical precision, and factual and bibliographical information, Burgos' book contributes towards the recognition of a sphere of Colombian musical life relegated to the margins of popular culture, dismissed as vulgar and supposedly lacking in cultural value by elite commentators whose utterances have had the power to legitimize or stigmatize Colombian musical practices.

"*Música del pueblo, pueblo*" is how Burgos described the music he heard while growing up in the 1940s and 50s in Robledo, a working class neighborhood in Medellín. The repetition of *pueblo* in the title conveys a colloquial figure of speech meant to emphasize that, rather than signifying a general constituency of the 'Colombian people,' the author is referring to the *real pueblo* as in the 'common people'.[1] As Burgos explained in his book's introduction, *el pueblo* in his title refers to "*el campesino total*

[1] 'Pueblo' in mostly agrarian Latin America in the first half of the twentieth century more often than not meant poor peasants and working classes. The meaning of *pueblo* in Colombia, suggests Herbert *Tico* Braun (2007), differently than in places where populist regimes looked to incorporate diverse segments of the population into discourses of nationalism, has been historically associated with "los de abajo" (those from below), who suffer a chronic condition of humiliation and lack of participation in the idea of the nation (31).

(the 'total peasant')," with "their *ruanas* (woolen ponchos), *sombreros*, and machetes *terciados* (across their backs)" (Burgos Herrera 2006:9).

In his childhood, Alberto Burgos witnessed the rapid transformation of his neighborhood with the arrival of thousands of campesinos displaced by the violence unfolding in the countryside during the period known as *La Violencia* (1948-1953). Neighborhood cantinas, often owned by newly urbanized campesinos, were important places of socializing for recent arrivals to the city, just as they were in rural towns, with music as a centerpiece. Burgos described his experience of living right across from the "*cantina disfrazada de tienda*" (cantina disguised into general store) called *Tienda Mixta Sinfonia* (*Tienda* Mixed Symphony):

> Mostly on Saturdays, this gentleman who hailed from Frontino tended to his *paisanos* (fellow countrymen) who had been displaced by violence […] We had to listen to the music playing at Don Alejandrino's whether we wanted to or not, because as I tell you, his *tienda* was located right in front of our home. Then we listened to Ray y Lupita, Lydia Mendoza, Las Hermanas Padilla, Los Madrugadores, Los Relicarios, Los Trovadores de Cuyo, El Conjunto América, and many more singers and groups; that's when I learned, still as a boy, that people called this [music] 'música guasca,' that 'guasca' meant 'montañero' (of the mountain), and that this was the music that was listened to by the '*campesino total,'* in this case, Alejandrino and his companions (2006: 10).

The Mexican and Mexican-American groups cited in this passage[2] became immensely popular in Colombia in the 1930s and gave rise to localized musical styles that, in spite of involving hundreds of Colombian musicians, singers, and composers, selling millions of recordings between the 1950s and 1990s, and being significant for so

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[2] Although not explained by Burgos Herrera, all of the groups and singers cited in this passage are Mexican or Mexican-American, except for Los Relicários, a duo formed in 1948 in Antioquia that recorded both covers and original compositions, and the Argentinean Los Trovadores de Cuyo, a quintet that had its first incarnation in 1927.

many listeners, have generally been left out of Colombian music histories and taxonomies of popular culture. Having received a range of appellations over time assigned mostly by professionals of the Colombian music industry, these reterritorialized musical styles constitute a musical complex, conceptualized in this dissertation as as a Colombian genre world" (Frith 1998) that has never been validated as such. Although occupying a marginal place within the broader sphere of popular music genres endorsed by the cultural elites and official Colombian culture projects as representative of Colombians, this continuum of Mexican-inspired musical practices has been deeply culturally significant for generations of Colombians who have embraced them as *their* music.

In this chapter, I examine the routes of Mexican musical styles to and through Antioquia, particularly música norteña, and processes of recontextualization[3] that took place between the 1930s and the early 1990s. I do so employing a historical perspective and in relation to other foreign and local music genres that over the course of the twentieth century became central to Colombian popular culture and social life. Ideas about music as representative of local identities in Colombia have been pervasive and are crucial to these concerns, which I examine in regard to the Andean region and its place within the nation. I look at how recorded music began to circulate in the 1930s and the

[3] I use the term recontextualization rather than localization to highlight that processes of circulation and mobility are constantly shaping musics and contexts. "Localization" instead invokes the idea of "local," which may infer bounded and static properties. Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier (2005) uses the term "recontextualization" in reference to the processes through which music practices get validated and associated with particular locales (216).

following decades, and at the social, economic, musical and political conjunctures and transformations that framed the processes through which local adaptations emerged and were commercialized with the emergence of the Colombian music industry based in Medellín in the mid-twentieth century.

The Andean region and most specifically Antioquia has been since the nineteenth century central to elite discourses of regional and national identity associated with a romanticized image of the Colombian peasant and countryside, with the *bambuco* as its musical embodiment. One of this chapter's central arguments is that the musical practices of the *pueblo pueblo*, or the 'real' Antioquian peasants suggested by Burgos, came to be construed by elite commentary as degenerate practices of campesinos that lacked the spirit of "*colombianidad*" (Colombianness) (Restrepo Duque 1989). They have thus been historically dismissed as a purely commercial enterprise devoid of aesthetic and cultural value.

The first part of the chapter examines how dominant ideas about region, identity, and nation took shape beginning in mid-nineteenth century Colombia and were deeply implicated in the rise of understandings and discourses about music of a literate elite inclined towards Eurocentric ideals of civilization. This process was reconfigured in the context of rapidly expanding transnational circuits of musical circulation since the first half of the twentieth century with emergence of recording technologies, yet the notions of race, social class, and rural-urban difference continue to be implicated in discourses about music in Colombia.

In the second half, I look at the rise of Medellín as a main center for the consumption and later the production of recorded music in Colombia, and situate the

arrival and reception of Mexican musica norteña and ranchera in relation to other foreign and Colombian musical genres such as tango, bolero, bambuco, and music of the Colombian Atlantic coast. I argue that música norteña and its adaptations came to be construed as the music of an "other" that did not fit comfortably into dominant discourses of tradition/modernity, rural/urban, folkloric/popular, or local/cosmopolitan, thus falling outside of any realm of validated Colombian culture. I examine how Mexican música norteña was reterritorialized and fed into the emergence of music forms centered in the city of Medellín, the hub of the Colombian music recording industry between the 1940s and 1990s. I situate these processes in relation to debates about popular culture and the waves of rural-urban migrations into the city instigated by the socio-political violence that swept the Colombian countryside in the mid twentieth century.

Between the 1950s and 1990s, local adaptations of música norteña derived into an array of musical expressions that the Colombian music industry has since categorized under various labels. The terms *música guasca, música campesina, música de carrilera, música de despecho, and música popular* have been used somewhat interchangeably to name musical developments within an emergent Colombian genre world that, although often discounted by critics as no more than a collection of vulgar and/or purely commercial products (Restrepo Duque 1989; Baquero Nariño 1990), is among Colombia's most popular musics.

I draw from writings by scholars and music commentators whose works do not address Mexican música norteña specifically but provide valuable information about the Colombian recording industry and the circulation and reception of foreign and regional musical styles between the 1930s and 1980s (Wade 2000; Waxer 2002; Bermúdez 2004,

2007, 2009; Santamaría 2006, 2014). These works in combination with extended interviews with musicians, cantina owners, aficionados, and record collectors I was able to conduct over a period of three weeks in Medellín in October of 2012 and by phone and email before and after inform the insights I develop in this chapter. I was also able to gather a wealth of information from close examination of recordings dating from the 1920s to the present, which the music collectors that collaborated with me generously shared along with their memories and passionate opinions about music in Medellín.

Medellín, a City of Musical Memory

Writing about how Afro-Cuban musical styles were adopted in Cali, Colombia, and became associated with the city's working class inhabitants before turning into one of Colombia's favorite popular musics, Lise Waxer (2002) described Cali as "the city of musical memory," highlighting the role of *viejotecas* (oldies clubs) as places for socializing and listening to old salsa records that were crucial in the constitution of the city's 1990s salsa scene (4). I borrow the expression to refer to Medellín, the capital of the department of Antioquia located in the Colombian Andes' central cordillera, where, although not called viejotecas by locals, similar sites abound, being often an extension of the homes of record collectors. There, for example, the terms *música vieja* (old music) and *música de antaño* (music of yesteryear) are categories used broadly, referring nostalgically to recordings of Argentine tangos, Mexican boleros, and Ecuadorian pasillos that arrived in Colombia between the 1920s and 1940s, sounds of the past that the city has become associated with through the works of dedicated listeners, the local music industry, writers, and government initiatives.

In her rich social history of how bolero, tango, and the Colombian bambuco participated in Medellíns' social life between 1930 and 1950, ethnomusicologist Carolina Santamaría-Delgado (2014) stressed the important role of the city's cafes and cantinas in disseminating a variety of international music genres. Santamaría-Delgado highlighted the importance of these recordings in the formation of Colombian audiences for popular music, distributed by a growing international business of recorded music that was based in the U.S. since early in the twentieth century and rapidly established important centers of production and distribution in key Latin American cities, such as Mexico City and Buenos Aires. Although focusing on the circulation of Argentine tango and the Mexicanized bolero, Santamaría-Delgado also pointed, even if in passing, to the presence of a variety of other genres such as Mexican ranchera, American foxtrot, and Ecuadorian vals and pasillo, noting that the records originally housed in public establishments such as cafes and bars provided the foundation for most of the record collections in existence in Medellín nowadays. There, however, I found that the many amateur record collectors also contain a rich archive of memories and recordings of Mexican música norteña and the local adaptations it gave rise to since the late 1940s, alongside the much more talked and written about tangos, boleros, valses, and pasillos.

One of the first insights I had of the co-presence of música norteña with other musical genres of foreign provenance in Medellín since early on happened soon after I arrived to the city for fieldwork, and Ramiro Arias and I went for a stroll into the heart of Medellín's commercial downtown. Making our way through the city's active rush hour, we walked down Carrera 50 towards the limits of Guayaquil, a busy neighborhood located in the old market district that in the past also housed Medellín's main train

station. With the opening of the station in 1929, the zone was flooded with shops, markets, bars, pensions, and brothels, becoming a vibrant center of confluence of commerce and people from all walks of life, and a main point of congregation for newly arrived campesinos. Stigmatized for many decades by middle and upper class city residents as a hub of lower class cantinas and bars, crime, prostitution and decadent bohemia, social life in Guayaquil also provided the backdrop for great musical activity for a good portion of the twentieth century, attracting bohemian intellectuals and academically trained as well as working class and newly urbanized musicians and listeners (Betancur 2000; Santamaria 2006, 2014).

A longtime lover of música vieja, including the music of pioneer duos of Mexican música norteña, Ramiro Arias had invited me for a *tinto* (black coffee) at one of his favorite spots: Salón Málaga, a bar/café founded in 1953 that in the past had enjoyed the same reputation as its surrounding neighborhood. Today, however, the establishment is an icon of a past musical golden era that peaked with the rise of a progressive local music industry. Soon after we passed the busy San Antonio metro station, there was the historical venue, with its bar, tables and mostly male customers visible from the sidewalk. Arias informed me that until fairly recently, *mujeres decentes* (decent women) would not frequent the establishment, but that that had changed. On the sidewalk, there were boxes containing dozens of old LPs for sale on a table set against the right corner rails of the building that houses Salón Malaga. On display that day, there were records by Helenita Vargas, the Colombian queen of rancheras in the 1960s and 70s, a compilation of famous tangos by Carlos Gardel, and a 1960's album of Ecuadorian *pasillos* interpreted by a Colombian *estudiantina* (string ensemble). There were also LPs by Antioquia's own

sister duo Las Hermanas Calle, the "queens of música de carrilera," whom the musicians of Colombian norteña I worked with cited repeatedly as one of their earliest influences, which was my main reason for deciding to go to Medellín.

As Ramiro Arias and I entered the cafe, I stared at the pictures of stars of decades past covering the walls of the large main hall, and at the two jukeboxes from the 1940s still in operation. My biggest surprise, however, was to spot, alongside the international and local music icons, photos of early pioneers of Mexican música norteña who, contrasting with the stars immortalized by Mexican cinema throughout Latin America like Agustín Lara, Pedro Infante, and Jorge Negrete, have remained largely unknown outside working class audiences within the U.S.- Mexico transnational migrant circuits, or so I thought. On the walls of Salón Málaga and of other cantinas and musical *fondas* I had a chance to visit in Medellín and surroundings, there were pictures of Lydia Mendoza and her musical family, Los Madrugadores, Chicho y Chencho, and Las Hermanas Padilla. Thousands of 78 rpm records, singles, and LPs of Mexican and Mexican-American música norteña are also carefully kept by *coleccionistas* (collectors) and aficionados, many savaged from retired jukeboxes and cantinas. These recordings provide windows into facets of musical life in Antioquia and Medellín that have been rather left out of commonly circulated accounts and histories of Colombian popular musics.[4]

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[4] For example, Medellín is distinguished as the Colombian capital of tango, and the city has several establishments and musicians dedicated to it, as well as tango dance schools, festivals, and tango tours for tourists that celebrate it as part of the city's cultural memory. The large circulation of tango in Medellín since the rise of the transnational music industry, its acceptance among the middle and upper classes, and the fact that

Mexican música norteña, although under a variety of different appellations, has been present, adopted, and adapted in the Colombian Andes for as long as boleros, tango, and Afro-Cuban musics have, cases of foreign musical reterritorialization in Colombia that have been acknowledged, studied, and celebrated.[5] Mexican música norteña, however, has had a shadowed, even if substantial and continuous, presence in Colombian musical life. This lack of recognition and the precarious status of norteña and its Colombian musical offshoots frames their production and reception to the present day, including the contemporary corridos prohibidos that I first set out to research. In my view, this can only be grasped by tracing the development of the discourses of an intellectual elite that since the mid-nineteenth century engendered a map of Colombia's geographical, racial, social, and musical makeup in which musical practices were categorized, evaluated, and portrayed in various ways as intrinsically tied to notions of race, region, civilization, and literacy. These early hierarchical socio-musical discourses greatly participated in shaping the listening habits of the newly forming Colombian audiences for popular music in the first decades of the twentieth century, a process that took place hand in hand with the growth of the transnational circulation of recorded music and the practices of musicians and entrepreneurs that influenced the establishment of an incipient Colombian music industry.

Argentine singer Carlos Gardel, the maximum exponent in the history of tango, accidentally died in the city in 1935, are some of the elements why "tango was adopted as an intrinsic part of Medellín's urban culture" (Santamaría Delgado 2006).

[5] In 2000, tango was declared "artistic, cultural, and social patrimony of the city" through the City Council's Agreement 12. Later in the same year tango was given the same status at the departmental level, being now considered "artistic, cultural, and social patrimony of Antioquia" (Quiceno, Muñoz, and Montoya 2008:2).

Musical Taste and Distinction

As we drank coffee, Ramiro Arias mentioned that most in his close circle of friends, middle and upper class white urban men like him, often joke about his liking of música vieja, particularly the sounds they hear as associated with peasants and the working class, and thus with poor taste. These include the recordings of Mexican groups and duos norteños from the 1930s and 1940s, labeled more commonly in Medellín as música guasca and is today widely used and reinforced by radio programming that targets specific audiences differentiated by social class. Associated in this way with the tastes of rural and urbanizing Andean campesinos since recorded music began to circulate in Colombia, Mexican música norteña in the 1930s and 40s was also referred to as *música campirana* (peasant music) and *música montañera* (mountain music) as mentioned earlier in this chapter. In Arias' opinion, his friends' mocking comments are due in great part to common associations between social class and musical habits in their social circles, suggesting a classic example of Bourdieu's (1984) notion that taste plays a role of distinction for people and is socially employed towards this end.

As scholars of Colombian music have noted (Wade 2000; Waxer 2002; Ochoa 2005; Santamaría 2006, 2014), social class along with race and region has been a marked category of difference in the processes that shaped perceptions of particular popular musics and their audiences in Colombia, which involved the work of elite intellectuals since the 19th century and continued in the practices of the mass-mediated cultural industry (Martín-Barbero 2003; Ochoa 2003, 2013; Cortés Polanía 2004; Bermúdez 2006). Although Mexican norteña under its many appellations in Colombia and the local practices it inspired have had enduring lower-class connotations, I suggest it is more

productive to understand this association as an undeniably sticky construct derived from long-standing dominant discourses on musical value and music marketing strategies than to focus on these musical practices as fundamentally representative of Andean Colombian rural and working class people, tastes, and identities.

While preferences in popular music can be and are often used as a resource for the construction and maintenance of identities, a topic widely explored by ethnomusicologists and in popular music studies, they are also activities in which people engage for a variety of reasons and purposes. In his extensive work on musical preference and meaning, Antoine Hennion (1999, 2004, 2015) argued that rather than reducing musical taste and the properties of the musical object to reflections of people's social background, taste is better conceptualized as a "reflexive activity," which requires close attention to "what the actors think and do" (2015: 162). Thus music preferences are not simply determined by social forces or by rebelling against them. They emerge from multilayered processes that involve not only circumstances of cultural and socio-economic inequalities but also continuous activities that shape, re-shape, negotiate, and contradict ideas of taste in relation to identitarian formations.

In the case of the recontextualizations of Mexican música norteña in Colombia, audiences and spaces of listening and sociability were and are more fluid than it has been construed, often traversing class divides even if in more pragmatic rather than rhetorical and symbolic ways. Participants do not consist only of campesinos and working class listeners, who, on the other hand, also listen to and enjoy many other types of music that go across perceptions of class distinction. As exemplified by Ramiro Arias, music participants navigate across musical boundary constructs and are often well aware of

attributions of social class to musical preferences, just as these notions may be put to circulate and become naturalized. In any case, taste is exercised through selectively listening, playing, socializing with, and engaging in talk about music. However, as debates about the value of different musical styles have been constant in Colombia and have deeply impacted their development, it is important to examine their ideological basis, which I tackle in the sections to follow.

Assumptions of an "essential link between music and identity" have been pervasive in Colombian cultural politics (Wade 2000: 25), and are central to understandings of how audiences for popular musics formed in the country. Lise Waxer's (2002) work on the adoption of salsa in Cali, for example, also argued for the importance of understanding the "nexus between music and regional identity" in Colombia as she saw that "Colombian regional identities are strongly articulated by musical styles and other cultural practices, in ways that are closely tied to struggles over economic and political control of the nation" (37). These assumptions, although taking different forms according to specific historical conjunctures, political projects, and the desires of particular groups of people, were and still are deeply enmeshed with conceptualizations of the Colombian nation, its regions, and people, as they intersect with notions of race, class, gender, and ethnicity that began to take shape in the mid-nineteenth century. In the next sections, I explore how these enduring linkages between concepts of region, nation, and identity emerged and developed in Colombia and were articulated with and through musical practices, which I find important as these assumptions still mediate the dynamics of cultural politics and production in the country today. They are crucial to understanding the Colombian routes of Mexican música norteña and the derivative styles that conform

the historically marginalized Colombian musical genre family that is the subject of this dissertation.

The Making of a "Country of Regions" – Hierarchies of Place, Race, Class, and Knowledge

Like the elites in other Latin American countries, since the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century Colombian political and intellectual circles were preoccupied with defining nationhood and what it meant to be Colombian. Racial heterogeneity was considered a major problem to be dealt with, within the Eurocentric views that framed the thinking of Creole elites in nineteenth century Latin America. While the idea of a homogenizing cultural and racial *mestizaje* (miscegenation) became a master narrative in many Latin American nation-building projects supported among other things by the emergence of distinct national musics in the early twentieth century, such as the Mexican mariachi ensemble (Jáuregui 2007), Cuban son (Moore 1997), Brazilian samba (Vianna 1999), and Dominican merengue (Austerlitz 1997), in Colombia, however, an emphasis on regionalism ensued a heightened tension between heterogeneous and homogeneous conceptions of the nation that endures today.[6] As put by anthropologist Peter Wade (2000),

> In Colombia […] official or other public discourse on the nation includes claims both to the supposed homogeneity brought about by centuries of cultural and physical mixing and to the tremendous ethnographic diversity of a 'country of regions' (5).

[6] For a comparative overview of music and nationalism in various Latin American countries, see Turino 2003.

Tackling the specificity of Colombian nation-building processes, Castro-Gómez and Restrepo (2008) proposed the notion of "regimes of colombianness" rather than referring to a singular and homogeneous "*colombianidad*" as a tool to address the "historically localized and always heterogeneous mechanisms that aim to unify and normalize the population as 'national,' at the same time that they produce differences within it." These regimes, argued Castro-Gómez and Restrepo, "generate distinct politics of unity, of identities and of differences," which must be understood as multiple discourses arising from the particular forms taken by modernity and coloniality[7] in Colombia (11). Thus, for the authors, Colombian discourses of the nation today, as in the past, not only aim to produce a political and cultural unity, but simultaneously "implicate the construction of hierarchical strategies of differentiation among population groups that find themselves interpellated by these technologies" (12). Castro-Gómez and Restrepo argued for an approach to Colombian history as a genealogy, in the sense proposed by Michel Foucault, in which "what appears as nation and national identity are discourses

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[7] The concept of coloniality was proposed by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) to be understood as inseparable from the notion of modernity as a project rooted in European colonialism. Coloniality references the kinds of colonial legacies that persist and permeate the exercise of power after colonialism ended in Latin America. As expounded by Colombian historian Uribe Vergara (2008), while colonialism refers to the political and military dominance necessary to guarantee the work in the colonies to the benefit of the colonizer, coloniality is exercised through the acquisition and naturalization of patterns of power that permeate "social, racial, geographic, cultural, epistemic, and gender relations" (206). For important extensions and discussions of the coloniality/modernity concept, see also the works of Walter Mignolo (2000). For applications of the concept to Colombia specifically see Castro-Gómez and Restrepo (2008), and Arturo Escobar (2008).

that need to be historicized and denaturalized in order to make evident the multiple and changing attachments of sense, sensation, power, and resistance" (11).

One of the ideas about Colombian national identity often alluded to since the 1980s by researchers in various fields is the lack of a unifying narrative of nation in Colombia (Martín-Barbero 2002; Palacios 2006; Pécaut 2001), offered as a plausible explanation for the systems of violence that have afflicted the country for so many decades. Scholars have proposed different reasons for this absence of a narrative of nation that failed to unify Colombians, such as a historically entrenched regionalism, a fragmented landscape, strong identification of Colombians with one of the two historically dominant political parties rather than with a central government, a history of patronage and clientelism permeating labor, political, and social relations, and the lack of a populist phase in Colombian socio-political history.

For this chapter's analysis of the circulation, reception and adoption of música norteña in Antioquia, I draw from these ideas but find particularly useful a body of scholarship which has focused more closely on analyzing the formation of Colombian identities, habits, political and economic systems, and conflict from the perspective of regional dynamics as they intersect with discourses about place, race, class, and modernity (see Palacios 1980; Roldán 2002; Appelbaum 2003; Escobar 2008; Castro-Gómez). Looking at the formation of an audience for Mexican música norteña and local adaptations in Antioquia in the mid-twentieth century, I am interested in how these music styles came to circulate and gain a range of associations that linked them in antagonistic ways to entrenched notions of regional identity that articulated racial and class difference. The remainder of this section explores how ideas about race, region, and class emerged in

Colombia since the mid-1800s through the discourses and writings of an influential class of intellectuals, which Cristina Rojas (2001) refers to as the Colombian *literati*. These ideas constituted the core of an exclusionary "regime of representation" that worked towards the Colombian political and intellectual elites' "desire for civilization" modeled after European ideals of modernity, progress, and civility (ibid).

During the colonial period, the Spanish settled mostly in the cool highlands of the Andean mountains. They founded Santa Fé de Bogotá, today's capital and largest city of Colombia, in the plateau of the eastern Andes mountain range. In the central Andes *cordillera*, they founded Medellín, the country's second largest urban center and most important industrial pole throughout most of the twentieth century. Other areas where population centers also developed early on were the ports of Barranquilla and Cartagena in the Atlantic coast, and Buenaventura, on the Pacific. The majority of Colombians live in the Andean mountain regions, and many are of mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent. Afro-Colombians add to the mix, most noticeably in the cities of Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá. Afro-Colombians are more predominant in the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, and many people of mixed ancestry combining Spanish, African and Indigenous heritage live in the low altitude areas along the Magdalena River. Most of the Colombian Indigenous peoples live in the southern tropical forest areas (LeGrand 2003:169; Wade 1993, 2000).

Although the type of demographic/spatial distribution described above is commonly cited in descriptions of the country, in Colombia, various degrees of racial mixing are found in most places and boundaries of racial categories such as "black," "white," and "Indian" are "much disputed and ambiguous" (Wade 1993:5). The concept of *mestizaje*, referring to racial and cultural mixture, has been and still is evoked in

Colombian constructs of national identity, although in constant interplay with racial discrimination with which it coexists. In his extensive work on racial identities and nation building in Colombia, Peter Wade (1993, 1995, 2000) pointed out that mestizaje, much as in other Latin American countries, emerged as a narrative employed by the Colombian cultural and political elites to promote a sense of shared identity among the diverse inhabitants of the emerging nation. Taking the shape of an apparently integrative discourse of a 'tri-ethnic' Colombian identity, Wade noted, mestizaje in Colombia is a rather discriminatory process in which all Colombians are defined as *mestizos* – people of mixed European, Indigenous, and, to a lesser degree, African ancestry – yet, with a pervasive privileging of the "whiter," predominantly Hispanicized mestizo.[8]

Strong associations between geographical space, race, and people's particular traits and customs began to take root since the mid-nineteenth century with the desire of the country's political and intellectual elite to align the nation with Eurocentric ideals of civilization and modernity. This "will to civilization," a term used by political scientist Cristina Rojas (2001) in reference to the pressing concerns of the Creole elites with ideas about progress and civility since the post-independence period, gave rise to restrictive narratives of citizenship that played key roles in the construction of cultural difference as a pivotal logic in the formation of the nation.

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[8] Peter Wade's work has emphasized the dynamics of sameness and difference in discourses and practices of *mestizaje* in Colombia, highlighting the "opposition between, on one hand, the nationalist glorification of *mestizaje* as a democratic process leading to and symbolic of racial harmony and, on the other, *mestizaje* as a rhetorical flourish that hides racist and even ethnocidal practices of whitening" (2003: 263).

The regimes of representation enforced and disputed by the lettered elites with the goal of achieving civilization, argued Rojas, were not reducible to and as important as economic motives (3). In her thoroughly documented analysis, Rojas sustained that:

> The ideal of civilization materialized in the privileging of certain economic practices, in religious and educational ideals, in habits and dress practices, and in the dream of a *civilización mestiza* in which whiteness would remove the traces of a black and indigenous past. […] The construction of identities (racial, gender, religious, regional, and class) was an important component of the civilizing project (xxvi).

These regimes of representation, similar to Restrepo Gómez's notion of "regimes of Colombianness" cited earlier, have historically included an emphasis on geographical characteristics as determinant of cultural, racial, and intellectual difference.

Much of Colombian historiography identifies the country as highly regionalized, which is commonly seen as arising from a challenging topography that made communication and trade between regions difficult and precluded the full integration of the nation-state. In Colombia, the Andes mountains split into three separate *cordilleras* that reach very high altitudes and run parallel from south to north. They divide the territory into regions lying low in the valleys between the mountain ranges and on the highland slopes, featuring a diverse range of climates and ecosystems that include mountainous Andean areas, two coasts on the Pacific and the Atlantic (also referred to as the Caribbean coast), a tropical Amazonian region, and vast grassy plains known as the *llanos* that extend towards the east and border with Venezuela. The Cauca and Magdalena rivers run through the valleys between the cordilleras and have natural barriers that make navigation difficult. Travel between regions, especially from east to west, which requires traversing across (which means up and down) the mountain ranges,

is difficult, and infrastructure and communications are deficient even currently in the twenty-first century.

Recent scholarship, however, has challenged this deterministic view of the regionalism of Colombia as derived from its physical relief and presumed demographic distribution, stressing instead a constructivist approach that highlights the myriad ways in which the notion of Colombia as a "country of regions" was given shape and served the political and intellectual elites in the project of imagining the nation.[9] Historian Nancy Appelbaum (2003) documented how the decade of the 1850s was a key moment in the emergence of Colombia as a "country of regions" with the creation of the federal system[10] at the same time that the Chorographic Commission, a government-sponsored ethnographic and cartographic research project, was deployed to explore and map the national territory. Beginning in 1850 and lasting for about a decade, the Colombian Chorographic Commission set out to map the country's territorial and demographic make-up as part of the project of defining the nation. The commission's reports, maps, sketches, and paintings portrayed a nation composed of various races linked to specific

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[9] The works of anthropologist Claudia Steiner (2000) and historians Nancy Appelbaum (2003, 2016) and Mary Roldán (2002), for example, offer a wealth of data that documents the ways in which regional and racial categories in Antioquia were constituted through the discursive and legal practices of a lettered elite. For analysis of the construction of region and identity in other parts of Colombia, see Ramírez 2011 for Putumayo and the Amazonian region, Rausch 2007 for the region of the *llanos* (eastern plains), and Escobar 2008 for the Pacific Coast.

[10] The federal system consolidated the country's previously dispersed three-dozen provinces into nine "sovereign states," each with their own currency, military force, postal service, and constitutional government. Although these states, also colloquially known as *países* (countries), proved to be relatively stable, they were often in conflict. As noted by Appelbaum, "the process of consolidating the nation-state was thus also a process of dividing it" (32).

regions and locales with their own idiosyncratic customs, including music and dance. The writers attributed varying levels of progress, morality, and civilization obtained by inhabitants of each place to "a combination of environmental conditions and inherited characteristics that presumably shaped racial stock" (ibid: 17). Appelbaum summarized the ideas about race and region put forward by the Commission and the writings of Colombian "men of letters":

> . . . blacks and the most savage Indians subsisted lazily in the unhealthy tropical lowlands of the coasts and interior valleys. The coldest and highest reaches of the highlands in eastern, central, and southern Colombia were portrayed as the domain of partially 'civilized' Indian villagers whose lives were as desolate as their windswept landscape. The climate considered healthiest for whites and most conducive to national progress was to be found in the mid-range altitudes of the highlands, where temperatures approximated a European spring or fall (33-34).

As also stressed by Peter Wade (2000), citizenry was defined and elite superiority was perceived in relation to the inferior others that were included in representations of a nation of regions portrayed by the illustrated elite (12).[11] In this geography, a clear hierarchy privileging the Andean highland plateaus, which coincided with the environment of the country's main economic and political centers, is evident. Through the discourses that shaped Colombia's regional and "moral topography" (Taussig 1987:253), a set of stereotypes of the Antioquia province emerged that associated its mountainous region and people with whiteness, health, progress, morality, and

[11] For detailed descriptions of the discourses on race and national identity in Colombia since the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, see Wade 1993. For more on region, race, and class formation in Antioquia, see Steiner 2000, Roldán 2002, and Appelbaum 2003. For an in-depth study of the nineteenth-century Colombian Chorographic Commission and the ensuing debates about national identity, region, and race in Colombia, see Appelbaum 2016.

industriousness. Although there was a wide range of social and racial diversity and mixing within the province's different towns and altitudes and among the inhabitants of Medellín, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries published descriptions de-emphasized diversity and increasingly homogenized Antioqueños, providing the basis for an entrenched regionalism (see Wade 1993; Roldán 2002; Appelbaum 2003).[12] Among the valued attributions of *paisa* (person from Antioquia) identity most widely agreed upon among the literati of the nineteenth century were devout Catholicism, inclination for hard-work, commercial orientation, and attachment to family life – particularly important

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[12] Such descriptions varied in emphasis and detail, but they displayed enough consistencies to give shape to a predominantly white "essential Antioqueño" predicated on health, beauty, and "rare intelligence… the natural propensity for material improvements and for the march of progress" (De Greiff 1852:76, quoted in Appelbaum 2003: 34). In 1852, for example, Manuel Pombo, a Liberal politician and "man of letters," wrote a picturesque description of a trip he made between Medellín and Bogotá describing Antioqueños as progressive, respectable, and obstinate. Quoting an Antioqueño writer, he wrote about how "the morality of their customs is due also to the passion for family life and to how popular marriage is among them," while juxtaposing idyllic and orderly Antioqueño family life with portrayals of Afro-colombians, for example, as "overtly sensual, uncontrolled, and dangerous" (Appelbaum 2003: 36).

José Maria Samper (1828-1888), also a politician and writer, and member of the Chorographic Commission, compared the "'white Antioqueño' to the 'primitive' Indian of Pasto in southern Cauca, the 'stupid' Indian of the eastern cordillera, the 'turbulent' mulatto of the coast, and the 'aristocratic' creole of Bogotá, along with other 'races' or 'types' that 'coexisted' in New Granada" (ibid). Comparing the *bogas*, black men of the Caribbean coast who poled rafts on the Magdalena River, to highlanders, Samper wrote in 1868: "There [i.e. in the coastal region] the primitive man, coarse, brutish, indolent, semi-savage and burnt by the tropical sun, that is, the Colombian *boga*, in all his insolence, his stupid bigotry, his cowardly self-satisfaction, his incredible indolence and his shameless speech, the child of ignorance rather than corruption; and here [i.e., in the highlands] the European, active, intelligent, white and elegant, often blond, with his poetic and penetrating glance, his ringing and rapid speech, his elevated spirit, his ever distinguished manners" (quoted in Peñas 1988:59 and in Wade 1993:13).

qualities in the European-based conception of civilization and capitalist economic organization pursued by the Colombian elite.

Arguing that the will to civilization and violence are not necessarily opposing forces, Cristina Rojas (2011) emphasized how among the Colombian elite literary competence was highly valued, and a resource to bring into existence a particular, exclusionary "regime of representation" which, she showed, was the very definition of 'civilization.' This regime of representation, not unlike Bourdieu's (1977) notions of 'symbolic' and 'cultural' capital, emerged from a distinct political economy of civilization within a field that was:

> . . . characterized by the accumulation of those civilizing qualities that male creole literati[13] appreciated: the law, grammar, and morality. Male creole literati reserved their own place in the regime of representation as the ones knowledgeable enough to direct the new republic on the proper road. The literati were the architects of civilization, and their power stemmed from their capacity to produce, circulate, and value their most precious commodity: words" (Rojas 2011: 166).[14]

The discursive practices of the Colombian elites set clear boundaries with respect to the rest of the population in a country where they were literati while the absolute majority of the population had no access to literacy.[15] They forged restrictive narratives of civilization in which blacks, Indians, and poor local artisans and peasants, most of

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[13] The term literati was used by Colombian intellectuals to refer to the top ranking in the social hierarchy they envisioned for the republic. It was comprised of "lawyers, medical doctors, literati, naturalists […] and academics" **(**Samper 1868 quoted in Cruz Gonzalez 2002: 227)

[14] On the primacy of the "lettered" world in Colombia, see also von der Walde 1997, Idelber Avelar 2004, Castro-Gomez and Restrepo 2008, Ochoa 2013.

[15] For example, of the nation's 563,000 children in 1870, only 32,000 attended school of any kind (Meyer 1971, cited in Rojas 2001).

them non-literate, were seen as barbarians and their histories, actions, and knowledge suppressed or marginalized not only discursively but also through violent means of enforcement. [16]

The Regeneration – A Degenerate People and an Exclusionary Cultural Nationalism

Lasting from 1880 to 1930, a period of Conservative rule that Colombian historians refer to as the Regeneration sought to implement an authoritarian centralist project overseen by the Catholic Church and the Conservative party. The notion that the Colombian common people were "degenerate" gained force through the rhetoric of Conservative politicians who were also distinguished grammarians, premised on the idea that the country's heterogeneous demographics resulted from the exuberant but unruly and isolating nature of the country's topography and was thus conducive to chaos and conflict, constituting an internal danger to the nation. In this view, the inhabitants of the nation's territory were "in disorder, fragmented, dispersed, outside of legality, degenerate," which impeded progress (Melgarejo 2008:301). The need for "regeneration" was thus to deal with "the profound ignorance of the quasi-savage masses" (Núñez [1888]1986: 87, quoted in Melgarejo 2008:301) and served to justify the closing of official paths for popular political participation and the practices of violent repression to

[16] Subalterns, however, did not passively receive what was dictated by the dominant political and intellectual circles. Through strategies of adapting and resisting they actively participated in constructing and reconstructing social relations at the core of the nation-building project in often contentious ways, which marked the years of the post-independence Liberal period. For analysis of the relationship between subaltern groups (Indigenous, Afro-Colombians, and peasants) and elites in mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Colombia, see LeGrand 1986, Palacios 1995, Hylton 2006, Roldán 2002, Appelbaum 2003, Sanders 2004.

those deemed unruly by official law enforcement as well as by 'civilized' landowners, politicians, and business men.

If in the post-independence era Colombia's elites focused on incorporating a "disciplined citizenry" that conformed to a hierarchical vision of social and political organization, the Regeneration focused its efforts on "ruling over recalcitrant subjects" (Hylton 2006: 24). It restricted the possibilities of popular politics while strengthening "a clientelism rooted in the boom of coffee exports that began in the 1880s and brought the Conservative commercial and banking elites of Antioquia to national prominence" (ibid: 23). As shown in Forrest Hylton's (2006) analysis:

> Demonstrations were forbidden, *Sociedades Democráticas* (Democratic Societies) persecuted, and 'order' became the watchword of the day. The country was 'ideologically imprisoned,' and Catholic, Hispanofile grammarians like Miguel Antonio Caro – the architect of the 1886 Constitution – were its guardians […] A professional army replaced popular militias and the death penalty was reinstated to halt attacks on private property […] At the end of the century, the Regeneration regime crushed Liberal resistance, associated with the rising coffee bourgeoisie in the murderous War of a Thousand Days (1899-1903), which left 100,000 dead (24).

The Regeneration thus combined extremely violent state intervention against its own citizens, curbing of civil rights, an "antimodernism" identified with the radical religious conservatism of the local Roman Catholic Church, and principles of economic liberalism (Palacios 2006). The radically Catholic and conservative new order was strengthened by the powerful new coffee economy within which Antioquia held a prominent position, and the idealized image of the rural Antioqueño as industrious, prosperous and white came to symbolize it. Hylton (2006) pointed out that:

> The Regeneration cemented oligarchic control – not seriously threatened during the War of a Thousand Days – and closed off avenues for radical-popular democratic participation […] Indians, artisans, and Afro-Colombians saw

> citizenship rights restricted under Conservatives, and the Catholic *raza antioqueña*, mythologized in the image of the small-holding Antioquian settler, became the cultural linchpin of the new political-economic order (25).

The Colombian case of cultural nationalism in the first decades of the twentieth century thus represents a "curious and unique program by Latin American standards," as observed by historian Marco Palacios (2006: 27). Indeed, it contrasted with several nation-building projects in Latin American countries emerging in the early to mid twentieth-century that were marked by state-initiated labor and land reforms and populist rhetorics that, at least symbolically, sought to showcase an increased inclusivity of difference in regards to race, ethnicity, region, and class. As amply demonstrated by ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other cultural analysts, music, dance, and other expressive cultural forms played a key role in nationalist discourses in Latin America, as these practices were transformed to serve as unifying symbols capable of embodying the idea of a common nation that the majority of the population could identify with.[17] In contrast, in the Colombian case the Regeneration period was characterized by an entrenched "Hispanophile cultural nationalism" (Palacios 2006: 27) in which music also played a salient role. Colombian cultural and musical nationalism of the early twentieth century had at their core the non-inclusive images of an idealized, bucolic Andean countryside and a healthy and prosperous white rural man that seldom corresponded to the lives and personhoods of most peasants in rural Antioquia, let alone in the rest of the country's vast and diverse territories.

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[17] Turino 2003; Moore 1997; Hellier-Tinoco 2011; Vianna 1997.

The Bambuco as National Music and the Idealized Colombian Peasant

During the Regeneration, the bambuco, a song and dance form associated with the "whiter" Andean interior, gained prominence in debates about national identity.[18] By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, composers had utilized the bambuco as source of inspiration for nationalist art music, and the upper classes in Bogotá had incorporated bambucos and other Andean styles into their salon dance music repertoires, which otherwise consisted primarily of European dance musics such as waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas (Wade 1993, 1998).[19] "Creolized" versions of European dance forms also gave rise to new urban genres such as the *pasillo*, one of several "new world" adaptations of the waltz that became popular in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.[20] While associating

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[18] The idea of a "national music" centered on the bambuco first appeared in the works of a few prominent Colombian lettered men in the 1850s and 60s. José María Samper, writer, statesmen and former member of the chorographic commission, for example, stated in 1868 that there was "nothing more national and patriotic than this song that has all Colombians as their authors […] It is the song of our *pueblo* made into melody" (Samper 1868 quoted in Cruz Gonzalez 2002: 227; also quoted in Wade 1998: 7).

[19] Like elsewhere in 19th-century Latin America, dances originating in Europe such as quadrille, waltz, and polka became popular in Colombian urban areas among the upper classes played on piano or string instruments, and would also have been heard among people of a range of social classes played by brass bands in public events. This type of salon dance music was similar among the upper classes everywhere in Colombia, although urbanized versions of local regional rural styles, such as the bambuco and torbellino in Bogotá and Medellín, had become quite popular as well (Wade 1998:7).

[20] The pasillo, a ternary musical form derived from the waltz, gained local adaptations and became very popular in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. It was mainly performed on piano or by small instrumental ensembles in private homes, by brass bands in public parks, and by various types of ensembles during public events. In these occasions, the pasillo served as an instrumental counterpart to sung genres such as the bambuco and other dances that were known and circulated in written notation as early as the mid-1870s (Cortés Polanía 2004:120).

symbolically with a European "civilized" world, these musical preferences also signaled the importance of national particularism for the Colombian elite. As put by musicologist Fernando Gil Araque, for the upper classes of a newly forming Colombia, the practices of salon dance music worked as an "act of civilization that united them with European society, but on the other hand, the acceptance of folk-based bambucos, torbellinos, and pasillos was a symbol of difference and national identity" (Araque 2003: 96, quoted in Santamaría-Delgado 2014).

As it is often the case with musical practices of oral transmission, the bambuco had uncertain origins, which gave rise to multiple controversies that continued well into the twentieth century. For some intellectuals, the bambuco had unmistakably African roots, while others went to great lengths to prove otherwise and locate the ancestry of the bambuco in Colombia's Spanish heritage. Still others exalted it as an expression of the classic Colombian racial trilogy of mestizaje, in which the emphasis was on the European portion of the mix.[21] Representations of the bambuco as a predominantly Spanish-derived mestizo genre representative of the Andean interior, and thus the nation, however, became quite widespread among the region's literate elites by the end of the nineteenth

[21] The first decade of the twentieth century also saw the institutionalization of academic music education with, for example, the founding of the Academia Nacional de Música (National Academy of Music), as part of the national plan of reconstructing the country in the aftermath of the War of the Thousand Days (1899-1903). This process entailed the differentiation between music of the academy, which primarily followed the parameters of the Western classical canon, and an emerging sphere of popular music. These transformations in both spheres provided the scenario for the intense debates about what would constitute a Colombian national music. For the polemic surrounding the topic of national and popular music in Colombia in early twentieth century, see Jaime Cortés Polanía (2000; 2004).

century (see Cruz González 2002). These socio-musical discourses were informed by and contributed to give shape to the ongoing "Hispanophile cultural nationalism," to use Marco Palacio's (2006:27) term one more time.

The 'creolization' of the bambuco, ethnomusicologist Ana María Ochoa (1997) argued, was necessary to make it eligible to represent the nation, which meant stripping away possible associations with blackness, and giving it an aura of refinement signified by its adaptation into the concert hall and the Europeanized dance salon of the upper classes.[22] This process of creolization meant transforming the bambuco into a qualified representative of the ideal Colombian citizen, which was male, white, and illustrated. It emphasized it as a mestizo product of primordially Spanish roots well aligned with the ideal of nation pursued by the Andean elite intellectuals and the governing class (Ochoa 1997; Wade 2000; Santamaría-Delgado 2014).

The Colombian project of nation articulated with the idea of a national music was thus a contradictory process in which national unity was predicated on difference among social groups along lines of race, region, and class, the latter being fundamentally enmeshed with race and marked by unequal access to literacy, which was the domain of a

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[22]One of the key points of contention about the bambuco was its possible African ancestry, first suggested by the influential Jorge Isaacs (1837-1895) in his work *María*, the foundational Colombian novel of the nineteenth century. At a time when the bambuco had already been accepted into the salons of the upper classes and the nationalist discourses of intellectuals, Isaacs' implication provoked a strong backlash from those who were invested in defending the "superior" origins of the bambuco. See Davidson (1970), Restrepo Duque (1986), and Varney (2001) for accounts of these debates. For more critical analysis of these arguments, see Ana María Ochoa (1997), Cruz González (2002), and Santamaría-Delgado (2014).

privileged minority. While exalted as "*obra del pueblo*" (work of the people) (Samper 1867, quoted in Cruz González 2002: 227), the types of bambuco popularized by and for the Colombian upper classes articulated a vague notion of the Colombian *pueblo* that excluded the majority of its peoples who were poor, non-white, illiterate peasants inhabiting territories of vastly varied topographies and sonorities.

By the turn of the twentieth century, an urban form of bambuco-song accompanied by string instruments had become popular among working-class artisans in Bogotá and Medellín, alongside the stylized instrumental bambuco pieces for piano of the upper classes' dance salon and bambuco-inspired nationalist art music. A typical format of this more plebeian style was the *dueto bambuquero*, a male duo usually singing in parallel thirds and sixths and accompanying themselves with a *tiple* and a guitar. The presence of a third musician was not uncommon, with the addition of a bandola or another guitar (Gradante 1998; Varney 2001). Duos and trios interpreted a repertoire derived from Andean regional styles, including bambuco-songs with romantic lyrics often composed by members of the literate upper class. While bambucos, along with torbellinos and other styles derived from Andean peasant musical traditions had functioned as part of the life of rural communities, the primary space for the emerging urban bambuco-song was the burgeoning male bohemian nightlife of cities like Medellín and Bogotá.

Pedro Morales Pino (1863-1926), a prolific composer and arranger, bandola player, and music teacher from Bogotá, was one of the pivotal actors in the standardization of the urban bambuco that would soon gain wider circulation in Colombia and abroad. He was among the first to transcribe bambucos of the oral tradition into

written musical notation and "dress them up" with elaborate arrangements for his renowned ensemble, *Lira Colombiana*. The process of adapting bambucos of popular sources to suit the musical aesthetics of the Colombian elites, which musicologist Cortés Polanía (2000) described as part of the "purification" of the bambuco, contributed to making it suitable as national music in their eyes, while musicians such as Morales Pino came to "present themselves as the representatives of peasant musical traditions" (7). The celebrated *Lira Colombiana* pioneered a larger type of ensemble consisting of a flexible combination of wind and string orchestral instruments, such as flute, violin, and cello, with the typical bambuco accompaniment, and interpreted danzas, bambucos and pasillos in addition to a host of musical styles of international appeal at the time such as *valses* and *operetas* (see Gradante 1998).[23]

In 1899, Morales Pino and his group embarked on the first international tour of a Colombian musical ensemble, which served to extend Colombian repertoires to Central America, Mexico, and the U.S. for the first time and paved the way for other Colombian musicians.[24] By the early 1910s, string duos, trios, and *estudiantinas* composed of artisans as well as musicians belonging to the upper classes had multiplied in the cities of

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[23] Known as *lira*, *estudiantina*, or *orquesta colombiana*, this type of ensemble pioneered by Morales Pino became widely popular among urban audiences in the Colombian highlands and gave rise to other similar groups such as the *Lira Antioqueña* in Medellín, which performed in theaters and other spaces that catered to middle and upper class publics (Cortés Polanía 2000; Santamaría Delgado 2007). Similar line-ups centered on string instruments also developed in Mexico and other Latin American countries in the late nineteenth-century, inspired by the Spanish *estudiantina* ensemble.

[24] For more details about Morales Pino and his group, see Restrepo Duque 1971, Rico Salazar 2004, and Bermúdez 2009.

the Colombian highlands and some of these musicians, many of them students of Morales Pino, were the first to record Colombian music.

Since the first decade of the 1900s, the pioneer American recording companies Columbia and Victor Talking Machine began to grow international markets for their commercial records, and for Spanish-speaking audiences they built off of already close cultural circles between Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina.[25] Initially, most of the music for Latin American consumption was recorded in New York by U.S.-based Spanish-speaking singers and orchestra musicians that interpreted a variety of genres utilizing lead sheets sent from the different countries. These early recordings included popular styles of wide international dissemination such as habaneras, light opera, and Spanish zarzuelas, as well as emerging Latin American "national" repertories, which were then distributed throughout the continent. To take advantage of the great commercial potential of an emerging Latin American music market, since 1906 recording companies also began to set up mobile recording units in a few places in Latin America, notably Mexico and Argentina, and a few years later established recording houses in Mexico City and Buenos Aires to which Latin American musicians travelled to record their music.[26]

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[25] In his analysis of the first recordings made of Colombian music, Egberto Bermúdez (2009) demonstrated that Colombian, Cuban, and Mexican artists, poets and musicians travelled between those countries where they enjoyed wide recognition, which was happening prior to the circulation of recorded music (108-110).

[26] Carolina Santamaría Delgado (2006) described the practices that shaped this incipient generic repertoire of Latin American recorded music as follows: "… it was more efficient and cheaper to appoint local agents to request that sheet music be sent directly to the studios in Latin American capitals or to a studio in New York. Spanish-speaking singers performed the music, and the records were quickly shipped back to be

The first recordings of Colombian music were made in 1908 for a unit of Columbia Records located in Mexico City by Pedro León Franco Rave (1867-1952) and Adolfo Marín (1882-1932), both from Medíelln and best known as the duet "Pelón y Marín." The song format popularized in their recordings, in particular the duet-singing style accompanied by string instruments, contributed to the consolidation of what became circulated internationally and domestically as a Colombian national style, in spite of continuing debates that questioned the legitimacy of these recordings produced abroad to stand as representatives of the nation (Santamaría-Delgado 2012:5). Yet, strengthened by the growth of the U.S.-based recording industry, the musical styles and genres recorded by Pelón and Marín and several other Colombian duets and liras since1909 reinforced the parameters of an incipient Colombian "*música nacional*" (national music) that had its strongest representative in the bambuco (Ochoa 1997; Bermúdez 2009).

The growth of a multinational circuit for recorded music triggered the spread of Colombian repertories of bambucos, pasillos, torbellinos, and other Andean styles in Colombia and abroad in the late 1920s to early 30s. After reaching its peak in the 1920s, however, the popularity of the bambuco and its tentative status of national music declined markedly in the following decade. The controversies about what was to constitute a

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sold all over the continent. Performers who recorded in New York, for example, came from different places in Latin America or from Spain and knew almost nothing about certain genres, local performance practices, or particular vocal styles. Singers specializing in opera, in Spanish *zarzuela*, or in any local tradition recorded all kind of songs, whether Argentinian tangos, Panamanian *tamboritos*, Ecuadorian *valses*, or Colombiam bambucos. The labels on the recordings were quite imprecise regarding the musical genre of each song, its provenance, and the name of its composer. Since copyright laws for sound recordings had not yet been formulated, there was considerable confusion about the authorship and the right to make new renditions of the songs" (70).

musical symbol of the nation that divided intellectuals since the nineteenth century, never settling into consensus, and the regional character of political power in Colombia help explain the lack of substantial institutional support that in other Latin American countries was paramount in the consolidation of national musics such as, for example, the cases of merengue in the Dominican Republic and samba in Brazil. Before having ever acquired uncontested status as a Colombian national symbol, the bambuco fizzled in the preferences of the growing audiences for popular music.

The reasons for the decline of the bambuco and what some have seen as its failure at consolidating as the national music of Colombia, at a moment when music nationalism was a driving force in much of Latin American politics, have been discussed by a number of music researchers. Musicologist Carlos Blasco Miñana (1997) noted that before it was "acclimated" to fit into the salons of the Colombian upper classes in the nineteenth century, the bambuco was not a single musical form, but rather a term that designated a variety of regional, festive music and dance practices associated with rural workers of also varied racial make-ups. Miñana suggested that the stylization of the bambuco stripped it of its diversity and its African and indigenous elements, thus transforming it into a proposed national music that contradicted its "intended 'national' legitimacy" (11) and was little representative of the majority of Colombians.

Coinciding with Miñana-Blasco, Carolina Santamaría-Delgado pointed out that the activities of well-known musicians who were also the first to record bambucos reinforced the associations of the genre with a social imaginary of Colombia represented by a romanticized figure of the Andean campesino and a "bourgeois atmosphere of melancholy and poetic refinement" (Santamaría-Delgado 2014:). The works of poets,

novelists, and folklorists also aimed towards the definition of the bambuco as a genre in its sonic and social significations in ways that reiterated an idealized vision of the Colombian campesino that was far from the lived realities of the diverse, non-white, poor, and marginalized Colombian majority.

In 1929, for example, the *dueto bambuquero* Wills y Escobar formed by the folklorists Alejandro Wills and Alberto Escobar represented Colombia in the Iberian-American Exposition of Seville garbed with *ruana* and *alpargatas*, the woolen poncho and sandals commonly wore by Andean peasants. As an outcome of their participation in the international event, they made a recording for Columbia Records with the title *Album de la Raza* ("Album of 'the Race'"), as in the 'Colombian race' (Cortés Polanía 2004: 67).

The rise of international markets for recorded music fomented by the multinational operations of companies like Victor and Columbia triggered the peak moment in the diffusion of Colombian repertories of bambucos, pasillos, torbellinos in the late 1920s to early 30s. However, the new mobilities of music enabled by the expansion of production and consumption of recorded Latin American musics also familiarized Colombians with an array of new foreign musical genres and styles that began to circulate broadly in Colombia and were paramount in the formation of local musical habits and modes of listening. This was, as noted by Santamaría-Delgado (2014), another fundamental reason for the fading of the bambuco by the early 1930s both in their levels of popularity among listeners and as a tentative musical symbol of the nation.

While the bambuco continued to be exalted by folklorists and music elites as an ideal representative of *el pueblo*, and conflated with romanticized images of the

Colombian Andean countryside and campesinos, Mexican and Mexican-American música norteña gained wide audiences among rural and urbanizing peasants with the arrival of recordings. The category *música norteña* never came into use in Colombia until many decades later, and the music of Lydia Mendoza and groups like Los Madrugadores became associated instead with the the terms música campesina, música guasca, and música de carrilera, interchangeably.[27]

Spatial and Musical Mobilities - Records, Trains, Cantinas, and Jukeboxes

On a Sunday morning in October of 2012 Ramiro Arias and I visited his friend El Kaiser at his cantina in the municipality of Caldas, located at 22 km from Medellín. The cantina occupies the main floor of the two-story house in which he has lived since childhood. It has a sizable porch for customers to sit outside, ample windows, photos on the walls, solid wooden counter, tables and chairs, and a jukebox standing at a corner, which, according to El Kaiser, does not get as much use as it did in the past. Guillermo Hernández Cifuentes, who prefers to be addressed by his nickname, played music on a CD player while we were there that morning. Noticing my disappointment at not seeing his record collection, he told me he digitalized a large portion of it and prefers to keep

[27] In the opinion of Alberto Chavarriaga, record collector and ex-cantina owner, the term música norteña did not come into use in Colombia because the majority of the listeners did not have access to reading the labels on the foreign recordings and album covers either because most were illiterate, or because they did not own records and rather got to be familiar with the music mostly through jukeboxes and by frequenting cantinas. Chavarriaga also noted that Colombian record companies labeled música norteña as música guasca and later música de carrilera, either when pressing records of Mexican and Mexican-American norteña locally and giving them new covers, or when issuing compilation albums (Chavarriaga 2012). I could easily verify this last assertion as I saw the albums in Chavarriaga's and other collectors' record collections.

most of the records in storage and only bring them out a few at a time when socializing with other aficionados or by request. His collection includes nearly 3,000 records and many of them are 78 rpm discs from 1925 to 1950, made in Mexico and the U.S.

The cantina, as well as part of the vintage records and the nickname, was inherited from his father, who established it before El Kaiser was born in 1940, and has since stayed in operation. The bulk of the collection, however, El Kaiser bought throughout his life since he was a teenager, mostly in the markets of Guayaquil in Medellín, where, according to him, one "could find everything." His love for music began early on as he accompanied his father during long hours working at the cantina and learned to eagerly anticipate the arrival of the new records that his father purchased each month, as he remembered:

EK: " Since I was around six years old, every month my dad used to bring me along to the station to wait for the train, which was just here on the street behind us [making a gesture with his arms]. We waited for this man wearing a suit who arrived with a black suitcase full of records. We would walk back with him to the cantina and my dad would choose a few, pay for them and offer *el señor* a drink. That night the cantina would packed with people to listen to the music."

PV: "The clients came to listen to the new records"?

EK: "Of course! The cantina was the place where the campesinos would come to in order to hear new music. *La gente del pueblo* (the common people) back then didn't own *victrolas* and only people with some money could buy a radio. People waited impatiently for new records."

PV: “So you are saying that people came here because of the music as much as for drinking?”

EK: “The music was as important, or may be more important, than liquor for a lot of the clients. The custom was that the person would arrive, select the songs he wanted to listen to that night, and only then order the drink. People got drunk, of course, but the music was very important, to listen to it and to talk about it, like if you liked it or not. People had their favorite groups and singers, and there were discussions and even fights! *Y otros solo quedaban ahí quieticos* (and others just stayed quiet), listening with their *aguardiente*. *La musica era la que le daba el tono al ambiente* (it was the music that gave the tone to the atmosphere)” (Cifuentes 2012).

This setting as remembered by El Kaiser vividly describes the role of cantinas in mid-twentieth century rural Antioquia, not as rowdy places for drinking, displays of machismo, violence, and prostitution as they are often represented, but as important disseminators of music and in the exercising of local musical preferences.[28] Providing the physically and economically most accessible medium for musical distribution for the region’s campesinos, rural cantinas were spaces of sociability in which music served as an important enabler of social interaction and in mediating social and personal moods. Rural cantinas nonetheless served customers of all social classes just as their urban counterparts, and provided a variety of listening experiences through which listeners could develop differentiated personal attachments to particular music styles and

[28] Carolina Santamaría-Delgado’s description of musical activity in cantinas in Medellín and Antioquia more generally in the 1930s and 40s corroborates this observation (2014).

interpreters. In other words, cantinas provided a vital space for creative, dedicated listening as well as personal and collective interactions with and through music. In the first decades of the spread of the multinational music recording industry, the railway, cantinas, and jukeboxes were principal mediators for the reception of an array of musical genres from diverse points of origin, and for the formation of popular music tastes among peasants and small town inhabitants in the rural Andes of Colombia.

According to El Kaiser and my other collaborators in Antioquia, the records that arrived to rural Andean towns by train in the 1940s included boleros, tangos, bambucos and pasillos, similarly to the repertoires that animated the cantinas and more bourgeois establishments of the city of Medellín. Records of Mexican *duos norteños*, however, were much more predominant in small rural towns than in the capital, and thus the audiences for these musics in Colombia grew among the rural populations along the routes of Antioquia's railways. Some of the Mexican and Mexican-American groups most cited by listeners, *coleccionistas*, and musicians I met in Antioquía were Los Madrugadores, Chicho y Chencho, Ray y Laurita, Maya y Cantú, Las Hermanas Aguila, and Lydia Mendoza and her family. Corroborating my interlocutors' verbal accounts were the several dozens of recordings made by these artists, most of whom were based in the U.S. for the majority of their musical careers, for the labels Decca, Columbia, Azteca Records, Victor RCA, and their subsidiaries that I encountered in their record collections.

Although the term música norteña did not come into use in Colombia until many decades later, recordings of Mexican and Mexican-American *duos norteños* began to circulate in the country since the 1930s, along with other international genres such as

boleros, tangos, Afro-Cuban styles, and foxtrots.[29] Música norteña, strongly associated with peasant and working class migrant life at the northern Mexico-Texas border, was recorded then under the ethnic music category for labels such as Bluebird, a subsidiary of Victor that also produced *hillbilly* and *race records* for segregated American audiences. Colombian entrepreneurs cut distribution deals with Victor, Columbia, and Brunswick and, following the U.S. model of market segregation, advertised different international musical genres to different social segments along class and urban-rural divides. So, while boleros and tangos, for example, were heavily promoted as icons of modernity to urbanizing middle and upper class Colombians,[30] the rural themes and working class sensibilities of Mexican música norteña were perceived by Colombian distributors and other music industry professionals to be best suited for peasants and poor laborers, and marketed accordingly. From the city of Medellín, the hub of the incipient Colombian music industry, recordings of música norteña were distributed by train throughout the rural towns along the railways that crossed the Colombian Andes, as evocatively described by El Kaiser.

From Música Campesina to Música de Carrilera

The music of groups from the Mexico-Texas border became widely popular in rural Andean Colombia and local adaptations soon arose, which is documented by the 78

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[29] By the 1920s, Columbia and Victor had local distributors in Medellín and Bogotá, as had become common in most Latin American urban centers by then.

[30] For an account of the circulation of bolero and tango in Medellín in the 1930s and 40s see Restrepo Duque (1971). For a nuanced analysis of the distribution and dissemination of recordings of tangos and boleros in Medellín and their associated marketing practices and discourses, see Santamaría, Carolina Delgado (2006, 2014).

rpm discs recorded by Colombian groups and kept by record collectors. Los Hermanos Valencia, Los Jibaritos, Los Relicarios, and Las Estrellitas are some of the local *duetos* that figure on the earliest recordings of música guasca produced in Medellín. The local productions were targeted at the same circuits of distribution and consumption as the Mexican-American recordings that inspired them, distributed to rural pueblos by train, and disseminated through reproduction via jukeboxes and victrolas in the local tiendas and cantinas.

Hernán Restrepo Duque, a veteran of the Medellín music industry, prolific chronicler of Antioquia's musical life, record collector, and one of the music directors of Sonolux since the 1950s, penned one of the very few articles written about música de carrilera to date. Drawing almost exclusively from his own personal memories in face of the absence of previous written sources, as he explicitly recognizes in his text, Restrepo Duque (1989) addressed what he found to be the reasons for the terms "música de carrilera" and "música guasca":

> Why *de carrilera* – the explanation I got in Medellín fits perfectly in respect to Antioquia but it is very likely that it was also used in Bogotá during the times of the *La Sabana* train. The term was used by the packagers to indicate the type, the musical style they were interested in taking to the *pueblos* to which they travelled by railway in order to sell their merchandise at the very train station or to distribute it to the open *fondas* alongside the old horseshoe pathways. That of *guasca*, synonym of uncouth and course, and of similar packaging, had a strictly urban connotation and was destined to the demands of jukeboxes and nickelodeons in lowly neighborhoods. . . . (69).

Restrepo Duque's remarks and the definitions he arrived at for the terms being discussed clearly indicate his personal bias regarding the music styles and audiences in question. Moreover, his viewpoint prioritizes the preeminence of the music industry's commercial enterprise in shaping the musical products, the listening habits of recipients,

and the naming of musical practices – not as genres, but as commercial products for uncultured consumers with no agency.

The perspectives of participants I had a chance to meet, however, differ drastically from this view, as exemplified by the affective experiences and memories of Hernán Cifuents, aka El Kaiser, in regard to música de carrilera described earlier in this chapter. When I asked El Kaiser to summarize how he defines música de carrilera, he said emphatically and with a smile: "It's the music that arrived by train!" As we talked more, I learned that for Cifuentes música de carrilera was the strongest link he felt to memories of his deceased father, from whom he learned to love the records and to make a living out of providing music and moments of oblivion to clients at the cantina. The music and the cantina were also his own way of mediating his experiences of the violence that engulfed the Colombian Andean countryside almost with no pause since the 1940s.

The flourishing of local styles labeled and recorded as música de carrilera coincided with the period of *La Violencia* (1948-1953), the bloody civil war unleashed by political conflict that took place primarily in the Colombian countryside rather than in the urban centers. This period of extreme violence caused thousands of people from Antioquia's rural towns to migrate to Medellín, only adding to the ongoing wave of rural-urban migrations taking place since the 1930s, caused both because of land dispute-related violence and because of the decline of the coffee industry, which left rural workers, landless in their majority, in a state of misery. Many of the first musicians to record música de carrilera thus arrived in Medellín among the large numbers of peasants, displaced by violence and poverty, which swelled the working class neighborhoods and squatter settlements in the city's peripheries.

Although record distributors and agents working for large multinational recording companies had been operating in Medellín and other Colombian cities since the 1920s, the business of recording music in Colombia only began in earnest in 1949.[31] By the early1950s, Sonolux, Zeida (later Codiscos), and Discos Ondina were representatives of the already thriving Medellín recording industry, by far the center of the incipient Colombian commercial music business. In order to protect the new industry, however, the government increased taxes on foreign records, which sent the emerging Colombian record labels into an intense battle over retail prices as the new taxation affected all records pressed internationally, including those meant specifically for consumption in Colombia and commercialized by local record companies (Vega V. 1949, cited in Santamaría-Delgado 2009:33). While record labels came up with different strategies in order to compete for a share of the burgeoning market for recorded music,[32] small labels such as Silver and Ondina focused on supplying the growing market of cantina's jukeboxes in rural and peripheral Medellín's working class neighborhoods, which established a high demand for local duetos. Many of these recordings, particularly by

[31] Since the 1920s, the trade of records and phonographs in Colombia had been dominated by a handful of local family-run businesses that at the end of the 1940s brought to Colombia the equipment necessary to press records and found their own labels (Santamaría-Delgado 2014).

[32] Sonolux, for example, heavily promoted the recordings of Argentine singer Raúl Iriarte after securing an agreement for reproduction rights with a foreign company. Bringing the singer to Medellín several times for performances and appearances on La Voz de Antioquia (radio show) served to increase sales (Santamaría-Delgado 2009:24).

Sonolux's division Lyra, and Codiscos' Zeida, also assigned to target this specific market, were sold almost exclusively in the pueblos, rather than in the city.[33]

With the passing of protectionist economic policies by the administration of general Rojas Pinillo, the Colombian president put in power by a military coup in 1953, the importation of certain consumer goods, including records, was banned for a few years (Cifuentes 2012). This measure further stimulated the local production of recordings in Medellín and resulted in a range of practices that, aimed at achieving high profit margins, had important implications for the development of the Colombian music industry and the formation of popular music listening habits. For example, old repertoires from catalogs by foreign record labels, acquired earlier by Colombian companies, were reissued through records pressed in Colombia, with the effect of reviving the careers of certain artists among Colombian audiences that had already fallen out of fame in other places. Buying international licenses from record companies abroad was also a way Colombian firms found to elude the restrictions imposed on importing records, as they could press Colombian records with foreign material.

In addition to the strategy of targeted marketing along class and rural-urban divides, two other common tactics adopted by the Medellín music industry had a major impact on the development of música de carrilera and are still used today by music professionals involved with its current music offshoots. One was the recording of covers

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[33] The interviews with Medellín record collectors conducted by Héctor Rendón Marín (2009:98-99) for his work about the city's *estudiantinas* in relation to the growing music industry corroborate my assertions here, which are based primarily on my own interviews.

of hit foreign songs by local groups, with or without changes in instrumentation or arrangements. As is patent in the rather scarce information printed on these records, the authors of covered foreign compositions were not often acknowledged, as per the loose Colombian legislation the name of a composer can be substituted by "D.A.R.," (acronym for "author's rights recognized" in Spanish), which exempts record labels, interpreters, and publishers of any liability and does not obligate them to pay royalties to authors unless they come asking for them. In addition, it was (and still is) not uncommon for covers to be given a different title altogether while still listing the author as D.A.R., with the effect of further eluding the possibility of a demand for royalties to be paid. This practice became so common that since the 1980s it is referred to as its own category: "*reencauche*." [34]

The recordings done by Margarita Ines Giraldo Zapata, born in 1930 in the small locality of San Vicente in Antioquia exemplify these practices. Giraldo moved in the 1930s with her family to Medellín, and became an aficionada for the music of the Mexican-American Lydia Mendoza, which she learned to sing and performed for friends and family. In 1950, a friend took her to Discos Zeida, where she was paired with another singer to constitute the duet *Las Estrellitas* (The Little Stars) (Burgos 2012). According to Judith Arboledo, who also integrated a duet at the time called *Las Trigueñitas* (The Brunets), Las Estrellitas recorded the repertoire of the Mexican sister duet Las Hermanas Padilla almost in its entirety, which was common practice at the time. Duets contracted

[34] Alirio Castillo (2011) explained that a *reencauche* is a cover of a song that attempts to sound as close as possible to the original, but that sometimes can be given a different title.

by the record labels in Medellín often had their repertories chosen for them, unless, as Arboledo explained to me, they "really put a foot down" (Arboledo 2012).

Alberto Chavarriaga explained how different cover versions circulated simultaneously, catering to the tastes of listeners. For example, "Irresistible" with Las Hermanas Padillla was circulated in Colombia and became a jukebox hit very soon until several versions appeared and disputed the preferences of listeners. A version by Lydia Mendez with Las Estrellitas, according to Chavarriaga, quickly surpassed the original version by Las Hermanas Padilla, only to be displaced a few weeks later by Las Aves Cantoras, whose version prevailed for a few years. Chavarriaga told me this story as an anecdote, calling my attention to how the record labels battled to be the first to come out with cover versions of popular Mexican hits so they could quickly cash in on the success of those recordings.

Giraldo stayed with Las Estrellitas for a few years until called by Discos Colombia to record various songs already popular with audience for música guasca and música de carrilera by Lydia Mendoza, her idol. Giraldo adopted the artistic name Lydia Mendez, and many of her covers where recorded with slightly different titles or with D.A.R. on the record in lieu of the authors' names. The Colombian Lydia Mendez was also a talented composer, which was not acknowledged in most of her recordings (Chavarriaga 2012). She made a recording of a tango-style song titled "Dime Mal Hombre" (Tell Me Bad Man), which is an interesting case where the title and general shape of the chord progression are borrowed from one of Lydia Mendoza's most famous recordings, the tango "Mal Hombre" (Bad Man), which she recorded in 1936.

Many of the recordings done from the 1950s through 1980s categorized as música guasca or música de carrilera feature the vocal duet singing style in close harmony with a nasal timbre that had become by far the most predominant in Mexican-American música norteña.[35] The musical accompaniment featured combinations of string instruments common in the Colombian Andes such as the 6-string guitar and the *tiple*. With twelve steel strings and a bright and penetrating timbre, the tiple easily fulfilled the function of the norteño accordion in providing melodic counterpoints to the voice, and became characteristic of Colombian adaptations of the time. The repertoire recorded by the emerging Colombian groups included covers of Mexican songs and original *corridos* and *rancheras* that were labeled commercially as música campesina, música guasca, or with the newer term música de carrilera that appeared around 1950. The broader category música de carrilera continued to be used for Mexican and Mexican-American música norteña, as well as for other recontextualized foreign genres, such as local versions of boleros, tangos, and Ecuadorian pasillos also recorded by the new Colombian duos.

According to Alberto Chavarriaga, who owned a cantina and also composed more than 30 songs among corridos and canciones, there were two reasons why the Medellín record labels were so aggressive in the number of recordings they put out every month. First, their profit margin for records featuring local artists was enormous, because singers were paid per day and very little, and were kept in the studio for over twelve hours of recording. Singers did not get paid any royalties if their recordings were successful and

[35] For the musical styles and practices at the Mexico-Texas border in the 1920s-1950s, see Manuel Peña (1997) and Catherine Ragland (2009). Also, see Chapter 1.

the records sold a lot, which according to Chavarriaga, they did: “The campesinos who had moved to the city saved every penny to buy a record they liked” (personal communication).

The other explanation Chavarriaga gave me for the large-scale production of recordings of música de carrilera was that fans were incredibly eager for new music.

> “No cantina could survive without a lot of new music. I think that the music was new but it sounded similar, that’s why people liked it so much. It brought the same feelings, the same emotions then other songs but with different lyrics. People could have the same experience, feel the same very deep feelings brought by those voices so *lamentadas*.”

Lamented voices was the same expression used by Ramiro Arias when I asked him why he liked música guasca and música de carrilera. Arias said that it was an experience he enjoyed that no other music facilitated for him, which he told me he didn't know why he felt like this not being a working class person or campesino.

Música de carrilera can thus be viewed as the product of an aggressive commercial enterprise by the growing Medellín-based music industry. This view, which is common among detractors of the genre, does not consider that musical sounds and genres do not flourish if they don't become deeply significant to their communities of listeners. In the context of La Violencia when música de carrilera flourished, the sorrows and losses of recently urbanized campesinos were shared in the social spaces of the local cantina. With lyrics detailing tragedies of loss and lost love, displacement, alcohol abuse, and alienation, música de carrilera was thus the commercial manifestation of musical practices that were closely linked to Colombian rural workers’ migrant experiences, shaped by violence, inequality, and marginalization.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Colombians endured in horror the growth of drug cartels and organized crime, and the escalation of violence involving insurgent guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the army. The low status of música de carrilera and other Mexican-inspired music styles was then further complicated as public commentary increasingly conflated them with the lifestyles and tastes of all-powerful drug lords and bosses of the Colombian emerald mafia. Economist Baquero Nariño (1990), for example, wrote about a "decomposing subculture" which found its "local musical expression in música de carrilera with its paraphernalia and content from the low world of *sicarios* (hired assassins)" (70). For anthropologist Claudia Steiner (2006), the world of the Colombian emerald mafia "is violent, passionate, popular[36], exaggerated, and has a particular taste for Mexican music." Uribe Alarcón (2006) wrote that for emerald gangsters, "their pride lies on [showing off] thick golden chains encrusted with emeralds, tons of women, a Browning [pistol] with golden handles, an SUV, and their music: Mexican rancheras and corridos" (48). If Colombian elites had for long held associations between Mexican-inspired music and peasants and the urban poor, these comments exemplify how since the 1980s, música de carrilera came to be construed as emblematic of criminality, machismo, and bad taste.

Another tactic adopted by the Medellín music industry that affected the development of música de carrilera significantly derived from a standard practice in the negotiations between Colombian music entrepreneurs and multinational record distributors. Securing the distribution rights to a particular recording often involved a

[36] Used in this sense, "popular" in Colombia means lower socio-economic class.

“package deal” that included other less desirable (more obscure) recordings and artists. This applied not only to individual recordings, but also to whole catalogues by well-established multinational record labels (Castillo 2011). In order to maximize their chances for financial returns, Colombian labels promoted artists that were rather unknown in their places of origin, with much success in some cases as will be discussed further. One more way in which Colombian music entrepreneurs made the most out of the more obscure recordings in their foreign music catalogues was by recording local versions with new arrangements to appeal to their target audiences.

These tactics determined in many ways which groups of música norteña became known in Colombia, or not. For example, the music of Mexican stars of música norteña Los Alegres de Terán was widely circulated under the category música de carrilera. Because they appeared mostly in compilation albums with little information it is difficult to tell by looking at the albums if they are Mexican. Mexican American, or Colombian. The compilation albums also had the effect of completely erasing the term música norteña and obscuring the names of composers. These practices also created audiences in Colombia for groups that were in the lower echelon of some record labels’ catalogues and barely known in Mexico and the United States**.** This is the case, for example, of Lupe y Polo, a Mexican duo considered to be among the founding fathers of música norteña by many Colombians, while hardly heard of elsewhere. On the other hand, groups of transnational fame such as Los Tigres del Norte were barely known in Colombia until the 1990s.

Lupe y Polo and Las Hermanas Calle - "La Banda del Carro Rojo" and "Dos Pasajes"

In the early 1980s, two corridos became popular with fans of música de carrilera: "Dos Pasajes" (Two Tickets) and "La Banda del Carro Rojo" (The Gang of the Red Car), both recorded by the Mexican norteño duet Lupe y Polo whose recordings were heavily marketed by the Medellín music industry while they were virtually unknown in Mexico and the U.S. The case of La Banda del Carro Rojo illustrates well the effects of the Medellín record labels' modus operandi. This corrido, made internationally famous by Mexican-American stars Los Tigres del Norte several years earlier, wasn't known in Colombia until popularized by Lupe y Polo's recording. As it was common practice in the industry, Las Hermanas Calle, at the time the most commercially successful and recognized act in música de carrilera, also recorded their own versions of the two corridos, boosting their popularity even further.

While Lupe y Polo's recording had a typical 1980s norteño sound, Las Hermanas Calle's version of La Banda del Carro Rojo featured new arrangements and adapted lyrics, dressed up with the accompaniment of a mariachi style ensemble. The mixed character of the recording's arrangement, combining mariachi and norteño elements, transformed the corrido norteño into a staple of música de carrilera, with the hybrid sounds and repertoires that characterize it.

Corridos referencing outlaws and smuggling, common in Mexican música norteña since its early days, were not a novelty in música de carrilera. The Colombian version of La Banda del Carro Rojo, however, was momentous at a time when the illicit drug economy seemed to permeate all spheres of Colombian life.

La Banda del Carro Rojo (The Gang of the Red Car)[37]

Dicen que venian de Cali (del sur)/ en un carro colorado
Traian cien quilos de coca/ pa Nueva York y Chicago (Chicago)
Asi lo dijo el soplón/ que los habia denunciado.

Ya era tarde en la noche (Ya habian pasado la aduana)/ estaban cerca a Cartago (la que esta en El Paso, Texas)

Pero llegando a Cerritos (pero en mero San Antonio)/ los estaban esperando
La policia de Pereira (eran los rinches de Texas)/ ya los tenia chequeados (que comandan el condado)

They say they were coming from Cali (the south)/ in a red car
Bringing one hundred kilos of cocaine/ going to NY and Chicago (Chicago)
That's how it was told/ by the whistle blower/ the one who had denounced them

Late that night (they had made it through customs)/ getting near Cartago (the one near El Paso)

But approaching Cerritos (right in San Antonio)/ they were being awaited
The police force from Pereira (it was the Texas rangers)/ Had been checking them out (that rule the county)

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[37] "La Banda del Carro Rojo" was composed by Paulino Vargas, a prolific author of corridos from Reynosa, Mexico. The original lyrics are (in parentheses) clearly allude to the immigration struggles of the Mexican-American context of the border, while the Colombian version makes reference to the rampant drug trafficking and violence that was spreading in Colombia at the time. Sonically, the original version features the typical norteño ensemble with accordion and bajo sexto at the center, while the Colombian version features orchestrations with trumpets and strings, Mariachi style, with the addition of the accordion, common in recordings of música de carrilera in the 1980s.

La Banda del Carro Rojo in Colombia had its popularity amplified by circulating both in the version of Las Hermanas Calle who at the time epitomized the música de carrilera genre and had a large following among fans. Lupe y Polo's recording continued to circulate as well, and reached into other parts of Colombia as its Mexican record label Musart had distribution deals with both Sonolux, one of the Medellín music industry giants, and also with the smaller label Balboa which, based in Bogotá, distributed directly to smaller markets in the Andean departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá (Castillo 2012). This corrido was as an important catalyst for the proliferation of local corridos composed by young musicians who had grown up with música de carrilera, as will be explored in the next chapter. With the spread of cassette technology and music piracy in Mexico, the U.S., and Colombia, these musicians gradually came into much closer contact with música norteña circulating independently from the Medellín music industry, and the influence of groups like Los Tigres del Norte became noticeable.

Composed by the Mexican star Antonio Aguilar, "Dos Pasajes" is another corrido recorded by Lupe y Polo that Las Hermanas Calle quickly made a cover of, around the same time as La Banda del Carro Rojo. Dos Pasajes has compelling lyrics in which the protagonist announces to his lover that he got two tickets and was ready to leave to other lands, and invites her to come along. The corrido became another classic of música de carrilera in the version recorded by Lupe y Polo, which is a good example of how the flexible category encompassed many styles and is mostly recognized by fans because of its mode of circulation, spaces of sociability, and the affective power it embodies.

Dos Pasajes (Two Tickets)

Que dices prieta querida/ vamonos para otras tierras
Aqui traigo dos pasajes/ o me sigues o te quedas

Ya estan silbando los trenes/ dile adios a tus parientes
Viviremos muy felices/ ya veras que no te arrepientes

What do you say my dear/ let's go to other lands
Here I have two tickets/ either come or stay

The trains are already whistling/ say goodbye to your relatives
We will live very happily/ you'll see you won't regret it

At first, I was puzzled by the level of endearment that my interlocutors displayed when remembering *Dos Pasajes* as a popular corrido and, for musicians, a crucial influence on their style. Why this corrido and not another one? The answers varied but mostly pointed to a strong emotional charge that some identified as sadness, as put by musician Humberto Rojas: "It is so beautiful and sad. It is beautiful because it is so simple, like a campesino would speak but so profound." Rojas also told me that he had personal attachments to the corrido because his dad used to play it on a record player every weekend when he was home (Rojas 2012).

Another explanation came from Alírio Castillo, a savvy music producer and promoter who before embarking on his project Corridos Prohibidos worked as a "song plugger" for big corporations such as Phillips and Sony in Colombia. Castillo had for many years specialized in *música popular*, a category he defined according to its target audience - the working class. According to Castillo, he had learned to observe and understand why people like the music they like, a critical skill in his business. Reminiscing about the popularity of Dos Pasajes, Castillo affirmed convincingly that there were two reasons, in his view. One was the norteño style of Lupe y Polo that,

although not novel – recordings of música norteña had been circulated since the 1930s by the Medellín industry – was fresh because of the success of La Banda del Carro Rojo, at the time inserted in a much larger sphere of translocal musical circulation. Second, Castillo reminded me the corrido made its appearance during one of the worst periods of the war, when thousands of people were obligated to flee their homes and lands in search of safety. Dos Pasajes spoke directly to the experience of forced displacement, uncertainty, and loss (Castillo 2012).

Música de Despecho

The biggest hit in the career of Las Hermanas Calles was "La Cuchilla," a corrido that earned the sisters the title of *Las Reinas del Despecho* (The Queens of Spite). The lyrics of La Cuchilla convey a threat of physical violence against a man who did the protagonist wrong. The category música de despecho was, as all of the other names given to styles within the continuum of Mexican inspiration, coined by radio DJs in Medellin, and displaced the label música de carrilera, which at the time in the 1980s was already viewed as nostalgic. Música de despecho aggregates styles that do not vary from the 1980s sound of música de carrilera. However, part of the repertoire turned towards emphasizing the more emphatic and outraged ethos of despecho with lyrics more similar to La Cuchilla.

Las Hermanas Calles continued to be the major exponents of música de despecho into the 1990s, with the musical style featuring orchestrations, trumpets, and occasionally accordion that had characterized their sound. However, a new generation of performers

rose in the 90s, and changed the type of arrangements and performance styles associated with música guasca, música de carrilera, and the early period of música de despecho.

Darío Gómez, eventually canonized as *El Rey del Despecho* (The King of Despecho), attained fame and commercial success among the existing audiences of música guasca and música de carrilera in Medellín after he left the trio of música de carrilera with whom he began his career. Gómez went on to revamp his image and music with the addition of synthesizers, electric guitars, and the emphasis on himself as a young and attractive male soloist. Both the addition of electronic sounds and the male soloist ethos drew much from *balada romantica*, one of the most popular working-class oriented musical styles across Latin America in the 1980s[38] and proved to be a winning formula for Darío Gómez, El Charrito Negro, and Alberto Posada, whose repertoires did not fall too far from those of música de carrilera. Dario Gómez's best known recording, *Nadie Es Eterno en Este Mundo*, has had enduring power in the repertoire of música de despecho, and will be discussed further in the next chapters.

The 1990s marked a shift in the Colombian music industry, as the 'Big Five' multinational music corporations established their dominance in the local market while the Medellín-based record industry gradually waned[39] and the category música de carrilera quickly became an icon of the past. Darío Gómez founded DAGO, his own independent record label, initially to produce his own recordings, but as his repackaging

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[38] See Party 2006 and Madrid 2013.

[39] Between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s, the multinational music corporations Sony, BMG, Warner, Universal, and EMI came to dominate the Colombian music market (Wade 2000).

of música de carrilera proved to be highly successful commercially Gómez ventured out to produce other artists that became categorized under música de despecho and música popular, the newer labels within the Colombian genre world of Mexican-derived musics.

Chapter 3: Expanding the Scenes of Música Norteña – Villavicencio, 1990s

Introduction

September 7th, 2012. *After months of trying to schedule a visit to Oscar Díaz's workshop, I am finally on my way to meet the sought-after instrument maker. The cabdriver makes his way through the narrow streets of Villavicencio's city center as dark clouds cluster over it, a typical stormy afternoon in the Colombian llanos. I heard much about Oscar Díaz from musicians I talked to since beginning fieldwork. Interestingly, some of them never met Oscar Díaz in person and some didn't even seem to remember his name correctly, but they certainly are aware of and contribute to the myth about how the first bajo sexto in Colombia came to be. Díaz's quasi-legendary status among musicians and fans of Colombian música norteña is certainly attributed to him having built, back in the 1990s, the first local version of a bajo sexto, the quintessential string instrument of Mexican música norteña. I feel really excited about meeting Oscar Díaz, in part because he was part of a group of musicians in Villaviencio in the early 1990s involved with a vibrant music scene that eventually came to be associated with the terms música norteña and "corridos prohibidos." He was a founding member of one of the first Colombian groups of this novel musical formation, Las Aguilas del Norte, who happened to play a central role in its emergence.*

It isn't hard to spot Oscar Díaz's instrument factory from the cab as we get to barrio La Florida, an older working class neighborhood not too far from La Playa, the two-block urban stretch where mariachi musicians in Villavicencio hang out and wait to be hired by potential clients that drive by. Visible from the sidewalk, unfinished six-string

guitars and violins hang from the ceiling, and half-built harps of various sizes lie around the shop. Seated near the door, a man is polishing the round back of a vihuela while another cuts a long piece of wood that looks like a fingerboard in the making. While I admire the guitarrones piled up in a corner, surprised to see as many Mexican instruments as Colombian cuatros and harps, a third man comes out to greet me with a large smile. As if having heard my thoughts, he comments:

> Yes, ma'am… here we make many of the instruments used by the local mariachis. We are known for it. But we also build *arpas llaneras* (harp of the llano), people from all over the llano come for them (personal communication DATE).

Oscar Díaz tells me he inherited the shop and the string instrument-building trade from his father Olimpo Díaz, with whom he apprenticed since he was six years old. In the process, Oscar also became well versed in playing a variety of stringed instruments and musical genres. In his household, as in many others in his working class neighborhood, música llanera and Mexican rancheras and boleros were prevalent musical tastes while he was growing up in the 1970s and 80s, a taste that his father cultivated through his activities as a performer as well, playing with local Mexican-style bolero trios.

Díaz doesn't have any orders for bajo sextos today as I visit, and there are none to be seen in the shop. Knowing of my interest and to make up for their absence, he shows me a picture of one he has made recently, beautifully carved and decorated with pearly ornaments. "Canadian pine and mother-of-pearl," Díaz explains. He recalls his initial encounters with música norteña and the bajo sexto in the early 1990s:

> My entrance into música norteña was progressive […]. Two local musicians introduced it in Villavicencio, playing a repertoire that mixed *música llanera*, boleros, música de carrilera, and corridos by groups such as Las Hermanas Calle;

> [the term] música norteña wasn't used yet. They invited me to form a trio because I played electric bass and other stringed instruments; we were able to play llanera with the *cuatro* and also switch to guitar and tiple and play in trio-style; we were '*polifaceticos'* (multifaceted). Then we added a drummer to the group and decided to *become norteños* (my emphasis). We tried to emulate the sound of the [Mexican] recordings, from those pirate cassettes that were around at the time and that we listened to. Lupe y Polo, Los Tigres del Norte, Cornelio Reyna. But there was nothing we could do with the electric guitar to imitate *that* sound. We knew there was another string instrument there in the mix, but I, for example, had never heard of a *bajo sexto* and had no idea what it was like. Until I saw one. It was a little different [then the ones he saw later], smaller and more rustic, like a cheap version for tourists. As an instrument-maker, it seemed easy to me to take the measurements and build something similar, to analyze it. This bajo sexto belonged to an airplane pilot from here that used to travel to Mexico. This happened back in the time when there was a lot of *movimiento* (movement) here, lots of characters who had a lot of connections with Mexico, you see? I don't really know exactly what these transactions were. Our singer was well known here and used to hang out and sing in this *movida* (action scene), and found out that someone had a bajo sexto, so he borrowed it. He brought it to me. The initial results were not what I hoped for. We didn't know the tuning, the type of strings to use; my first bajo sexto was only an experiment, an amateur investigation (Díaz 2012).

I begin this introduction with Oscar Díaz's story because it highlights some of the main themes I explore in this chapter, chiefly, the multiple networks in which música norteña and a budding production of corridos in Colombia became entangled during the 1990s as they emerged through and followed new routes of spatial and musical mobility. Soon after the initial appearance of a handful of pioneer groups in the rural Colombian Andes as seen in the previous chapter, this expansion involved new performance spaces, new audiences and musical instruments, new forms of patronage, and new modes of production, circulation, and reception. The growing drug trafficking economy in Colombia had a stronghold in the llanos and the Amazonia regions with Villavicencio at the center, and was a major player in these developments, which also forged new discourses and attitudes towards the growth of this music scene.

In this chapter, I examine how Villavicencio, the major urban center in the region of the Colombian *llanos* (eastern plains) and a pole of attraction for inhabitants of the Amazonian region, became the focal point of an active scene of live música norteña and newly composed corridos. Oscar Díaz's story about how he and his bandmates decided to become *norteños* illustrates how he and other musicians at the time transitioned from performing more mixed musical styles of Mexican parentage already widespread in Villavicencio, such as those commercialized as música de carrilera, música de despecho, música popular, and the older bolero-trio style, to adopting música norteña, which was seen then as a newer trend that became more available through pirated cassettes, signaling important shifts in the music industry in Colombia and within a sphere of transnational music circulation.

Díaz's account of the arrival of the bajo sexto from Mexico directly to the city of Villavicencio also articulates with local experiences of other growing networks through which musical sounds and artifacts traveled at the time, which he mentioned in a very subdued way in reference to the mounting transnational drug trafficking routes that forged new linkages between Colombia and Mexico through business transactions and cultural exchanges.[1] Although alluding obliquely to the booming informal economy fueled by the cocaine industry that offered plenty of *movimiento* (movement), Oscar Díaz's account highlighted the emergence of new types of social mobility in Villavicencio, including actual physical movement of people and goods – such as

[1] For the growth of drug trafficking networks between Colombia and Mexico, see Betancourt and García 1995, and Astorga 2005.

recordings – regionally and between Colombia and Mexico, as well as new economic opportunities for musicians and for that effect for many Colombians of any occupation. Díaz's background and experiences, however, also suggest a longer and broader history of concurrent mobilities of people and musical tastes that converged in Villavicencio, in light of transforming social, political, and economic conjunctures since the mid-twentieth century.

My goal is thus to map the networks that gave shape to and were shaped by the social world within which música norteña emerged in Villavicencio, mapping interconnections within and between events, groups of people, institutions, physical artifacts, as well as affective associations and discourses regarding various local musical practices. The themes I discuss in this chapter arose from numerous conversations with musicians and listeners in Villavicencio such as the one with Oscar Díaz, which revealed multiple strands of connections and associations to be followed in order to trace the local emergence of música norteña. Although the money generated by the cocaine boom was undeniably important for the spread of Mexican-style corridos and música norteña in Villavicencio and Colombia in general in the 1990s, analyzing these new musical practices primarily as an adoption of Mexican narcocorridos related to the socio-cultural networks elicited by the war and the drug traffic, as proposed by other scholars (Astorga 1997; Pérez González 2003; Valbuena 2004; González Vélez 2007; Bahamón 2009; Montoya Arias 2012), contributes to the obscuring of broader musical and socio-political dynamics in the region and the nation at the time. The accounts by musicians and listeners suggested a much more complex picture of how music genres, Colombian and foreign, interacted in Villavicencio, becoming intertwined with regional and class

identifications in which música norteña came to occupy a marginal position, particularly as it gained notoriety at a crucial moment of intense turmoil while region and nation-building projects gained new impetus in the region. In sum, my main goal in this chapter is to provide an analysis of the emergence of live música norteña in Colombia, more specifically Villavicencio and surrounding areas of influence in the 1990s, and how, as noted by Lise Waxer (2002) in relation to the development of Colombian salsa, this event "reveals deeper historical patterns, both out of and continually shaped by the thirst of modern Colombians for diverse musical sounds, both national and international" (221). I approach this analysis from three main angles that are complimentary, as explained next.

The first deals with situating the appearance of the first grupos norteños within long-standing musical practices in Villavicencio. For this purpose, I highlight processes of spatial and musical mobilities to situate the city as historically a crossroads of people, business transactions, customs, and cultural flows. The activities of musicians who in the 1990s "became norteños," to use Oscar Díaz's expression, were not uncommon for local musicians: embracing various musical genres and performing eclectic repertoires, in which styles of Mexican provenance occupied an important share. Many of the musicians involved in Villavicencio's emergent scene of música norteña were migrants, converging in Villavicencio like many other migrating persons, habits, and music. I examine these dislocations and encounters in light of shifting socio-economic and political conjunctures in Colombia and particularly in Villavicencio and the surrounding llano and Amazonía regions as they were impacted by neoliberal politics and discourses of multiculturalism in progress throughout the 1990s, the expansion of the drug economy, fierce dispute for local power between guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and ensuing violence.

I also pay attention to how, while Mexican music genres made an impact on the musical tastes and practices of people in Villavicencio through people's migrations and via radio and recordings since at least the 1940s, becoming as much a part of the local soundscapes as other genres that were popular among Colombians at the time, *música llanera*[2] gradually gained force as a regional tradition, which took place in counterpoint to the marginalization of música norteña within the sphere of recognized Colombian popular musics. I consider this to be an important topic because it is a key reason why private sponsorship was, and for many musicians still is, a fundamental factor for the growth and maintenance of live and recorded música norteña in Colombia, which I continue to explore in this chapter.

A third important goal in this chapter is to shed light on the lived experiences of musicians and the constraints and opportunities that motivated them to become norteños, focusing on the process of "becoming" through an analysis that outlines the convergence of broader historical processes and power configurations with the choices exercised by individuals. It aims at highlighting the creative ways in which these musicians negotiated the new political economies created by the drug trafficking and escalating armed conflict,

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[2] *Música llanera* (music of the plains) is an umbrella category for a range of musical and dance practices conceived as traditional to the region of the llanos of Colombia and Venezuela. The category refers more commonly to *joropo*, a 6/8 musical form that is in itself a broad term including many stylistic variations, which may be vocal or instrumental and accompanies a couples dance. Arpa llanera (harp of the plains), maracas, and the small-bodied, four-stringed chordophone cuatro are the instruments most associated with the joropo and llanera in general. The electric bass is not uncommon either.

to make their own interventions into the range of possible ways of imagining their place in the conflict.

Villavicencio, Gateway to the Plains

Villavicencio, the capital of the department of Meta, is the most important urban center of the *llanos orientales* (eastern plains), one of Colombia's geographical regions also comprising the departments of Casanare, Vichada, Arauca, and Guainía. Much of this tropical region features grassy lowlands, plains, and savannahs where vast, sparsely populated landscapes stretch to the eastern border with Venezuela. Large navigable rivers, tributaries of the Amazon and Orinoco systems, cross the plains and are used for transportation to easternmost areas.

To the south and southwest, the region of *el llano*, also called the *Orinoquía*, borders with the Colombian Amazonian region, which features isolated areas with dense jungles and hills, and includes the departments of Guaviare, Putumayo, Caquetá, Vaupés, Amazonas and Guainía. Together, the llano and the Amazonía represent nearly two thirds of Colombia's land area.[3] Much of these regions have been historically considered "areas of colonization" and prone to conflicts over territory, as the possibility of settling on

[3] In addition to the local indigenous populations, Spanish conquistadors and Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries were present in the area since the 1600s. Conflictive relationships between indigenous groups, Europeans, and later, mestizos, over territory, labor, and resources never ceased, which some observers consider important precedents to present day disputes and violence (Rausch 2003: 254; Gómez A. 2014).

public lands continued to attracted peasants as well as entrepreneurs from other parts of the country since the nineteenth century and throughout the 1900s (LeGrand 1985)[4].

Although Villavicencio is less than 100 miles from Bogotá, because the eastern Andes contains peaks of up to 19,000 feet between the two cities, road trips can take several hours on the narrow two-way highway that connects them. Passing through the high Andean plateau, the road meanders up and down the mountains to finally descend, after a series of tunnels and bridges, to the city of Villavicencio. Nested in the lush foothills of the eastern *cordillera* (mountain range), the city is an obligatory point of passage between the Andes and the low-lying Colombian eastern regions, thus referred to as "*el portal de la llanura*" (the gateway to the plains). Journalist Juana Salamanca describes Villavicencio as a "city of two faces," in reference to "the duality of a city that throughout its history has looked into two directions: to the plains, of which it is the gate, and to the cordillera, where lies the country's capital" (Salamanca Uribe 2009). Villavo, as locals commonly call their city, has thus historically occupied a pivotal position as a crossroads of people and trade, linking the *llano* and the southeast areas of the Amazonia to the rest of the country. Nonetheless, material goods, music, and ideas have circulated into and through Villavicencio in complex and multiple ways that may well constitute dynamics that are broader than the duality proposed by Salamanca Uribe.

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[4] The encroachment of land entrepreneurs onto peasant holdings, however, has historically contributed to contentious results (LeGrand 1986: 164). For political scientist Paul Oquist (1980), there is a continuity between long standing antagonism between peasants and landowners and the rise of the conflict between insurgent guerrillas and the state, which have tended to develop in the same geographical spaces. He argues that "in twentieth century Colombia, 'colonization area' is synonymous with chronic conflicts and high degrees of violence" (225).

Economic Routes, Political Violence, and Migrations

Although the difficult access from the center of Colombia to the *llano* ensured that Villavicencio remained "an isolated frontier outpost" into the 1940s, the city developed through successive waves of migrations of people from other parts of Colombia (Rausch 2007: ix). The first immigrants to come into the llanos in the nineteenth century were mostly peasant squatters from Cundinamarca, Tolima, and other departments of the Andean regions escaping violent land disputes in the interior countryside and seeking independence and economic opportunity. Affluent entrepreneurs interested in growing coffee, cocoa, and cattle soon followed them, and gradually extended their control over the territory and the peasants' labor by asserting private ownership of vast areas of public land (ibid).

Although unequal, economic growth since the 1930s was boosted by the completion of the road to Bogotá, the implementation of successful new crops, and improved ranching techniques (Rausch 2007: 112-13). The prospect of oil in the llano also prompted the arrival of large multinational companies that proved to be a crucial and lasting source of attraction to the area. Another major factor in opening up the llano was the development of a local aviation system for transport of people and products in the late 1930s, which made accessible the remote areas that used to lie a month away for those travelling on horseback (Bell Bates 1947: 179-80). By the 1940s, a flood of immigrants from other parts of the country and abroad had turned Villavicencio into the largest town of the Colombian llanos by far and one of the fastest growing in the country. As put by historian Jane Rausch, Villavicencio was an example of "a classic boomtown," which would remain so throughout the following decades of the twentieth century (112). Nancy

Bell Bates, an American who lived in Villavicencio for a few years accompanying her biologist researcher husband, wrote in 1947 that since the opening of the road and the arrival of the planes:

> "…People and things from almost everywhere have poured in"… "It is no wonder that Villavicencio reminds us a lot of boomtowns one reads about in the old Western stories"… "Horses and cattle fill the streets at fair time, and bars do about the best business of all" (Bell Bates 1947 quoted in Rausch 2007:112).

For journalist Antonio Bruges Carmona, Villavicencio at the time best resembled a port city, where people from the highlands and those coming from the llanos mingled as they conducted business while enjoying music and liquor. In an article for *El Tiempo* on April 16, 1947, he wrote:

> Like a port on the Mediterranean, Villavicencio gives shelter to thousands of people who arrive from all parts and go out [to the Llanos] to look for the fabled Golden Fleece. [The city] is a place of commercial transactions where negotiations are carried on about cattle and salt, rice and rubber, cord and fish, land and pasture, coffee and *panela* – there are entire blocks packed with bars and cafés filled with the noise of *electrolas* that drown out the sound of dice on metallic tables (Bruges Carmona 1947, quoted in Rausch 2007: 113).

If Villavicencio had historically been a node of convergence of migratory flows, this tendency was magnified when the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 unleashed the period of undeclared civil war known as *La Violencia,* causing a massive migration of people across the country over the next several years. After the violence that initially broke out in Bogotá was quickly subdued, the bloody episodes that characterized *La Violencia* took place mostly in the country's rural areas and affected mostly the poor, causing large numbers of campesinos from the Andean interior to flee to other less affected rural areas and to cities (Bushnell 1993; Palacios 1999), which greatly impacted the llano and Villavicencio.

The llano was also the site of an important focus of liberal guerrilla resistance during the first five years of *La Violencia*, which, as agreed upon by most analysts of the Colombian conflict, provided a significant precedent to the rise of the first leftist armed guerrillas later in the 1960s, such as the ELN and the FARC, and to their historical presence and peasant support in the region of the llanos. In 1953, the leaders of the liberal guerrilla in the llanos accepted an amnesty from conservative general Rojas Pinilla, who had ascended to presidency of Colombia through a military coup. If initially violence had also caused an exodus of people out of the llano, as had happened in rural areas across the country, when the guerrilla chieftains put down their arms, "scores of migrants, displaced from other troubled areas in other parts of the country, began to arrive to Villavicencio in search of a better future," a pattern that continued through the 1950s and 60s (Rausch 2007:131), and would later resume during a second wave of violence and migrations in the 1980s and 90s.

Most of the new arrivals came from the Andean departments of Antioquia, Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Santander, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca, in a wave of migration unleashed as much by economic necessity as by the need to escape violence, which were inextricably intertwined for campesinos who were forced to leave their possessions behind (Romero 1983). Although the levels of violence in the region remained high, after 1953 Villavicencio "became a magnet for displaced immigrants" and experienced rapid economic, social, and cultural transformation (Rausch 2007:117).

A Boomtown 1: Radio Waves and Musical Tastes

Just like aviation and business opportunities since the 1940s opened up Villavicencio to "people and things from everywhere," in the words of Nancy Bell Bates cited previously, so did transmissions from battery-operated radios. News, music, and *radionovelas* (radio drama) reached the town by long and shortwaves travelling through the mountains via *Radio Caracol* and *Radio Santa Fé* from Bogotá, and across the eastern plains aired by *Radio Rumbos* and *Ecos del Torbe* from Caracas and San Cristobal in Venezuela (Rausch 2013). In 1944, the first radio station in Villavicencio, *La Voz del Llano* (The Voice of the Llano), began to operate, modeled after Bogotá's *La Voz de La Victor,* Medellíns' *La Voz de Antioquia,* and other commercial stations that began to multiply across the national territory.

Coinciding with the emergence of the Colombian popular music industry in the 1940s in Medellín, radio musical programming developing across the country reflected and disseminated the eclectic mix of Colombian and foreign genres that characterized it (see Chapter 2). As music recording in Colombia didn't start in earnest until the late 1940s, early radio programming aired music mainly produced in Mexico, the U.S., Cuba, and Argentina – bolero, ranchera, tango, foxtrots, swing, Afro-Cuban styles, Peruvian *vals*, as well as Colombian bambucos and pasillos recorded in New York and Mexico (Wade 2000). Radio broadcast then became the most important medium of communication and musical distribution for inhabitants of Villavicencio and surrounding areas. It was a major force in the formation of the musical preferences of local residents, many of whom were migrants from the Andean regions where these styles had made deep inroads.

Musicians and other residents that I talked with in Villavicencio who had familiarity with earlier musical life in the city, either from their own experiences or from recalling their parents' and grandparents' musical preferences, constantly cited a variety of musical sources. Through our conversations, my interlocutors evoked memories of tangos by Argentine icon Carlos Gardel, and recollections of bolero trios and rancheras sung by Colombian star Helenita Vargas. Widely mentioned were the names of Arnulfo Briceño, who composed the official hymn of Villavicencio and other well-known songs, as well as those of famous Mexican singing-actors and actresses such as Lola Beltrán, Pedro Infante, Miguel Aceves Mejía, and José Alfredo Jiménez.

Oscar Díaz, the luthier whom I introduced at the opening of this chapter, told me how his father worked since the 1950s as a professional musician in Villavicencio, performing in the most popular ensemble format at the time: the trio style with vocal harmonies and string instruments modeled after the legendary Mexican trio Los Panchos. Their repertoire, however, was not restricted to boleros, and featured popular songs of the moment as well as older favorites from various musical genres and points of origin. Their use of different combinations of string instruments such as guitar, tiple, and bandola, also typical of bambuco, allowed for great flexibility and facilitated the performance of such variety of styles (Díaz 2012). As in other parts of Colombia, *serenatas* with this type of trio formation or duets had been for long a central part of social life, and constituted the main activity for working musicians who performed at many types of private events and cantinas of varied social standing and reputation.

Teresita Díaz, composer of a number of canciones and corridos that have been recorded by local grupos norteños since the 1990s, was born in the late 1940s. In her

recollection, Mexican music has been an integral part of Villavicencio's music life as far as she can remember:

> Since I was very little, I used to accompany my dad to sing in serenatas. There was always music in our home. Most of it in *estilo ranchero* (Mexican ranchera style), which is something people here in the llano like very much; we are *llaneros* but we could very well be Mexicans (laughs…). Ranchera and bolero were as common, or even more I would say, than *música llanera*. My dad and my brothers sang and played guitars. My dad was a great singer and loved to sing songs by Alfredo Jimenez and Pedro Infante. We heard them on the radio a lot. We liked *música colombiana* too. But *música llanera* wasn't heard as much on radio or in *tiendas* back then; *creo que era de mas alla, del llano adentro* (it seems to me that it was from farther out, farther into the llano) (Díaz 2011).

Carlos Rojas, director of group Cimarrón and researcher of música llanera, was born in 1954 and remembers that while growing up in San Martín de los Llanos in the department of Meta, he listened to *Radio Lara*, a Venezuelan radio station that promoted *joropo*, considered the quintessential musical style within the broader category of música llanera.[5] As explained by Rojas, the Venezuelan style he heard on radio was very different, however, than the much more hybrid joropo that was played then in the Colombian llano which he was familiar with from watching his father and uncles playing with tiple and bandola during family gatherings, string instruments equally common in the Andes and in the llano at the time (Rojas, in interview by Liliana Martínez Polo for *El Tiempo*, 28/06/2012). Rojas's account, as well as the other ones cited above, evokes well

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[5] Joropo encompasses a range of musical practices. Yet its most general characteristics feature 6/8 rhythm and a coreographed couples dance. The core instrumentation may include arpa llanera (harp of the llanos), cuatro (four-stringed chordophone), maracas, bandola, and electric bass. According to musician and researcher Carlos Hernández Rojas (2000), joropo in the oral tradition, or *joropo campesino*, refers to a complex of musical practices of the pre-recording era that varied greatly throughout the region of the llanos in both Colombia and Venezuela.

the mixed character of musical practices in the llano and in Villavicencio, which, in the same manner of other components of the city's vibrant and convoluted social and economic life in the mid twentieth century, constituted heterogeneous networks of actors and practices within a multiplicity of cultural flows.

Describing the live music scene in the mid 1940s in the Colombian interior, Peter Wade (2000) also called attention to the "tremendous eclecticism" that was the norm for working musicians in Antioquia and Bogotá (122). The *Trio Los Romanceros*, for example, was originally from Barranquilla, considered a stronghold of Costeño styles such as *porro* and *cumbia* that later came to dominate Colombian mass mediated popular music. Their forte, however, were boleros, similarly to several other groups at the time, which exemplifies the deep inroads made by the Cuban genre in Colombia via the Mexicanized bolero string trio format. Yet, the trio did include in their repertoires bambucos, pasillos, porros, and other Costeño styles; "these working guitarrists played anything and everything to a very wide range of people" (ibid). Similarly, by the 1950s the activities of musicians in Villavicencio comprised a mélange of practices and repertoires that drew from various sources and shared similar spaces of sociability.

When I arrived to Villavicencio for fieldwork in 2012, the city's musical life resembled the varied soundscapes described above in many ways. Large billboards seemed to be in every corner announcing the most advertised concert tour of that year in Colombia: the biggest star of the Mexican music industry in the ranchera genre, Vicente Fernandez, was coming to Villavicencio in a few months. Likewise, posters announcing the upcoming *Torneo Internacional del Joropo*, the largest annual festivity celebrating the llanos' regional music and dance, were also seen in many points in the city, although

much less visible than the heavily promoted Colombian tour of Vicente Fernandez. DJs dominated the nightlife in Villavicencio's *zona rosa*, the downtown entertainment area frequented primarily by middle and upper class youth in Villavo, playing the latest transnational hits of reggaeton, bachata, and electronic dance music that could be equally heard in any Colombian or Latin American metropolis at the time. Salsa seemed to attract patrons in their thirties and older, and was the centerpiece at a couple of venues in Villavicencio that were by far the favorite night entertainment destinations of most of my middle and upper class acquaintances.

Música norteña was the main musical attraction at *El Rancho de Las Aguilas* (The Ranch of the Eagles), a venue also located in the zona rosa that attracted a clientele of various ages and social classes and one of the few in the area that had a permanent stage for live music. Virtually all of the norteño groups in Villavicencio also included in their repertoires older carrilera classics and new hits of música popular, styles that draw considerably from Mexican ranchera and norteña. Most of their work, however, consisted of performing for private functions and being 'polifaceticos' – not only an unquestionable necessity but also an established practice.

Performing live at El Rancho every Friday and Saturday nights, the norteño group *Las Aguilas del Norte* alternated sets with a DJ that played a mix of salsa, vallenato, and tropipop, favorite Colombian dance genres that packed the dance floor while the band took breaks. Located a few blocks from El Rancho, the only music venue dedicated to música llanera in Villavicencio featured a live quartet composed of harp, cuatro, maracas, and electric bass every Saturday and attracted an older upper class clientele and lots of tourists. While I lived in Villavicencio in 2012-2013, a new live music establishment

called *Viva Mexico* opened up. Every weekend, they featured one of the local mariachi ensembles and various groups of norteña and música popular, in addition to performances by well-known impersonators of Mexican stars.

By the time I started field research, I had already travelled to Villavicencio several times over a period of six years and was familiar with the city's diverse soundscapes and strong penchant for Mexican music, which nonetheless had been a striking revelation on my first trip to the llanos. As much as joropo and other musical styles under the umbrella of música llanera are largely promoted as the sonic emblem of the region and the city, which will be explored later in this chapter, and Colombian salsa and other dance genres are ubiquitous beyond regional and socio-economic lines, Mexican and Mexican-inspired corridos and rancheras were ever-present in Villavicencio's nightlife, commercial streets, roadside tiendas, public buses, social gatherings, and radio.[6]

For most middle and upper class Villavicences, however, while mariachis may be seen as a tradition to have for serenading at someone's birthday or anniversary, other Mexican-derived styles such as norteña, carrilera, and música popular are generally reviled or just ignored. During fieldwork, I was constantly faced with various expressions

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[6]As in other places in Colombia, exponents of Mexican música ranchera heavily promoted by the international music industry and mariachi ensembles may appeal to people in Villavicencio across social classes and are often present in social events such as Sunday family gatherings, weddings, and anniversaries. On the other hand, other Mexican-derived styles such as música de carrilera, popular, and norteña came to be primarily associated with the lower classes, which in Colombia does not necessarily correlate with lack of financial means because of the informal drug-related economy that benefitted many previously poor Colombians.

of dislike for these musics, from disgusted looks to incredulous questions about why I would choose to study such a music genre. Yet, the local audiences for música norteña are far from homogeneous as I did meet people of all socioeconomic backgrounds who enjoyed it, which does not dismiss the widely recognized social stigma of the genre while presenting a more complex scenario in which local musical preferences and associations cannot be merely understood as determined by social class differences. The experiences of local working musicians involved with música norteña that I became close to embodied and responded to the multiplicity of musical flows that characterized life in Villavicencio, and the discourses that grew out of them.

Norberto Riveros is one of the musicians who became most involved with the growth of música norteña in Villavicencio, and his musical and life experiences highlight the transformations that occurred in the city. Since he was a teenager in the 1970s Riveros made a living singing with trios and mariachi ensembles and in the 1990s he participated in one of the first grupos norteños in Villavicencio. A prolific songwriter in different music genres, he is the author of dozens of compositions including many corridos that have been recorded by a number of interpreters. When we first met in 2011, he was involved in several musical projects including the composition of a number of songs "por encargo" (by commission) while singing regularly for private functions with his own mariachi group, which he has continued to do as his main source of income.

Riveros acquired his liking for Mexican styles by listening to the radio and to *borrachitos* (drunkards) singing in his neighborhood's cantina. When he was still an infant in the 1960s his family moved from Bogotá to Canaguaro, a vereda near Granada, Meta, as many other working class families that migrated to the rural llanos region

hoping for better life conditions. Growing up in poverty, at twelve years of age Riveros went to try his luck in Villavicencio and found work in a bakery, where he "sang while making the bread." By the time he was fourteen, his repertoire consisted of hundreds of songs, mostly Mexican rancheras and boleros which he learned by listening daily to his favorite radio programs, "*Bajo el Cielo de Mexico*" (Under Mexican Skies), and "*Atardecer Campesino*" (Peasant Dusk), both aired on the radio station "*La Voz del Llano*" (The Voice of *el Llano*).

Riveros began singing at the local tienda with a neighbor who played guitar, and was soon invited to join a trio that performed boleros, tangos and rancheras in the cantinas and brothels of the city center's *zona rosa*, at the time considered the red light district of Villavicencio. Singing at local cantinas he could earn in one single night up to ten times more than his full monthly salary at the bakery, so becoming a professional musician seemed like a promising way out of poverty for Riveros. In 1981, he was invited to sing at "El Conuco," a new venue where the owner maintained a mariachi ensemble, a grupo llanero, and a string trio on rotation in order to cater to a variety of local musical tastes. Riveros first sang with all three groups, and finally was hired as the main singer with the mariachi ensemble because he "knew all of the old and also the newest Mexican rancheras… especially the biggest local hit in 1981 which was *No Me Sé Rajar*" by Mexican star Vicente Fernandez.

Before being hired at "El Conuco," Riveros had never seen a mariachi before, and the same fascination he felt by it seemed to be shared by local audiences: "People used to line up to see the mariachi, as if it were a movie premiere. It was amazing." He

remembers that he expansion of Villavicencio's live music scene was noticeable, and so was the economic boom that fueled it:

> I remember once making 1500 pesos in one night, and this was a huge amount of money. And that was because the 1980s had arrived, which is when the bonanza exploded – there were people walking around everywhere with tons of money. And the first people coming in to the area to pick coca leaves started to show up (personal communication Aug. 2011).

Beginning in the 1980s and intensifying in the 1990s, Villavicencio went through a surge of growth comparable to the first wave of mass migrations that brought tens of thousands into the region during and after *La Violencia* in the 1950s and 60s. Driven by the flows of people out of the Andean regions and by the expansion of the drug trafficking industry into the llano and Amazonia, the economy and population of the department of Meta swelled[7] and work for musicians was plentiful.

A Boomtown 2 – The Drug Economy and Forced Displacement

In the 1980s, Colombian drug organizations were able to consolidate complex production, distribution, and financial operations, and a period that analysts refer to as the 'cocaine bonanza' ensued, lasting through the end of the 1990s[8]. Both guerrilla and

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[7] The 1951 census was used by the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas (DANE), to calculate the populations of the region of Meta at 80,790 and of Villavicencio at 41,910 in 1960 (cited in Rausch 2007:151). According to the 1973 census, 151,905 people lived in the department of Meta, while the population of Villavicencio had grown to 91,559. Based on the 1993 census, the population of Meta in 2003 was estimated at 618,427, more than half of which lived in the urban center and rural surrounding area of Villavicencio (ibid: 174).

[8] Studies about the economic impact of the illegal drug trade in Colombia assert that from the 1980s through the end of the 90s, the organized crime achieved much higher rates of capital accumulation then the country's private economic sector. Massive revenue from cocaine exports in the 80s and 90s flooded the country's dollar black market and particularly invigorated economic sectors suited for money laundering such

paramilitary groups benefited from it in many ways, either as direct allies in the case of the paramilitaries, or by imposing taxes for use of their territory in the case of the FARC, for example. These organizations grew in power and size, expanding into more territories, recruiting more soldiers, and purchasing more armaments, which led to an escalation of armed violence in the Magdalena Medio and in the Andean regions of Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca, and Antioquia, in areas where control of territory had been historically disputed by these groups in correlation with landowning and agrobusiness interests (Richani 2001; Bushnell 2010).

Similarly to the period of *La Violencia* in the 1950s, warring factions fought for control of resources and territory in the countryside, forcing hundreds of thousands of rural workers out of their homes. Widespread massacres and violent clashes, which more often than not caused civilian casualties, compelled a dramatic wave of "forced displacement" of people from rural areas across the country, either fleeing the threat of violence or looking for alternate sources of subsistence, and often both, as they had to leave or adapt to regions devastated by the war.[9]

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as construction, rural and urban real estate, the service industry, and commerce of luxury items (see Tokatlian 1997: 37; Tokatlian 1994; Uribe 1997; Thoumi 2002).

[9] "Forced displacement" of people, a phenomenon that for long was not attended to by the authorities and didn't attract the attention of the Colombian public, in spite of its strong impact on Colombian social, economic and cultural fabric (Daniel Pécaut 2000:90), posing a devastating picture of the effects of the war on the most vulnerable populations in Colombia. In 1995, internally displaced peoples numbered between 500,000 to 700,000. In 2000, estimates were double that. Pécaut notes that very little research has been done on the characteristics of the peoples displaced, the places where they settle, and how they adapt to these new environments (ibid: 89)."Colombia has never been able to come to grips with that other twentieth-century experience of mass displacement, La Violencia of the 1950s" - ibid: 90).

Pecaut questions if the lack of awareness about such a significant issue could be

The expansion of drug organizations since the 1980s involved the establishment of large plantations of coca leaves in Colombia followed by the diversification of the illicit drug economy with the development of a local poppy industry[10] in areas where the guerrillas already had a strong presence, which led to an exponential increase of armed violence. Illegal plantations and processing plants grew rapidly in isolated areas in Vichada, Guaviare, Putumayo, and Guainía in the Amazonia, and Meta and Caquetá in the llano where the climate was ideal for the crops. In face of a historically deficient presence of state institutions, the insurgent guerrillas and particularly the FARC had secured control of territory and strong peasant support starting in the 1960s in those regions,[11] which turned into an explosive situation when paramilitary forces and the army moved into the same areas with the justification of combating drug operations.

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because "For a long time, much of public opinion on the violence has been shaped by reactions to a seemingly unending sequence of horrifying events, such as sensational massacres, assassinations of public figures, terrorists attacks, and especially, incidents of urban violence" (ibid: 90). Similarly to the experience of urban Colombians during La Violencia, who were largely oblivious of the high levels of violence occurring in the countryside and affecting mostly rural dwellers.

[10] In the 1990s, Colombia surpassed Bolivia as the world's second largest producer of coca leaves after Peru, and also emerged as an important producer of opium and heroin, two main derivatives of the poppy seed. Colombian drug organizations, previously profiting mostly from the processing of coca paste acquired from Peru and Bolivia and from distributing the final product, were then able to consolidate all stages of the production of the drugs, which generated incredible wealth and job opportunities at all levels of the manufacturing and distribution of drugs (see Thoumi 1999:118; Uribe 1997; Richani 2001).

[11] Between 1949 and the mid-1950s, the llano, and more specifically the department of Meta, became the center of a liberal resistance movement referred to *Guerrilla Liberal del Llano* by Colombian historians (see Rausch 2007; Bushnell 1993; Ramsey 1981). Involving operations by militarized self-defense units formed by liberal politicians and peasants against violence perpetrated by conservatives, the movement fueled the rise of contemporary rural guerrillas, particularly the FARC, as one of its main ideators, Manuel Marulanda, was first a member of the 1950s liberal resistance and

As explained by a FARC commander, the guerrilla had for long performed the role of a local government in their areas of influence, imposing their law and extracting taxes for protection services from

> local merchants, narcotraffickers, medium-size and large land owners, and cattle raisers […]. In various municipalities of Guaviare, Caqueta, and Putumayo where the FARC influence is strongest, it manages to protect the peasant subsistence economy by fighting the large landowners, cattle ranchers, and narcobourgeoisie against expanding their landholdings at the expense of colonos and small peasants (quoted in Richani 2001:68-71).

Growing through economic support from drug organizations and land owning elites and complicity from the Colombian army, right wing paramilitary groups moved into the llanos and Amazonia, which turned into battlefields for control of territory (ibid: 93-116).[12] Confrontations between the armed groups became common occurrences, and so did massacres of civilians if suspected of sympathizing with one side or another; the Colombian eastern and southeastern regions turned into scenarios of territorial violence that radically changed the lives of residents in rural and urban areas.

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decided to give continuity to the armed struggle after it was dismantled. Hence, since the 1960s, rural areas of Meta and Caquetá have been strongholds of insurgent guerrillas, especially the FARC, with significant local peasant-based support. The presence of the FARC spread into rural areas in the Guaviare and Putumayo and accelerated since the 1980s because of the advent of coca plantations (Richani 2001; Bushnell 2010). The FARC also expanded its military presence in Arauca after 1982 when it became a major oil-producing region.

[12] For analyst Nazih Richani (2001), the two primary actors of the Colombian conflict are the insurgent leftist guerrillas and the state, while the paramilitary groups are mainly armed forces originated and fed initially by the economic elites and later by the organized crime. Colombian paramilitarism became a useful military alternative for the Colombian army in the combat of the guerrillas, which aided its growth in power and scope.

The presence of paramilitary groups in the llano also grew when powerful emerald patrones from Boyacá, who were often involved in the drug industry as well, moved into the area since the 1980s, purchasing vast extensions of land and cattle-ranching farms and setting up private self-defense militias as had been a long established practice of large landowners in the regions of the Andes and the Magdalena Medio.[13] The dominance exerted by these groups thanks to their incredible wealth and control of violent means had a profound impact on the llanos, not only on the local economy and social relations, but also on patterns of consumption of material and cultural goods.

Large numbers of people were attracted to the llanos and Amazonia by the prospects of profitable work, especially from the Andean countryside as had historically been the case of migrations into these regions, and work opportunities in the drug industry were many and varied. Impoverished colonos with meager means of subsistence otherwise found much more profitable work as *raspachines* (itinerant laborers that work in the picking of coca leaves), or by turning their small land holdings into coca farms. Common occupations also included the processing of coca paste, serving as commercial intermediaries in many ways (*traquetos*), and a myriad of direct and indirect forms of involvement in money laundering activities that involved Colombians of all socio-economic levels. Many became involved with the transport of the drugs by land, boats, and small planes, as the latter already counted on a long established infrastructure of

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[13] Victor Carranza, the powerful esmeraldero known as El Patrón, extended his already vast economic grip to the llanos since the 1990s, taking possession of vast extensions of land and maintaining paramilitary groups in the area that were found responsible for numerous assassinations of peasant leaders, leftist politicians, and civilians (Meta: Análisis de la Conflictividad 2010: 14-15).

transport across the remote zones of this part of the country. The hundreds of already existing airplane land strips that spread over the llano and the easily available training for new pilots in Villavicencio were pivotal for placing the city as an important outpost in the center of interconnected routes in and out of the llanos and the Amazonía where illegal plantations proliferated.[14]

Villavicencio swelled with money pouring in from the new bonanza and incoming migrants attracted by a booming informal economy fueled by the investments of drug lords and emerald patrones in the region, which became visible in the growth of construction, rural and urban real estate speculation, and the service industry.[15] Musician Joseph Quintero, for example, left the town of La Unión Valle in the Andean region of Valle del Cauca, and fled to Villavicencio with his mother and younger siblings in the early 1980s. As told by him, they were:

> Searching for prospects, searching for a different future because we come from a family of campesinos; we were brought up working the land, and we got tired of laboring in the land. There was no future, there were no possibilities of education. The problem of the conflict was not just the violence, it was political. There was no aid for the *campesinado* (peasant labor force), no options for a better life, no opportunities for us to study; being a campesino also meant starving and being illiterate (Quintero 2012).[16]

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[14] Several residents in Villavicencio recounted to me how in the 1990s and 2000s, many young men of *familias acomodadas* (families of "comfortable" socio-economic status) became pilots and made small fortunes overnight which no one bothered to inquire about, which went along with a common behavior among the upper classes of tacitly looking the other way when illicit money-making activities seemed to be involved. These recurring stories sadly also mentioned tragic deaths involving piloting airplanes across the llanos and Amazonia regions, being caught in crossfires and assassinations for various reasons in the hands of any of the armed groups.

[15] Meta: Análisis de la Conflictividad (2010).

[16] Joseph Quintero. Personal communication, 8/1/2012. Villavicencio, Meta, Colombia.

When I first travelled to the llano in 2005, the urban center of Villavicencio alone had a population of nearly 300,000 and was considered a medium-sized Colombian metropolis, with high-rise buildings and urban slums, and a busy nightlife. Analyzing the fast development of Villavicencio in such a relatively short period of time, historian Jane Rausch (2007) sees this rapid growth happening "despite, or perhaps because of, civil war and unrelenting violence between guerrilla groups, narco-traffickers, paramilitaries, and the Colombian army" (ix).

Looking at conflict as a catalyst for the growth of a music scene may seem paradoxical, but in the case of Villavicencio, the interlocking systems of violence and the movements of people and resources into and through the area were intrinsic to the musicians' lives and deeply intertwined with the growth of live music scenes and the emergence of local música norteña. In the view of Joseph Quintero (2012), one of the first to form a grupo norteño in Villavicencio, war and economic opportunity for musicians in the 1980s and 90s could not be taken apart: "they went hand in hand."

Becoming Norteños

In 1991, Norberto Riveros joined the group Los Norteños, the first group in Villavicencio to include a significant amount of corridos and música norteña in their performances and to make a clear allusion to the genre in their name, even if, like most local groups at the time, their repertoire and sound was rather mixed, as explained by Riveros who sang and played the cuatro:

> We used to sing and play everything, really: tangos, boleros, rancheras, anything people asked for. We played música llanera too because we had a harp; with

> cuatro, maracas, bass, and accordion we were able to play everything (Riveros 2012b).

The group Los Norteños was formed by Carlos Rodríguez, a pivotal musician that was active in Villavicencio's music scene in a variety of settings and genres on the harp and the accordion, and also included the luthier and multi-instrumentalist Oscar Díaz on the electric bass and guitar. When Norberto Riveros left the trio to perform full time with a mariachi ensemble, singer and guitar player Hector Moyano and his wife Rosita joined the group. Rosita, a newly arrived immigrant from Antioquia, was a singer of música de carrilera and rancheras and performed this repertoire with Moyano as a vocal duet with guitar when Carlos Rodriguez first met them, which was instrumental in the stylistic transition of Los Norteños. The group soon hired a drummer and made a more decisive change in their sound and repertoire to cater to the enormous demand of local audiences, most of whom were new arrivals from the Andean interior as part of the complex and intertwined patterns of migration, the drug economy, and violence intersecting in Villavicencio.

As told by these musicians, their main musical influences were very similar to those of the pioneer norteño groups of rural Boyacá and Cundinamarca such as Los Hermanos Ariza and Los Rangers del Norte.[17] Playing covers of Las Hermanas Calle's version of La Banda del Carro Rojo, corridos popularized by the recordings of Lupe y Polo, other carrilera hits, and the most popular songs by Chuy Luviano y Los Rayos de

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[17] See Chapter Two.

Mexico provided a foundational repertoire for emergent músicos norteños in Villavicencio. As recalled by Carlos Rodríguez:

> La Cruz de Madera, Billete Verde, and La Piedrita were playing everywhere, in cars, cantinas, tiendas, parties. Not so much on the radio; there were cassettes that circulated and people wanted to hear the songs live […] Moyano and I started to really like this music and to toy with the idea of forming a real grupo norteño so we looked hard for a drummer who was interested in learning to play it. We started to play La Banda del Carro Rojo and newer songs like Contrabando y Traición, music by Los Rayos […] and music of *Grupo Exterminador* which was also starting to be heard a lot around here (Rodríguez 2012).

Before playing the accordion, Carlos Rodríguez was a harpist and played música llanera, which he learned from family members and on his own while growing up in the 1970s in Tame, a small town in the department of Arauca located in the eastern area of the Colombian llanos at the border of Venezuela. His main references were the records and radio programs coming from Venezuela, and local radio programming that "aired mostly Venezuelan songs." Born into a family of humble means, he left to Villavicencio where he found stiff competition, as many musicians in the professional circles of música llanera had musical training in the city's academy of folklore that promoted formal instruction in regional music and dance styles. Yet, by the early 1990s Rodríguez had managed to establish himself as a harpist of música llanera accompanying local singers in live performances and recordings. However, as the popularity of música de carrilera and of Mexican música norteña soared in Villavicencio, he found more work opportunities performing varied genres and eventually by becoming a norteño musician. Rodríguez picked up the accordion from "an old man from Antioquia that played música de carrilera at *Tierras Colombianas*," the *estadero* where he also worked nightly playing the harp, and began to double on both instruments until eventually giving up his career in música

llanera, which in his experience was the domain of a small elite circle dominated by local politics (Rodríguez ibid).

Although the tremendous popularity of música de carrilera and norteña provided musicians with plenty opportunities for live performances, they had little access to the support of recording labels and mass media outlets such as news coverage, local radio and television, which curbed their options for promoting original compositions. As suggested by some of my interlocutors, this was perhaps a reason why norteño groups in Villavicencio initially, and for several years, mainly focused on playing covers of carrilera and Mexican música norteña during live performances, rather than their own compositions.

Understanding the lack of positive media attention and support that consistently marked the Colombian scene of música norteña since its inception requires examining it in relation to Colombian regional and national cultural politics, which in the early 1990s were deeply invested in the project of multiculturalism as an axis of Colombia as a nation. The new Colombian Constitution of 1991 looked to increase democratic participation by decentralizing political administration and strengthening civil society, with clauses and concessions made to ethnic minorities with the goal of granting them economic and cultural rights (Palacios 2006; Asher 2009). With the new Constitution, the Colombian state pronounced the "multiethnic and pluricultural character of the nation" to promote the protection of regional practices and cultural identities state, and emphasized its goal of creating new possibilities to overcome decades of violent conflict (Wade 1995:347). Since then, the government has developed several cultural policies to promote

multiculturalism that have often been conflated with peace-building projects (Ochoa 2003b; Birenbaum Quintero 2006; Goubert 2009).

In the next section, I examine the dynamics of region and nation building projects, and the newer discourses of multiculturalism as they impacted the development of música llanera, which, I argue, had the effect of maintaining música norteña and other Mexican-derived styles at the margins of validated Colombian popular culture. Criticized for being imitations of Mexican music, unpolished, and associated with the low world of the illicit drug trafficking, música norteña together with música de carrilera and other expressions of this genre world remained outside of Villavicencio's popular culture industries, often construed in opposition to música llanera, a rather new although heavily promoted symbol of regional identity and traditional artistic expression.

Música Llanera as a Regional Cultural Icon

The shaping of what today is thought of as *música llanera colombiana* was initially put in motion in the early 1960s with the work of intellectuals, musicians, and politicians, involving the selection and promotion – and sometimes creation – of particular performance practices, largely borrowed from neighboring Venezuela, to define a regional cultural identity with Villavicencio at its center.

With the pacification of the liberal guerrilla of the llano (1949-1953), Villavicencio recovered its economic momentum[18] and political leaders and more

[18] Although the Bogotá-Villavicencio highway was still precarious, Villavicencio continued to grow as the main outpost in the region, distributing machinery, merchandise, and food from Bogotá to llaneros, and supplying Bogotá with cattle and agricultural products (Rausch 2007:145).

affluent residents began pleading with the national government for it to sponsor regional studies that would acquaint Colombians with "the true face of this forgotten region of their country" (Rausch 2003:256).[19] This new interest by politicians, intellectuals, and economic elites in defining a "face" for the region can be seen as arising from the economic growth brought by the fast developing oil, agricultural, and cattle industries, the enlargement of the population due to the mass migrations of people into the region, and from a desire to change outsiders' perceptions of the llano as a lawless, violent and uncivilized frontier[20], which was reinforced in the imaginary of Colombians by the guerrilla insurgency that rose in the region during La Violencia. Another all-important reason was the decree by the national Congress in 1959 that elevated the political status of Meta from *intendencia* to that of department, with Villavicencio as its capital city.

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[19] By the 1960s, there was a noticeable deficiency in the amount and breadth of studies about the Colombian llano. Historian Jane Rausch (2003), one of the first to engage with the project of writing the histories of the region in the 1970s, notes, for example, that María Teresa Cobos' 1965 bibliographical guide for regional studies of the llano cited mostly works by geographers and anthropologists, who in turn lamented the inexistence of trustworthy historical sources (255).

[20] According to Rausch (1994), the stereotype of *llaneros* as brute and uncivilized dates back to the time of the independence wars and owes much to the writings of influential intellectuals (374). For example, in 1867 Vergara y Vergara described the llanero as a "unique type among the *granadinos* [inhabitants of Nueva Granada, as Colombia was formerly named], and has no equals in America, except for *apureños* from Venezuela and the *gaucho* of the Argentine pampas. The soul of the llanero doesn't absorb from cultivated society any sympathetic impressions such as music, poetry and valor; it refracts any idea of elegance and refinement" (Vergara y Vergara 1974, 210-11, as quoted in García Navas 2013:41). Rausch (1994) argues that negative stereotypes of *llaneros* as violent and dangerous were continuously reinforced because llaneros throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century raised in arms in successive conflictive episodes in the history of Colombia (375-78).

The problem with forging a unique, defined "face" for the llano, however, lied in what historian Nancy Espinel Riveros (1997) describes as a "crisis of identity" of Villavicencio, a city that at least until the 1960s was more of a "reflection of the regional cultures of the highlands than that of the llanos" (201), illustrated by local musical tastes and practices as argued previously in this chapter. Thus, at the time, the new importance of Villavicencio as departmental capital and major trade center of the Colombian eastern plains was accompanied by several measures to build a regional identity emphasized by strong cultural emblems. Rather than an isolated phenomenon, the interest of Villavicencio's elites in affirming a cultural distinctiveness and political presence within the nation mirrored similar efforts in other Colombian regions at the time, which also intertwined with the building up of local music practices that served to assert local identities such as the cases of vallenato in the Atlantic coast (see Gilard 1986 and 2000; Wade 2000; Ochoa 2005; Bermúdez 2006) and of the adoption of Afro-Caribbean styles in Cali (Waxer 2002).

As the liberal guerrillas were subdued, the annual arrival of cattle driven from the easternmost regions of Casanare and Arauca to Villavicencio resumed in the mid-1950s and "brought as well an influx of the culture of the "*llano adentro"* […]. Llanero music, food, and folkways became more prevalent, gradually challenging the Andino aspects that had dominated Villavicencio up to that time," as observed by Jane Rausch (2007:145). It is likely that the llanero music that the historian refers to included local practices from oral traditions of the Colombian eastern regions of the llano, as well as repertoires popularized by Venezuelan radio and recordings, which at the time were well

established and exerted a strong regional influence on both sides of the border (Rojas Hernández 2000).[21]

The first known Colombian grupos llaneros formed in the mid-1950s, featuring hybrid instrumentation and drawing extensively from popular Venezuelan styles. Although widely used in Venezuela at the time and today considered the iconic instrument of música llanera on both sides of the border, the harp was inexistent in Colombian musical practices, so pioneer groups used bandolas, guitars, and tiples, similarly to other ensembles that performed a variety of musical genres already ubiquitous in Villavicencio.[22] The styles that became known as música llanera were thus a novelty in the 1950s in Villavicencio and what distinguished them was the addition of maracas and a repertoire that included versions of Venezuelan joropos popularized through radio transmissions.[23]

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[21] In contrast with Colombia, where the llanos and their cultural practices were largely peripheral within ideas of national culture in the early1950s, in Venezuela, the llano region had a pronounced political and cultural importance in the imaginary of the nation and the joropo had gained the status of national music, which was largely aided by the development of radio and recording technologies (see Rojas Hernández, Carlos 2000).

[22] The first Colombian *grupos llaneros* to become known in Villavicencio were the trio Los Galanes and the group Luis Ariel Rey y Sus Llaneros, as remembered by David Parales, another Colombian música llanera pioneer, in an interview. Credit with being the first to introduce the harp to Colombian música llanera in the early 1960s, Parales recounted that those early groups played a hybrid style using the same Andean instrumentation as other trios in Villavicencio ("El Arpa Cumplió 50 Años." *El Tiempo* 22/07/2009). As noted by Baquero Nariño (1990), what was known throughout the pueblos of the Colombian llanos in then 1950s was "what came down from the mountains, and the bandola, tiple, and guitar filled with pasillos and bambucos the nostalgia of the inhabitants."

[23]This remark is based on my analysis of the musical selections featured in some of the first recordings produced by these groups, which are available on YouTube and on

Credited with having recorded the first album of Colombian música llanera in 1953 for *Discos Vergara*, a small recording label based in Bogotá, Luis Ariel Rey also pioneered a manner of dress portrayed in his album cover that included cowboy boots and hat, a wide cartridge belt, and a red handkerchief tied around his neck, greatly resembling the cowboy images of the 1950s widely popularized by Hollywood and Mexican musicals. The cowboy garb not only became the "typical" dress for grupos llaneros, but also an enduring, popular look in the llanos for those able to afford the rather costly accessories[24]. When grupos norteños formed in the early 1990s, their cowboy-like outfits were thus as evocative of these well-established practices considered "local" as they were of newer Mexican norteño trends.

The 1960s marked a turning point towards the consolidation of a regional identity for the Colombian llanos and Villavicencio. The political ascension of Meta to the status of department was commemorated in Villavicencio on July 1st, 1960 with a joropo specially commissioned for the event, titled *Departamento del Meta* (Department of Meta).[25] Also in 1960, the *Academia Folklórica del Llano* (Folkloric Academy of the

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other online sources such as fan blogs, and on comments by llaneros who remembered the groups posted on several blogs dedicated to música llanera, such as www.casanarepurollano.blogspot.com

[24] Although in the 1970s the typical Colombian llanero attire used for folkloric performances was modified to feature stylized versions of the dress of campesinos in the region, the cowboy look has remained common among landowners and cattle ranchers in the llanos.

[25] As remembered by resident Victor Raúl Suescun, the joropo "could be heard everywhere […] interpreted with guitars and maracas by trio Los Galanes and disseminated by the only two radio stations of that time." Victor Raúl Suescun. 2014. "Ay mi llanura… como nos ha faltado bravura." Opinión Pública. *Notícias de Villavicencio.* 29/06/2014. Accessed at

Llano) was founded in Villavicencio by Miguel Angel Martín, a well-known composer from Arauca, the Colombian region closest to Venezuela, and sponsored by the governor of Meta, Carlos Hugo Estrada. Interested in promoting musical practices that could support the idea of a unique *cultura llanera* in the region, Estrada and Martín established dance and instrumental instruction in the new Academy including the harp, which at the time was still virtually unknown in Colombia. Having learned to play the harp while living in Venezuela as a boy, David Parales became the first harp instructor at the Academy at age thirteen. He is also credited for the first recordings of Colombian música llanera with harp for Sonolux in 1963. During the following decade, recordings of Colombian música llanera became unthinkable without the harp, and the instrument quickly became a musical icon of the Colombian llano.[26]

Invested in promoting the new department of Meta at a national level, in 1962, governor Carlos Hugo Estrada and Miguel Angel Martín conceived Villavicencio's first music festival, the *Festival de la Canción Colombiana* (Festival of Colombian Song), inspired by the government-supported folkloric festivals that Martín had seen in Spain from where he had just returned.[27] The well-respected composer became a major force in the forging of 'música llanera' as emblematic of the Colombian llano and Villavicencio. His efforts to display música llanera in the festival he organized were described in the newspaper *El Tiempo*:

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http://www.noticiasdevillavicencio.com/index.php?id=20&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=6344&cHash=fcf2cd85e1b39684a34241aa4ac1326a

[26] "El Arpa Cumplió 50 Años." *El Tiempo* 22/07/2009.

[27] "Dos Festivales y 33 Años de História." Sección Otros. *El Tiempo*. 14/03/1995. Accessed at http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-309819

> Then [in 1962], [the Festival de la Canción Colombiana] was born, on an improvised stage on the side of Parque Santander […]. That year, one of the inconveniences was that no groups of música llanera per se existed and, because of that, Miguel A. Martín, in his eagerness to make the folklore of the llanos known in the rest of the country, searched even at the local boarding houses where llaneros used to arrive, taking anyone who could sing and play an instrument directly to the stage to participate.[28]

In 1965, another annual festival was instituted in Villavicencio, the *Torneo Internacional del Joropo* (International Tournament of Joropo), much more focused on establishing links across the border with Venezuela, as it attracted the participation of people from all areas of the llanos and of Venezuelan musicians as performers and jurors. Incorporating a national beauty pageant a few years later that attracted representatives and attention from other Colombian departments, the Torneo del Joropo popularized music and dance styles of the llanos throughout the country.[29] The festival became a fundamental institution in the construction of música llanera as a Colombian regional tradition in the national imagination, and in placing Villavicencio as the center of what became one of the most important events for the maintenance and growth of joropo musical practices. The institutions and events created since the 1960s,[30] greatly anchored in the forging of Colombian música llanera, were thus crucial for "Villavicencio's claim

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Several official decrees passed since the late 1960s brought about the founding of the *Casa de la Cultura* (House of Culture) in 1971, comprised of the departmental library, a museum of folklore, and a school of art, music, and dance. In 1972, the departmental *Academia de História* (History Academy) was also created, with the purpose of promoting studies of the region of the llanos (Rausch 2007:169-170).

to be an authentic Llanero city notwithstanding its obviously mixed ancestry" (Rausch 2007:170).

Implemented in 1991, the new Colombian Constitution recognized many citizens' rights and particularly those of indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples, set provisions for increased regional and municipal autonomy, and structured the national project of Colombia as a pluriethnic, multicultural nation, which placed a renewed emphasis on cultural politics that promoted regional identities and musical practices. Within this climate – and as I see it, responding to the growing conflict and discomforting influx of displaced immigrants from the Andean regions – two new festivals were created in Villavicencio: the *Festival de la Canción Llanera* (Festival of Llanero Song) and the *Reinado Internacional del Joropo* (Joropo International Pageant), a revamped, international version of the previous beauty pageant. As noted by historian Francisco Alcantara, the two events established by official decree differed from Villavicencio's discontinued *Festival de la Canción Colombiana* previously established in the 1960s because they were geared towards "circumscribing support specifically to the folklore of the llano region," evermore conceived as a cultural space that cut across the Venezuelan border, and towards increasing the exchanges "between regions and countries that shared idiosyncrasies, art, and folklore."[31] Tellingly, the typical attire for Colombian joropo male dancers also changed in the 1990s, and the *liqui-liqui*, a collarless suit previously used predominantly in Venezuela, has since become the signature traditional Colombian llanero dress.

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[31] "Dos Festivales y 33 Años de História."

Involving a series of associations and strategic appropriations championed by folklorists, politicians, and musicians, the success of establishing Villavicencio as a center of música llanera may be assessed by the inauguration in 2001 of the city's *joropódromo*,[32] a large outdoor parade of joropo dancers along a two-kilometer stretch that has taken place every year during the Torneo Internacional del Joropo, an initiative led by the *Instituto de Cultura del Meta* (Culture Institute of Meta). After the parade of 2002, Oscar Alfonso Pabón, a member of the History Academy of the Department of Meta, wrote an enthusiastic note for newspaper *El Tiempo*: "I must comment that Villavicencio has been now consolidated – without any doubts – as the capital of joropo in Colombia and perhaps in Venezuela."[33]

In his important work focusing on the articulation of popular cultures in Latin America with both national and transnational flows of capitalism, García Canclini (1989; 1999; 2001) attempted to understand the ways in which such cultural practices are used, put into circulation, and transformed by capital, the ruling classes, and the state. In the preface to his 2002 *Culturas Populares en el Capitalismo*, Canclini asserted that:

> Cultural production has become more central than ever to capitalist expansion and reproduction, but it is not artisan crafts and traditional festivals that benefit most from this development. Other popular cultures, susceptible to being industrialized in audiovisual form, music above all, take a leading role in the economy (2002: 14).

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[32] Although I have not found any references to it, the *joropódromo* (joropodrome) was clearly inspired by the Brazilian *sambódromo* (sambadrome), a purpose-built parade area for samba schools in Rio de Janeiro only open once a year during the world-famous Brazilian *carnaval*.

[33] Pabón, Oscar Alfonso. "Joropódromo." Sección Opinión. *El Tiempo*. 07/12/2002. Accessed athttp://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1315522

Discussing the 1990s' revival of older costeño music styles (i.e. cumbia and porro) as regional signifiers in Colombia's Atlantic coast, Peter Wade (2000) saw the rise of the discourse of multiculturalism in Colombia as part of a "condition of postmodernity in Latin America and elsewhere" (225) intrinsically related to "a move toward the commoditization of places and their traditions prompted by globalizing capitalism" in which "the search by capitalists for new sources of profit and the search by consumers and ideologues for new, or rather renewed, sources for personal and collective identification both contribute to the construction of localities, regions, and nations as special, saleable, and consumable" (226).

The shifts in Colombian cultural politics since the 1990s have clearly impacted the transformations and consolidation of the llano as a region and of llanera identity. Dozens of annual festivals have proliferated throughout towns in the Colombian llanos featuring smaller versions of Villavicencio's joropódromo. Since then, the festivals' musical performances and dance competitions, parades, beauty pageants, and an array of other related festivities and products attract thousands of tourists every year. They in turn generate cultural and economic capital, and define, redefine, and maintain a *cultura llanera* now conceived as 'Colombo-Venezuelan' that transformed Villavicencio, historically a crossroads of diverse cultural influences, into the Colombian cultural capital of 'el Llano.'

"El Llano," Llanero Identity, and Its Others

'El Llano' became the choice term of regionalist scholars and folklorists, rather than *llano* or *llanos* (plain or plains), as generally used by residents, or *Orinoquía*

(referring to the Orinoco river) and *los llanos orientales* (the oriental, or eastern plains), commonly found in tourist descriptions and educational texts. Folklorist Carlos César Cachi Ortegón, for example, dislikes "*los llanos orientales*," which he sees as a view from the capital that places the region in a marginal position in regard to the political and cultural centers of the nation. For him, the term is "too Colombian while the Llano is definitively Venezuelan as well" (Ortegón, in García Navas 2013). Ortegón argues that the term *Orinoquía* equally misrepresents the region because it refers to places along the Orinoco river that do not necessarily share a "cultura llanera" (culture of the llano), which he outlines as "the culture of the horse, cattle, and vast open spaces" of mestizos of the region, whom he refers to as "*el hombre llanero*" (the man of the llano). Ortegón excludes from his definition of cultura llanera areas that display "a wild culture, indigenous or related to the harvest of minerals, rubber, timber, or, nowadays, coca leaves and marijuana – zones that are not culturally *llaneras*" (ibid).

Politicians and intellectuals have thus engaged in defining 'cultura llanera' by building up selected performance practices and artistic expressions, a project aimed at both dispelling the peripheral condition of the eastern region of Colombia historically perceived as violent and wild, and constructing a strong regional identity that could take its place within the multicultural palette that has become the socio-cultural basis for imagining Colombian democracy and national unity as emphasized by the 1991 Constitution. Strict definitions of *cultura llanera* like the one expressed by Cachi Ortegón, however, may well serve as the basis for maintaining large groups of people and expressive practices in the margins, on the grounds of ethnicity, place of provenance, gender, cultural affinities, and, importantly, socio-economic status: the occupations he

mentions are most often not taken up by choice, but by economic need by impoverished indigenous groups and Colombians who have settled in the region over the course of several decades of fleeing violence and poverty, and now constitute the majority of the populations of the llano's cities and towns.

Martín Barbero and Ochoa Gautier (2001) stressed that, through the 1990s, processes of modernization in countries of the "so-called Third World" have assumed globalized forms that tend to collide and exacerbate identities, often with the result of generating fundamentalist tendencies in which the preservation of patrimonies and promotion of the aesthetics of the elites interlock with new discourses of heterogeneity, inclusion, and multiculturalism (111-13). They cited the case of Colombian rock, a favorite style mostly among middle and upper class youth in Bogotá and Medellín, as a "non-traditional" genre that has been integrated into the State's new cultural policies, in a way showcasing a shift from older concepts of national culture that used to favor monolithic notions of authenticity towards the acceptance of "new modes of doing culture" (114-15). However, the selection and regulation of cultural practices tend to follow a persistent "oligarchic concept of politics" (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998:9, quoted in Martín-Barbero and Ochoa Gautier 2001:115), conceived as an extension of personal relationships that generate unequal and fragmented processes of political and cultural democratization (ibid).

Conceiving el llano as a distinct Colombian cultural region thus privileged a mestizo, cattle-ranching male ethos that involved adopting the Venezuelan joropo and practices recognized as música llanera as central emblems of the Colombian llano. Concurrently, musics of other foreign derivations such as música de carrilera and later

música norteña continued to be favorites among many people of the working classes, migrants, and local peasant populations. However, they came to occupy the position of a musical *other*, associated with the low social standing of the new masses of Colombians from the Andean regions, many displaced by poverty and violence, and with the lifestyles of emerald and drug lords.[34]

The emergence of new groups of música norteña in Villavicencio took place among musicians that came from the peasant and working classes, with little economic resources of their own. They were connected in different ways to the city's live entertainment and music scene that was burgeoning then, used to dabbling in a variety of musical styles and maintaining large musical repertories in order to cater to broad audiences, which secured their ability to find employment in the local music venues. Norberto Riveros, author of hundreds of compositions in various styles including corridos, rancheras, baladas, and joropos, explained to me how he and other musicians in Villavicencio who lacked strong ties to the musical, social, and political circles of 'música llanera' were able to record and promote their music:

> Here there are two big cultural events, which are the *Torneo del Joropo* and the *Festival de la Canción Llanera* […]. The city library *Cienagas* used to hire musicians many years ago, including me; one day it was the mariachis, then the trios, then grupos llaneros, then on another day, grupos norteños; there was variety which was a very good thing because there are people here who like these

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[34] In his book *Joropo: Identidad Llanera* (Joropo: *Llanera* Identity) economist Alberto Baquero Nariño clearly exemplifies the type of criticism from regionalist folklorists directed towards música de carrilera, viewed as the music of acculturated Andean peasants, and associated with the bad tastes of drug traffickers and emerald bosses. Contrasting the "authentic" Colombian joropo to música de carrilera, Baquero argues that the popularity of the latter is a reflection of a "decomposing subculture" which found its "local musical expression in música de carrilera with its paraphernalia and content from the low world of *sicarios* (hired assassins)" (1990: 70).

> different genres a lot. But this is over, they ended it a long time ago; and look, it only happened once a year anyway! Other than that, it is really just the Festival de la Canción, and there are too many artists of música llanera for this event. They are handpicked by the ruling clique ("*escogidos a dedo por rosca*"), which causes many problems. The same happens with the Torneo del Joropo, and this is all. In the past, the local government had a financial aid program for recording an album. They used to lend you money and you paid it back in any way you could. It doesn't exist anymore; they closed the office in charge of that, right at the time [in the mid-1990s] when I wanted to apply. So, one looks for the support from his friend, his client, his *patrón*, and from the person that likes to listen to one singing. And then one goes and records his album, which now is easier because the studios are no longer like the big recording studios of the past. Or better yet, now people get a hold of a computer, buy the software, the card. Someone who knows the technology operates it and charges for it, records, and then burns your CD. Back in the day, I was not able to record my own album because it used to cost a pile of money. You had to go to Bogotá, it was very difficult to have the right connections, there were no phones, there was nothing [accessible] here for someone like me. And so, to record an album one had to have a good amount of money. A very good amount of money (Riveros 2011).

While highlighting how Villavicencio's public musical sphere became more hermetic and hierarchical as the eminence of música llanera rose, Riveros' account nonetheless references as well how emergent technologies – namely, the rise of cassettes since the 1980s, and later of digital recording – contributed to the formation of new networks of musical production for local musicians, which happened in more than one way. New types of spatial and musical mobilities thus linked musicians to new sources of música norteña arriving from Mexico that began to circulate more broadly in pirate cassettes, and recording and distributing their own music also became possible due to the cheaper costs of making cassettes compared to the more expensive and monopolized production of vinyl records. Importantly, Riveros also alluded to how the role of private sponsorship became a crucial source of support for local música norteña in Villavicencio and regions of influence, a topic I address in the next section.

***La Movida*, Cassettes and Private Sponsors – The New Scene of Música Norteña**

Although the commercial reach of the Medellín-based carrilera music industry meant that the hits of Las Hermanas Calle and Lupe y Polo, the two most cited early influences of Colombian músicos norteños, played significantly on radio stations aimed at *clases populares* (*popular* classes),[35] they also circulated widely in the form of bootleg cassettes which in the early 1990s became the main form of music dissemination among the Colombian poor and working classes (Wade 2000; Zuleta y Jaramillo 2003). According to musicians and fans from Villavicencio, here and there one could also come across cassettes of Los Hermanos Ariza, one of the rising norteño groups from Boyacá's emerald region, which some of my interlocutors attributed to the spread of the dominion of emerald czar Victor Carranza and other *esmeralderos* in the llanos, considering that Los Ariza distributed their music only locally and on a very small scale.[36] This assumption, more than to be taken literally, is nonetheless illustrative of how people in Villavicencio perceived the influx of thousands of new arrivals from the Andean regions,

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[35] Yuber Delgado, one of the head music and video producers of Studio 35, a music promotion and booking firm in Bogotá specialized in *música popular* with a catalogue of more than 150 artists when I first met him, aptly described for me how radio programming in Colombia and the promotion of musicians and groups by companies like his operate according to social class divisions, not unlike the first distributors and recording labels that operated in Medellín in the first half of the twentieth-century (see Chapter Two). As explained by Delgado, música popular encompasses música guasca, música de despecho, and música norteña, and promoters gear it towards AM radio programs and music cable TV channels such as Radiola TV that cater to "*extractos uno, dos, y tres*" (stratas one, two and three) – the three lower echelons in the official system that categorizes neighborhoods in Colombia's cities by property tax, and, implicitly, income levels. In Delgado's words, "música popular is music that always goes to the lower strata in our country" (Delgado 2012).

[36] See Chapter Three.

campesinos and *patrones* alike, and their musical tastes into the llanos. *La Cruz de Madera*, the emerald zone's greatest hit by Chuy Luviano since the mid-1980s, all of a sudden "*sonaba a la lata* (played a ton) in every cantina and car stereo" in the llanos, as remembered by Joseph Quintero (2012).

At the time, new groups also became increasingly familiar to musicians and audiences in Villavicencio such as the Mexican Los Tigres del Norte, Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Ramón Ayala, and Grupo Exterminador, thanks to the wide circulation of pirate cassettes. According to Quintero and other musicians in Villavicencio, with the exception of Los Tigres del Norte, whose popularity in the 1990s soared through transnational mainstream music circuits,[37] these groups did not play on the radio, nor were their recordings found in retail music stores in Colombia at the time. According to most musicians and fans I met, their music arrived with people transiting in and out of the llanos, some of them perhaps to and from Mexico because of the growing transnational drug trafficking routes in which Villavicencio was inserted, as Joseph Quintero and other consultants cautiously suggested. Nonetheless, these groups also happened to be based in Los Angeles rather than Mexico and were popular on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, which made them targets of music bootlegging via pirate cassettes that put them into wide transnational circulation (Ragland 2009). In any case, what is clear is that the newest trends of Mexican música norteña were first heard "in cantinas and fincas" (Quintero 2012), passed along in pirate cassettes rather than through the conventional

[37] See Ragland (2009) and Madrid (2012).

channels of the globalized multinational music industry that in the 1990s came to dominate the Colombian popular music market[38].

Locally Composed Corridos and the Growing Popularity of Música Norteña

In 1995, a locally produced corrido began to circulate in Villavicencio: *El Carro Rojo del Llano* (The Red Car of the Llano), an adaptation made by Norberto Riveros of the classic Mexican drug smuggling corrido *La Banda del Carro Rojo*, which had been made hugely popular in Colombia in the versions of Las Hermanas Calle and Lupe y Polo, as discussed in previous chapters. The adapted corridor, originally intended to be played live at the *estadero* Tierras Colombianas, where Riveros performed regularly at the time with the group Los Norteños, was recorded by Giovanny Ayala, then a young aspiring singer who also sang regularly at the venue. With the help of a hefty donation from a regular private patron, Ayala recorded his first album named *El Catire Norteño*, his nickname[39] in the Villavicencio music scene, and released it through the small local label *Llano Jes* in cassette format, which made the production possible without the backing of a larger record label (Riveros 2012a).

In addition to his version of the Mexican corrido, Ayala's album featured ten original compositions by Norberto Riveros including corridos and *canciones de despecho*, with a blend of stylistic features very similar to recordings commercialized as música de carrilera – combinations of norteño-inspired elements such as the accordion

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[38] For the music industry in Colombia in the 1990s see Wade (2000) and Zuleta and Jaramillo (2003).

[39] "Catire" means a person of fair complexion.

and some melodic and rhythmic features with trumpets, strings, and varying Colombian instruments such as the tiple, cuatro, and arpa llanera as in the case of the tracks in *El Catire Norteño*. These arrangements were typical of emerging norteño groups at the time in Villavicencio and similar to the first productions of Colombian música norteña done just a few years earlier by musicians in the Andean emerald country as well, as seen in Chapter 4. None of the album's original compositions, however, achieved the popularity of El Carro Rojo del Llano, which quickly became a hit with local audiences.

> Dicen que venian del llano/ en un carro Colorado
> Con cien paquetes de coca/ iban con rumbo a Villavo
> Sin sospechar que un soplón/ ya los habia denunciado
>
> Ya habian cruzado Granada/ muy cera de Canaguaro
> Pero llegando a Guamal/ los estaban esperando
> La policía de Acacías/ ya los tenía chequeados
>
> They say they were coming from the llano/ in a red car
> With one hundred packs of coca/ they were headed towards Villavo
> not suspecting that a a whistleblower/ had already denounced them
>
> They had passed through Granada / very close to Canaguaro
> But approaching Guamal/ they were waiting for them
> the police from Acacias/ was already aware

Norberto Rivero's adaptation of the classic La Banda del Carro Rojo outlines a drug smuggling route that begins in Granada, where both he and Giovanny Ayala grew up, and continues following the red car that crisscrosses the llano, naming towns located along the war zones that musicos norteños became accustomed to navigating in order to reach the sites where they were contracted to perform. In 1995, when El Carro Rojo del Llano came out, the llano and the Amazonia were a patchwork of divided territories where entire towns, coca plantations, and areas rich in natural resources – and by

extension, the lives of peasants and other dwellers – were regulated and disputed by guerrillas and paramilitary groups. This was the context within which musicians moved, traveling constantly from town to town in the Guaviare, Guainía, Meta, and Vichada, sometimes driving for days before reaching their destination. Mapping the geographies of violence that framed the movements of musicians and dwellers across heavily militarized zones, El Carro Rojo del Llano was the first in a body of new local corridos that made an impact in Villavicencio in the 1990s.

Following the local success of El Carro Rojo del Llano in the voice of Giovanny Ayala in 1995, Norberto Riveros began composing dozens of corridos that became well known among fans, recorded by some of the emergent local grupos norteños. *La Cuatro Puertas* (The Four-Door One), another corrido featuring a car as the main protagonist, was recorded by Las Aguilas del Norte later that year and became a local classic, being requested often during the group's live performances I attended in Villavicencio between 2011 and 2013. In 1996, Armando Quintero and *Los Príncipes del Norte* (The Princes of the North) released their first recording featuring all original compositions, some by Norberto Riveros, including romantic-style canciones norteñas and corridos about local events. Some became widely popular through the group's live performances, among them *La Toma de Miraflores* (The Seizing of Miraflores), which described the tragic combat between FARC guerrillas and the police force that took place in the jungle town of Miraflores in 1995, then a major center of coca production in the Guaviare, which was partially burned down and left dozens dead.

The first locally composed corridos in Villavicencio were thus sung-narratives that outlined in detail events and places where conflict and fear permeated everyday life.

As observed by anthropologist Keith Basso (1988) in his research on Western Apache narrative, because of their bond to specific localities, place-names may work to "summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations – associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life" (103). Similarly stressing the relevance of place as "an important source of culture and identity," anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2008) noted in his work on the territorial struggles of Afro-Colombian communities that "despite the pervasive delocalization of social life" … "there is an embodiment and emplacement to human life that cannot be denied" (7). As has been discussed, references to specific places and people appear frequently in both Mexican-style corridos and música llanera, serving to locate singers and listeners in space, recount stories, locate patrons in homages, and thus construct shared views about these places and experiences.

Yet, as stressed by Escobar, "if places are historical points of belonging and identification, agency is what defines the particular form places may take" (ibid: 357). Places can be thus understood as "strategic possibilities," differentially produced by the agency of particular populations and individuals, if by agency we mean "the articulation of subject positions and identities into specific places and spaces on socially constructed territories" (ibid). The places outlined in Villavicencio's corridos were sites of dislocation, illegality, conflict, restricted mobilities, and death, expressive of the lived experiences of musicians and audiences, contrasting sharply with the idyllic llanos typically portrayed in the lyrics of música llanera that was popular at the time.

For the sake of comparison, in 1995, when the composition of local corridos took off, the award for best *poema llanero* in the Festival de La Canción Llanera went to

Manuel Orozco, an acclaimed composer and interpreter from San Martín, Meta, whose many compositions illustrate the prototypical música llanera that had become a musical emblem for the region. Arranged within common stylistic conventions with electric bass, cuatro, maracas, and harp, the recording of Orozco's *Canción a Mi Pueblo* (Song for My Town) begins with the typical *grito llanero* (llanero shout) before the verses unfold:

> San Martín pueblo querido/ aqui tiene mi canto
> Y este grito altanero/ yo te vengo a dedicar
> Montando buenos caballos/ pa' salir a engalanar
> Las lendarias cuadrillas/ de tu acervo cultural
>
> San Martin my dear *pueblo*/ here I give you my song
> And this proud shout/ I dedicate to you
>
> Riding good horses/ to go out and join
> The legendary quadrilles/ of your cultural heritage

Describing specific locations, vast landscapes, the symbiosis of man and horse, llanero pride, and local practices such as the *cuadrillas*, Canción a Mi Pueblo engages with an assortment of shared signs of llanero spaces and identity characteristic of contemporary llanero music and poetry. As previously argued, the aesthetics of música llanera in the 1990s articulated vitally with Colombian national and regional discourses of multiculturalism and neo-liberal economic development. Endorsed and conceived as a musical tradition representative of the land and its inhabitants, música llanera, however, portrays a way of life virtually unattainable for the absolute majority of rural and urban dwellers in the llanos whose material life conditions were severely deteriorated by the armed conflict and an economic environment that provided few life-sustaining choices if not related to the drug economy. The mental maps outlined by música llanera thus asserted a political, spatial, and cultural imaginary of local and regional worlds that were

critically challenged by the emergent scene of corridos norteños, which, notwithstanding, garnered sizable local audiences while remaining marginalized within a wider public and the mainstream cultural industry.

As expressed by many musicians in Villavicencio, local música norteña in the early 1990s, initially consisting of covers of Mexican norteña and música de carrilera, appeared as a novelty that resonated among musicians and audiences who were already fans of música de carrilera, which had become widely popular in the region since the 1980s, owing partially to the wave of migration from the Andean regions. Yet, the emergence of locally composed corridos paved the way for a boom of música norteña in Villavicencio, which spread throughout the llanos and Amazonia beginning in the mid-1990s. Their audience was made up primarily of working class people, campesinos, and the new rich who were the main sponsors of live performances and recordings. As recalled by Norberto Riveros, the peak of the local scene of música norteña lasted until the mid-2000s; at times there were as many as fifteen *tiendas norteñas* in Villavicencio, all featuring regular live performances.

As viewed by Carlos Rodríguez, founder and accordionist of Los Norteños and later Las Aguilas del Norte, live music performances in remote areas in the Putumayo, Guaviare, Guainía, Meta and Vichada, where they travelled frequently, were a novelty and provided entertainment "for people who had very hard lives," which helped popularize the norteño style. Yet, for Rodríguez, corridos appealed so much "because they talked about the reality of what was going on. In these songs, one says things using popular [common] terminologies that *gente del común* (common people) enjoy. This is what people like, that things are spelled out the way they really are" (Rodríguez 2012).

Emphasizing the function of language in local corridos as a marker of social class and the importance of "spelling out" the everyday precariousness of life, Rodríguez highlighted a crucial role of these corridos as contestatory discourses within a regional and national political climate in which musical practices came to be increasingly linked to the consolidation of social identities while acting as a mechanism for "coexistence within diversity and tolerance" (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2007, cited in Goubert 2009). Outlining class-based difference and the violent everyday presence of the drug trafficking and the war, the new production of Colombian corridos norteños clashed pugnaciously with the spreading post-1991 notion of music as a vehicle for pacification and celebration of national and regional identities. They were generally disliked or rather disregarded by Villavicencio's traditional intellectual circles, socio-economic elites, and commercial mainstream media.

The Political Economy of Música Norteña in 1990s Villavicencio

Giovanny Ayala, El Catire Norteño

At the time of this writing, Giovanny Ayala is the only Colombian performer coming out of the música norteña local scene to break into the mainstream music industry in Colombia, such as that his CDs can be found on the shelves of the few remaining record stores in major Colombian cities under the category of *música popular,* which is generally associated with a working-class consumer base. Although along the way in his ascending career he intentionally dissociated himself from the stigma-heavy labels 'norteño' and 'corridos prohibidos,' Ayala has, however, maintained a repertoire heavily drawn from or inspired by contemporary Mexican música norteña. In July 2012 for

example, his nearly note-by-note *reencauche* (cover) of *Sentimientos de Cartón* (Cardboard Feelings), originally recorded by *Duelo*, a Mexican grupo norteño virtually unknown in Colombia at the time, played constantly on the radio in Villavicencio and Bogotá. Before that in 2007, it was also a *reencauche* of a Mexican *norteña romantica* song that propelled Giovanny Ayala into mainstream popularity. *De Rodillas Te Pido* (On My Knees I Beg You), recorded earlier that year by the Mexican grupo norteño *Los Alegres de la Sierra*, earned its composer José Sosa Munguia a Billboard award[40]. The composer and the group, however, continue to be unheard of for Colombian fans of the song, who associate it exclusively with Giovanny Ayala. Concurrently, Ayala has been heavily marketed as an innovator and representative of the newest strand of Colombian música popular by music producers. A news article appearing on Billboard (8/9/2008) with the headline "Hybrid Hits: Codiscos Mines Hits in Mexican-Colombian Fusion" illustrates how Ayala's style, and mixtures of Colombian and Mexican sounds more broadly, were branded as a novelty by Codiscos, the singer's record label that successfully marketed him to larger audiences:

> Throughout its nearly 60-year history, Colombia's Codiscos has broken local talent in genres from vallenato to rock. The venerable independent label is now finding success with a fusion of regional Mexican and Colombian sounds. […] 'Ranchera has always ben strong here, and Mexican artists have always been liked,' [VP of A&R] Fernando Lopez says. 'But this as a combination of popular Colombian music with norteño. If it were a mere copy of the latter, he adds, "it wouldn't be successful."[41]

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[40] Information from SACM, *Sociedad de Autores y Compositores de Mexico* (Society of Authors and Composers of Mexico). Accessed on 01/03/2015 at http://www.sacm.org.mx/archivos/biografias.asp?txtSocio=21830&offset=20

[41] Ben-Yehuda, Ayala. "Hybrid Hits: Codiscos Mines Hits in Mexican-Colombian Fusion." Billboard, August 9, 2008:12. Accessed on 8/10/2015 at: https://books.google.com/books?id=xMEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA12&lpg=PA12&dq=codi

Ironically, Codiscos was one of the first record labels to record hundreds of albums featuring fusions of Mexican and Colombian sounds, prominently música norteña, labeled as música de carrilera since the 1950s.[42] The novelty-based marketing strategy, also well established in the Medellín-based music industry Codiscos thrived in, worked well for Giovanny Ayala, and the commercial reach of the category música popular grew significantly.

All the while, Ayala's reencauches of the Mexican norteño hits that propelled him to fame are nearly exact covers of the originals, not exactly fusions. Also, the musical arrangements in many of his other recordings no doubt employ similar formulas to those of 1980s música de carrilera already familiar to his fan base. These musical arrangements can hardly be described as new, such as the use of trumpet and violins along with the norteño rhythm section and the occasional addition of Colombian string instruments such as the requinto and tiple that characterized the sound of, for example, Las Hermanas Calle. The novelty of Ayala's sound, however, did lie in the use of a more heavily pronounced norteño rhythm section, which he and his cohort of musicians in Villavicencio were experimenting with during his formative musical years as examined

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scos+hybrid+hits+mexican-colombian+fusion&source=bl&ots=bcLJPB_aR2&sig=1ors-pL3W3WP8D-Q0o1RsHiszm4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjy7Ovt4fbSAhVI0oMKHUKxB4QQ6AEIHDAA#v=onepage&q=codiscos%20hybrid%20hits%20mexican-colombian%20fusion&f=false

[42] See Chapter Two.

earlier in this chapter. It sounded fresher in Colombia at the time because he chose to record covers of newer strands of Mexican música norteña not yet familiar locally, and often concealed the original sources through practices that had been for long utilized by the Colombian music industry in their treatment of this genre.[43]

Born in 1973 in Granada, Meta, to a large family of very humble means, Giovanny Ayala washed cars and held other small jobs while trying to make singing into his main money-earning activity. Ayala's first album *El Catire Norteño* and the local success of *El Carro Rojo del Llano* were followed by other productions that earned him the support of the independent record label *El Dorado* before being signed by Codiscos, one of the most established Colombian record labels in the 1990s.

Giovanny Ayala's crossover to a wider commercial music sphere was also possible in part because he gathered sufficient private funds from private patrons to invest in promoting his music on mainstream radio stations such as Bogotá-based *Radio La Cariñosa* and *Radio del Recuerdo*, subsidiaries of the communication giant *Caracol* specifically geared towards working-class audiences.[44] The singer was part of the

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[43] To cite one example among many, one of the biggest hits of Giovanny Ayala's career to date was *Me La Robé y Me La Robaron*, a nearly exact cover of the Mexican song *Del Otro Lado Del Portón* as recorded by the multi-Grammy award winner Mexican composer, accordionist and singer Ramón Ayala. The Colombian singer changed the title of the song and did not acknowledge the composer by utilizing a common strategy of Colombian musicians and music producers, placing the acronym D.A.R. ("authors' rights reserved" in Spanish) next to the title, which is acceptable by Colombian copyright laws regarding royalties for music compositions.

[44] The information here and in the remainder of the section about Giovanny Ayala is based on personal communication with the singer, as well as personal communication with close friends and acquaintances of his, unless noted otherwise. It is my choice not to attribute information I relay here to specific interlocutors.

emerging norteña music scene in Villavicencio, and continued to sing in local live music venues and for private performances that, as put by Ayala, were abundant and paid musicians so well at the time because drug money "was in everyone's pockets." He recalled why many of his habitual patrons were people involved in drug trafficking, and why the type of patronage relationship he became involved in, which – modeled after the long-established emerald mafias of Boyacá that at the time had amassed sizable territories and power in the llanos – were also common within the social arrangements of Colombian drug organizations:

> Back in the day *coqueros* (coca dealers) liked to *boletearse* (show off); they used to arrive with scores of bodyguards in *camionetas* (SUVs), so everyone knew who they were. As a singer, I was part of their recreation [which included] having luxuries, women, and listening to the voice of their favorite singer." […] And the *cariño* (affection) they showed towards one! '- *Here, take this tip!*' […] They [were] the *patrones* – One used to call them 'patrones' which was a way of expressing *cariño*; '- *Patrón!*' and to not call them by their names. '*Patrón, patrón, what song would you like to listen to, patrón?*' (Ayala 2011).

Patron-client relationships were historically pervasive in Colombian political, economic, and social transactions, in which systems of favors and alliances among those in power and between them and their subordinates contributed to widespread corruption, concealment, violent repression, and to blurring the borders of the legal and the extra-legal (LeGrand 1985; Pécaut 2002; Richani 2002). The new economies generated by the drug traffic thus only exacerbated already pervasive types of political patronage and interested distribution of economic advantages, which served to feed unequal social alliances and systems of violence even further. As noted by leading researcher Francisco Thoumi (1999):

> The illegal drug industry has many actors: peasants who grow illegal crops and produce coca paste, cocaine base, opium, and heroin; local buyers who gather

> those products and refine them further when necessary; manufacturers who refine cocaine and heroin; the cartels that coordinate some of the refining activities and smuggle the drugs and market them out of the country; guerrilla organizations that protect crops, peasants, and labs, and charge "export" and "value added" taxes in the growing and processing regions; white-collar professionals such as chemists, pilots, lawyers, financial advisors, and accountants; bodyguards and other security forces, including paramilitary organizations; politicians; financial-sector professionals who are money-laundering accomplices, and so on. As witnessed in the current social and political crises, the involvement of Colombian society in the illegal drug trade has been pervasive (119).

The Colombian musicians I met who were able to benefit financially in the wake of the coca boom vehemently spoke about the hypocrisy of those who criticized their activities and reviled música norteña because of the presumed sponsorship by drug bosses. Giovanny Ayala's thoughts are illustrative of these generalized feelings:

> I moved among this crowd of people who manage the narcotraffic. I loved to do what I did, which was to sing, so I had an opportunity to do just that and at the same time I benefited. And, how can I tell you? I live in a land where this isn't a secret for anyone; almost everyone, no matter who they are, benefits in some way, directly or not, but in some way (Ayala 2011).

Corruption scandals enmeshing politicians, military officials, and well-to-do families with drug trafficking money and activities occurred daily in 1990s Colombia, most notoriously the accusations surrounding the presidential campaign of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) being financed with large sums of illicit money. According to 1995 opinion polls, most Colombians believed in the veracity of the results of *Proceso 8000*, an investigation that confirmed the accusations; yet the majority of the population remained favorable to maintaining the Samper's presidency. As observed by Daniel Pécaut, this goes to show that Colombians in their majority were convinced that "unutterable political forces" lay behind the drug trafficking apparatus (Pécaut 1997:919). Double standards drenched in prejudice and class distinctions, however,

predominated in the differentiated ways in which groups of people were viewed in relation to their involvement with extra-legal activities.

Musicians in Villavicencio have been keenly aware of the existing differentiated, class-based taste and moral judgments of música norteña, as revealed by the previous comments by Giovanny Ayala. Jairo Agudelo, composer and accordionist of música norteña in Villavicencio, also made a sharp comparison between the stigmatized 'coca proletariat,' to use Daniel Pecault's term (ibid), and the bias regarding corridos and música norteña, which in his view are depreciated in association with their perceived audiences:

> The rich, they sell their properties to [drug lords] for three times the price, or invest their money with them, or buy things from their money laundering businesses. The poor are *raspachines* (coca leaf pickers) or *mulas* (mules) that transport the drug in their own bodies, they are the ones that are exposed for everyone to see. They are the ones who are exposed to the violence of the drug bosses and of the armed groups, who can die if things go wrong, that are seen as criminals. So it is the same thing with the music, you see? It is true that *traquetos* (intermediaries in the illicit drug business) liked corridos and música norteña and paid musicians very well. May be they felt identified with the stories, right? But many of them also liked vallenato and música tropical, and hired those groups too. It is obvious, right? We Colombians like many kinds of music. […] But no one went around criticizing these genres because this music is [part of] other circuits, plays on radio, TV, has famous artists; it is music of *la gente bien* (good people). Norteña and corridos were liked by a lot of people but many associated it with campesinos and the poorer people, which is where traquetos come from as well, you see? This is why people say it is their music, even if so many people like it; common people, *gente del pueblo* who are not narcotraffickers (Agudelo 2011).

One of Giovanny Ayala's strategies to attain commercial success and entrance into the Colombian music mainstream thus involved a gradual dissociation from the label 'norteño' towards promoting himself as an interpreter of 'música popular,' interchangeably with 'música de despecho,' in the fashion pioneered by Dario Gomez

and El Charrito Negro, successful artists based in Medellín that since the late 1980s had repackaged the vocal duet, string-based carrilera style epitomized at the time by Las Hermanas Calle. Ayala has, however, accentuated a norteño imagery by invariably wearing cowboy-like shirts, boots, and Stetson hats, which, he claims, are some of the distinguishing trademarks of his personal style.

The musical influences that are evident in Giovanny Ayala's recordings draw from the Medellín-based música de carrilera of the 1980s and its more contemporary off-shoots, which since the 1990s mainly fall under the umbrella term 'música popular:' trumpets and violins added to the mix of accordion and rhythm section with electric guitar, electric bass, and drum set. Also constant in the arrangements of Ayala's most popular songs is the use of Colombian acoustic string instruments such as tiple, requinto, and occasionally harp, always an important feature of the older styles labeled as música de carrilera as well, and also common in música popular.

While these practices, coupled with the common themes of romantic love, place Giovanny Ayala within this established category of Colombian commercial, working-class oriented popular music, his sound is distinct from other well-known interpreters of música popular and música de despecho because of the addition of more obvious elements from música norteña such as the bajo sexto, a more articulated and staccato style of accordion playing, and, as aforementioned, his covers of Mexican norteña numbers, which became his greatest hits. Ayala's style, promoted as a novelty within Colombian música popular with rare mentions of the Mexican sources of some of his biggest hits, has been a major inspiration for the newer generation of Colombian grupos norteños that emerged in the 2000s.

Las Aguilas del Norte

The group that became most associated with Villavicencio's música norteña is undoubtedly Las Aguilas del Norte, as recognized by Colombian norteño musicians, producers, and fans. It still is, even though since the mid-1990s at least a few dozen other grupos norteños formed in the city. The group not only pioneered the local scene of norteña, but also remained active through recordings and public live performances while the majority of norteño musicians in Villavicencio continued to play mainly for private functions, especially since the economic bonanza of the 1990s dwindled and many live music venues closed after the mid-2000s. Since 2005, Las Aguilas del Norte has been the house band at El Rancho de las Aguilas, one of a few *tiendas norteñas* in operation in Villavicencio at the time of this writing, where they play a mix of older favorites, covers of new releases by Mexican groups such as Los Tigres del Norte, and occasional new compositions by the band members every Friday and Saturday nights.

During my period of fieldwork, El Rancho was often a meeting point for local and visiting músicos norteños who came by to socialize and sit in, and for regular audience members, many of whom participated habitually and enthusiastically by singing along, requesting favorite songs, and once in a while by getting a hold of the microphone to sing. Other regulars, however, preferred to listen and drink quietly most of the time. The weekly live performances of Las Aguilas del Norte thus have played a central role in maintaining the presence of música norteña in Villavicencio's public musical life, and in enacting the context in which groups of fans, new arrivals, and musicians assemble.

The initial members of the group, harpist-turned-accordionist Carlos Rodríguez, singer and guitar player Hector Moyano, and bassist Oscar Díaz, first came together in

the early 1990s under the name Los Norteños, an ensemble that at one time or another also featured a number of other musicians associated with the local scene of música norteña such as Norberto Riveros and Giovanny Ayala. After incorporating drummer Julián O. and an additional electric guitar, the group changed its name from Los Norteños to *Estrella Norte* (North Star). As explained by band members Oscar Díaz and Carlos Rodríguez, introduced earlier in this chapter, they transitioned from performing an eclectic mix of styles to adopting a more distinctly norteño sound and repertoire, which they achieved by playing covers of and by closely emulating the styles of the Mexican groups Lupe y Polo and Chuy Luviano y Los Rayos, whose recordings were local jukebox favorites, widely disseminated by the carrilera music industry and through bootleg cassettes.

The first recording by Carlos Rodríguez and his band mates was a homemade tape done in a cassette deck recorder to promote the group and seek out interested record labels and music producers. It included ten original compositions by members of the band and by Norberto Riveros, who wrote the corridos *La Cuatro Puertas* and *El Cartelazo* for the group by request. During a trip to Bogotá to search for interested music producers, the group heard of Alírio Castillo, a veteran of the Colombian music industry who for many years had worked for Phillips, one of the first multinational recording companies to open in Bogotá. After being let go from Phillips when the company closed local operations and a short stint with Sony Music, Castillo assembled his own record label, *Alma Producciones* (Soul Productions), with the intent of commercializing music by unknown

groups and composers geared towards *audiencias populares* (audiences of lower social strata), as he explained to me more than once.[45]

When he met Carlos Rodríguez and his band mates, Alírio Castillo had just completed the recording of *Cantina Abierta Vol.1* ("Open Cantina Vol.1"), the first compilation album released by Alma Producciones. The compilation included carrilera-style rancheras and corridos, and additionally, *La Cruz de Marijuana* (The Marihuana Cross) and *La Pista Secreta* (The Secret Landing Strip), two corridos by the Mexican *Grupo Exterminador* that Castillo had come across by way of a pirate cassette given to him by a friend. Believing in the commercial potential of more explicit corridos about drug trafficking and drug traffickers, Castillo began searching for local original corridos and grupos norteños. In 1995, he produced Estrella Norte's first album, basically re-recording in a studio in Bogotá the songs and arrangements the group had already pre-produced in their homemade demo cassette. After changing the name of the group to Las Aguilas del Norte, which he thought was more commercially sound, Castillo released the album initially in cassette format as *El Primer Zarpazo* (The First Blow).

The songs in the album El Primer Zarpazo represent well the mix of styles common to the first Colombian grupos norteños, featuring a range of instrumental

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[45] Between 2010 and 2013, I conducted seven "formal" interviews with Alírio Castillo, which I recorded. In addition, we spent many hours talking informally during long car and bus trips, at social gatherings, and while listening to music and drinking *tinto* at his place in Bogotá. All of those were occasions in which Castillo shared a wealth of information, opinions, anecdotes, etc. Many of the stories he told me he repeated a few times in different occasions. In addition to Castillo's recorded interviews, I wrote an enormous amount of notes on the data he shared with me. The information about Alirio Castillo in the remainder of this chapter comes from this amalgamation of field notes, head notes, and transcriptions of interviews.

arrangements varying from mariachi-like trumpet melody lines and electronic keyboards akin to 1980s and 1990s música de carrilera and música de despecho, to more typical norteño sounds emphasizing the accordion and polka-like back beat played by electric guitar or cuatro in lieu of the Mexican bajo sexto, an instrument then still unknown in this Colombian music scene. The connection with música de carrilera was also reinforced by the participation in three of the tracks of Rosita Moyano, a seasoned singer of carrilera who had migrated to Villavicencio from Antioquia and was the wife of band member and lead singer Hector Moyano. Most of the lyrics contained themes of unrequited love, poverty, departure, and longing, common in both música de carrilera and norteña, such as in the first-person canción-corrido "El Caminante" (The Rambler), a fast tempo binary polka norteña. "Brindis con la Muerte" (A Toast with Death) clearly resonates with songs that were very popular at the time among fans of música de carrilera, música de despecho, and música popular such as "Nadie Es Eterno en el Mundo" (No One is Eternal in This World) by Darío Gómez, and Chuy Luviano's "Cruz de Madera" (The Wooden Cross), both of which express an intimate yet stoic sense of the inevitability of death.

One of the tracks that became quite popular with local listeners at the time was Hector Moyano's "El Gallo Macario" (Macario the Cock), an accordion-driven corrido in praise of a wealthy esmeraldero who had partially sponsored the group's recording.[46] Yet,

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[46] As discussed earlier in this chapter, musical tributes to sponsors in general like this one were and still are quite common in Colombian música norteña. Well established among pioneer groups in the emerald zone like Los Hermamos Ariza and Los Rangers del Norte, and Las Aguilas del Norte in Villavicencio, praising patrons who provide financial help is not, however, at all unique to música norteña, being also common in vallenato in Colombia's Atlantic coast (see Gillard 2000) and in Cali's salsa during its emergence in the 1980s and 90s (see Waxer 2002), to cite a few examples.

the popularity reached by the two corridos composed by Norberto Riveros was unprecedented for a Colombian grupo norteño. Soon they played out of jukeboxes in cantinas and tiendas in Villavicencio and across the towns in the llanos and the Amazonía.

When I asked Riveros why he thought that La Cuatro Puertas and El Cartelazo became so popular he said that it was because:

> These corridos told stories just like the ones people were living everyday… [these stories] were in the news, but the news went away very fast while the songs stayed and went around, and people sang them and listened to them over and over. [These corridos] have circulated around the world, one can see the comments on YouTube and get an idea of how many people have listened to them (Riveros 2012c)).

Carlos Rodríguez expressed a similar view when, as mentioned previously, he stated that listeners liked the common, plain language in which corridos told events that, either real or fictitious, resonated with their everyday experiences. Anticipating the potential popular appeal of corridos that registered local events and subjects at a moment when Colombians were immersed in political violence and the drug trafficking troubled most facets of social life, producer Alírio Castillo focused his marketing strategies for Las Aguilas del Norte on Rivero's corridos, which he promoted independently from the rest of their album as explained next, and cannot be ignored as a crucial factor for their disproportionate popularity compared to the other tracks.

Motivated by the successful promotion of *Cantina Abierta Vol. 1* and the promise of Riveros' corridos, Castillo conceived a new compilation album containing exclusively "heavy" corridos with explicit lyrics about drug trafficking and drug traffickers, reissuing three tracks from Cantina Abierta Vol. 1 to maximize their sales draw. They

were Las Aguilas del Norte's La Cuatro Puertas and El Cartelazo, composed by Norberto Riveros, and La Cruz de Marijuana by Grupo Exterminador.

Released in 1997, Alirio Castillo's new compilation CD was named *Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1* ("Forbidden Corridos Vol. 1"). Greatly surpassing his expectations, the album sold nearly 100,000 copies in a year, a formidable number for an independent production by the standards of the Colombian music industry. This album was the first of the series *Corridos Prohibidos*, which by 2013 included 14 compilation CDs.

For the next three years, Las Aguilas del Norte performed non-stop, travelling in and around Villavicencio and the towns of the llanos and the Amazonía regions, and to areas where there was a new demand for their live performances. The popularity of their corridos reached towns in rural Boyacá, Santander, and Cundinamarca, as Alirio Castillo promoted his compilation albums in a similar fashion as the old música de carrilera peddlers: travelling in person with his CDs in hand and distributing them directly to cantina owners, *tiendas de pueblo*, and anywhere else where he found a jukebox or a CD player in a public place. Small, local radio stations often cooperated with Alírio Castillo and promoted his CDs. Norberto Riveros' corridos in the interpretation of Las Aguilas del Norte were soon heard as well in *Sur de Bogotá* (southern Bogotá), the impoverished peripheral zones outside of the Colombian capital where hundreds of thousands of people displaced from rural areas settled precariously over decades of incessant violence and dispossession affecting poor workers in the countryside.

In 1998, Alirio Castillo produced and recorded Las Aguilas del Norte's second album, *Zarpazo 2*, which shows a clear shift in style from their previous independent recording. All of the tracks of Zarpazo 2 feature fast tempo polka-like corridos with the

prototypical core-instrumentation of Mexican música norteña: accordion, drum set, electric bass, and the bajo sexto built by band member and instrument maker Oscar Díaz, then a novelty in Colombian norteña pioneered by Las Aguilas del Norte.

Castillo exerted firm control over all aspects of his series of compilation CDs Corridos Prohibidos, which involved selecting a repertoire exclusively focused on "heavy" lyrics and on emulating as close as possible the sound of Mexican grupos norteños, which he believed had the most commercial promise as a novelty that could easily appeal to Colombian already-existing audiences for Mexican-derived styles. Hence, while presenting Colombian norteño musicians with opportunities to record and commercialize their music that they didn't have otherwise, Castillo also worked towards the standardization of the previously much more heterogeneous música norteña in Colombia, with its eclectic, varied fusions of Mexican and Colombian styles, performance practices, and musical instruments derived from multiple layers of transculturation and musical adaptations.

Conclusions

This chapter was focused on becoming, and as the type of inquiry Gile Deleuze (1997) has proposed, "not only on origins and causalities [but] an analysis that reveals mobilization, desire, and possibility," as commented by Biehl and Locke (2010). "From one map to the next," Deleuze suggests, "it is not a matter of searching for an origin, but of evaluating displacements. Every map is a redistribution of impasses and breakthroughs, of thresholds and enclosures, which necessarily go from bottom to top" (Deleuze 1997:61 – quoted in Biehl and Locke 2010:323). In this chapter, my main goal

was to trace the emergence of a lively scene of musica norteña centered in the city of Villavicencio, and how musicians focused on becoming norteños as a result of desire and opportunity. The trope of "mobilities alongside moorings" (Hannam et al 2006) is helpful to frames the ways in which various types of spatial, economic, and musical mobilities convened in Villavicencio. Deleuze's ideas of *milieus* – "worlds at once social, symbolic, and material, infused with the affects of their own subjectivities"– and *trajectories* – the journeys people take through milieus to pursue their needs, desires, and curiosities or to simply try to find room to breathe beneath social constraints" (ibid) also resonate.

The chapter provided a close examination of various displacements – unequal flows of people, ideas, and objects, new economic routes and shifting politics and struggles for power – as a constitutive force that has continuously shaped and reshaped music and life in Villavicencio. In the next chapter, I explore a combination of events that incited new political and affective alliances (Grossberg 1983) within which to locate the boom in popularity of the emergent corridos prohibidos in the Amazonía and the llanos regions, which propelled their expansion from local to larger spheres of consumption via their exposure, although for a brief moment, via mass media such as national TV and newspaper articles.

Chapter 4 – The Cocalero Peasant Movement and the Emergence of Corridos Prohibidos

Introduction

July 20th, 2012. *It is Saturday afternoon in Villavicencio, and the street of the mariachis is bustling with activity when I meet Alirio Castillo at one of the small* tiendas *that line the sidewalks. He arrived this morning from Bogotá, looking to spend the weekend in the pleasant warm weather, typical of July in the llano. I spot Castillo sitting at a table with Norberto Riveros, who is dressed in full mariachi garb like a few dozen other working musicians walking up and down the street, waiting to be hired for private functions. We are soon joined by Gabriel Acuña, the director of a daily radio program of música norteña based in Tunja, Boyacá, and bajo sexto player Ivan Sanchez. Both are in town for the day accompanying Uriel Henao, who will be performing this evening for one of the celebrations of* La Virgen del Carmen.

They order beer and we all engage in casual conversation. Castillo talks about his latest musical projects. He says he is done working with música norteña and doubts he will ever produce another album of corridos. He speaks of his frustration with the market for his CD series Corridos Prohibidos, which has decreased drastically in the previous several years since its peak in the late 1990s: "This [corridos prohibidos] is dead (eso ya se murió); the pirates (los piratas) ruined everything," he says. He sounds and looks weary and sour, to my surprise. I've gotten accustomed to the ever upbeat, enthusiastic attitude he showed me from the first time we met. In a contrasting note, the career of singer and composer Uriel Henao seems to be steadily at a height in 2012.

Gabriel and Ivan will be accompanying him on a string of live appearances over the next month throughout the Andean mountain towns and the llanos. They offer to give me a ride later so I can get into tonight's show with them.

*A CD in hand, a man in mariachi outfit, perhaps his mid-30s, approaches our table and introduces himself to Castillo, who responds affably. "Don Alirio, pleasure to meet you (*mucho gusto*)," says Jeisson Pardo. He sings and plays accordion and string instruments doubling as a mariachi and norteño musician, which is not uncommon in Villavicencio, and has a group called 100% Norte, which he is working hard to promote. The exchange is brief, concluding with Castillo's assurance that he will listen to the demo CD and keep the group in mind for future Corridos Prohibidos' productions. As Pardo leaves, Castillo mutters with a slight smirk: "I didn't want to take his hopes away."*

The incident immediately reminds me of something he had told me the first time we met two years earlier, that Colombian norteños that were not in Corridos Prohibidos "did not go anywhere." Don Alirio, 'El Patrón' of Corridos Prohibidos," asserted writer Carlos Valbuena in the book that came out of his master thesis and was published by Alma Producciones, Alirio Castillo's label. A close friend of Castillo, Valbuena was insightful in explaining the dominating role that the producer has taken in the production of corridos prohibidos. Castillo tells me often that the 'problem' with corridos and narcocorridos in Mexico is that there are too many different styles, audiences, and musicians without 'ordering.' He thinks they became repetitive and lost vitality for this reason. In Colombia, he is the 'organizer' of corridos (el organizador de los corridos), he tells me: they all go through him and he conceives a theme for each album; he

commissions corridos and edits the ones he selects, chooses the musicians to record them, promotes and sells them. No wonder he declares the death of corridos prohibidos now that he decided to discontinue the series.

The event described above took place a little over a month after I arrived in Colombia for my longest stint of continuous fieldwork. By then, I had already come to terms with Alirio Castillo's alleged exit from the scene of corridos prohibidos, which was unexpected for me. Last time we had met, during my previous trip to Colombia back in January 2012, Castillo was excitedly planning a new Corridos Prohibidos album, through which he intended to launch a batch of new composers and interpreters that he had been 'grooming,' as he told me then. Just five months later, Alirio Castillo broke the improbable news while we chatted over a *tinto* in his small home office when I visited him soon after arriving in Bogotá, as I had done at the start of each of my previous research trips. "Corridos prohibidos are dead," Castillo told me, "their time has passed, audiences are no longer interested."

Alirio Castillo had always made it very clear that he launched Corridos Prohibidos for its commercial potential, so it wasn't wholly surprising that he would end his involvement with the series when it seemed no longer profitable. At the time, opinions about the vitality of corridos prohibidos varied among fans and musicians. Musicians seemed particularly interested in pointing out a general shift in preference towards more romantic strands of musica norteña rather than corridos prohibidos during many interviews and conversations over the course of several months of fieldwork between 2012 and 2013.

For example, when I first met the musicians of La Pandilla del Rio Bravo, they seemed excited to tell me about their latest independent production in progress, a Mexican banda-style song with romantic lyrics they had re-arranged with a norteña twist. When I asked them about corridos prohibidos, drummer Edwin León was emphatic: "That was a fever during the worst time of the conflict and the narcotraffic, a craziness that has passed. Times have changed; people don't want to hear about so much violence anymore. We prefer to sing about love and fun and make people dance" (León 2012). At the time of this first meeting, my only previous reference for La Pandilla was the several corridos they had recorded for the Corridos Prohibidos series, including one that I knew had been a hit in the early 2000s, "Lineas de a Metro" (Lines by the Meter), composed by Norberto Riveros exclusively for the group. León and the other band members told me they didn't include any of those corridos in their live performances. In fact, they never had, only playing them upon request back when they were first released and promoted by Alirio Castillo, as explained by León (ibid):

> We played them live a few times back when they were playing on the local radio stations and jukeboxes in the towns where we went to perform, but soon new corridos prohibidos came along and the audience didn't really request them much anymore. We play Lineas de a Metro very once in a while, only when the audience insists, but we don't even remember how to play the other ones anymore, if we ever even knew how [laughs].

This remark, coupled with La Pandilla's stated lack of interest in collaborating again with Alirio Castillo, seemed to justify why they also considered corridos prohibidos to be 'dead.' The group's commentary and the assertiveness with which Castillo attributed the existence (or not) of corridos prohibidos to himself seemed to corroborate a common line of critique of corridos prohibidos as illustrated by the following observation

made to me by a well-known scholar of Colombian culture: “You know corridos prohibidos is not really a musical genre, right? You know it is really just a commercial brand, right?”

A quite different scenario, however, became visible, or rather, audible, as soon as I began to attend live performances and get acquainted with the repertoires of Colombian grupos norteños as well as the songs that audiences frequently requested and responded to. Although most groups were, like La Pandilla del Rio Bravo, continually working on recording new arrangements and some original compositions, they rarely performed them live. Amidst an usual mix of covers of old and new hits by Los Tigres del Norte and newer Mexican and Mexican-American groups such as Pesado and Intocable, and very few of their own arrangements or compositions, Colombian norteños invariably included some of the songs that had been released and promoted through Corridos Prohibidos over the previous fifteen years.

Attending dozens of live events allowed me to assemble a list of a few staple corridos prohibidos that were more often than not played at some point during a live performance of música norteña in Colombia between 2011 and 2013, even if sometimes it was because audience members demanded them. Those were undoubtedly the ‘classics’ of corridos prohibidos, which were not necessarily Colombian compositions as exemplified by La Cruz de Marihuana, arguably the one corrido that never failed to be played in live performances by most groups. And there was also the case of a few Colombian groups and artists whose original corridos, included at some point in Alirio Castillo’s CD series even if not composed exclusively for it, continued to move particular audiences and enable musical moments thick with affective resonance. Such were the

cases of Los Rangers del Norte and their sung-stories of life and death in the emerald mines, Las Aguilas del Norte's recounting of the drug wars in the llanos, and Uriel Henao, whose fans never failed to sell out his live shows and sing along to his corridos from beginning to end.

This chapter circles back to the core questions that initially motivated this study, which grew out of my desire to understand the musical meanings and social significance of corridos prohibidos for individual listeners and within the larger field of Colombian popular music and social life. Who listens to corridos prohibidos? How are they produced and by whom? How did the discrepant views, discourses, and experiences of corridos prohibidos as the ones outlined above and in previous chapters come to take shape? What cognitive, discursive, and affective meanings do they articulate for listeners, musicians, other users, and for those who don't like them? Did these meanings transform over time? How were the multiple facets of violence in Colombia over the last several decades and the emergence of corridos prohibidos articulated? Why have they been much more popular in the llanos and the Amazonia than in Medellín?

To tackle these questions, the previous chapters outlined the political and economic processes, musical developments, and dynamics of class, regional and national identities in Colombia, all necessary to understand historical socio-musical continuities within which corridos prohibidos and Colombian música norteña are embedded. In this chapter, I examine the pivotal moment in the mid-1990s when musical trends -- developing since the late 1980s within a continuum of Colombian adaptations of Mexican musical practices -- coalesced into an emergent musical formation that producer Alirio Castillo perceptively collected, named, and promoted. In sum, I focus on the moment of

emergence of corridos prohibidos within a particular musical, historical, and socio-political conjuncture, their conditions of production and circulation, and examine their initial reception among a forming fan base and within a wider sphere of Colombian public social life.

In her analysis of the uses of music in everyday life, sociologist Tia DeNora (2000) noted that approaching the effects and significance of music in social life, or in her words, the "semiotic force" of music, requires attention to multiple cognitive and affective realms of people's engagements with music through empirical exploration of actual receptions in specific locations and situations. Calling for closer attention to the active role of listening and practices of reception, DeNora remarked that a reflexive conception of music's force must consider "how particular aspects of the music come to be significant in relation to particular recipients at particular moments, and under particular circumstances" (23) Analyzing the advent of rock, Lawrence Grossberg (1997) has similarly argued that understanding its emergence involves an attempt to "map the conditions and effects of its emergence, understanding why this actual formation appeared rather than another" (17) and how particular affective alliances among participants are formed.

Following this line of inquiry, this chapter seeks to add a crucial layer towards understanding the rise of corridos prohibidos, endeavoring to map out key events, specific networks of people and musical circulation, and the political and affective moods that both nourished and were sustained by this novel musical formation. Corridos prohibidos first gained force among communities in the Colombian Amazon, in the context of a political and humanitarian crisis that culminated with a three month-long

peasant protest in the region in 1996. I contend that this event catalyzed the formation of a new collective consciousness among campesinos in the Amazonia in which two songs, to be identified as corridos prohibidos soon after the event, participated and gave it sonic presence. I examine the ways in which corridos prohibidos mediated the actions and feelings articulated by the peasant movement, informed by scholarship that places affective practice on the same epistemological plane as social and political histories (Ahmed 2004; Flatley 2008; Berlant 2011; Gray 2013; Wetherell 2014).

This chapter takes La Cruz de Marijuana, the song that spearheaded the launch of the series Corridos Prohibidos, and places it in the context of its reception to suggest that this corrido articulated these new subjectivities, thus contradicting previous scholarship that interpreted La Cruz de Marijuana as a reflection of the views of outlaws and drug dealers. By situating the corrido within larger musical repertoires that were popular among recipients at the time, I argue that *La Cruz de Marijuana* fit into familiar modes of listening that articulated particular modes of feeling as well, contributing to its unprecedented popularity. Here I am drawing from two interrelated lines of inquiry: scholarship that locates the emergence of new genres within recipients' existing habits and tastes (Jauss 1982; Fabbri 1982; Holt 2007), and the work of scholars who highlight the way in which particular affects become attached to certain genres and circulate (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2008; Gray 2013: 5).

I contend that the rise of corridos prohibidos into view of a wider public occurred largely as a result of the synergistic relationship between the affective powers it held for fans at the moment of its emergence and the commercial enterprise initiated by Alírio Castillo. Through analyzing the articulations between the peasant protest and the

reception of La Cruz de Marijuana and also of El Corrido del Cocalero, both from the album Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1, my goal is to situate Alírio Castillo's project within an emergent feeling among Colombian peasants in the Amazonia that fed into and was fed by the appearance of corridos prohibidos. This emphasis echoes the work of Antoine Hennion (2003), who has shown how actors engage in multiple types of practices that empower certain musics, which in turn come to "have power" over them (Bergh and DeNora 2009: 106). This approach aims to privilege the agency of music's "users," including both producers and recipients, and the vital importance of their experiences – thought, felt, voiced, silenced, lived, remembered, or imagined. It situates everyday practices in the constitution of the realms of the social in all of its dimensions, which in this particular case were poignantly constituted within political and territorial power struggles and the violence of life de-humanized.

Examining corridos prohibidos as a musical category and assessing the significance of its emergence, this chapter returns to some of the concerns explored in Chapter 2 regarding the complications of the notion of genre in popular music and the interplay of affective and discursive realms of experience within the rise of new musical formations. It proposes understanding corridos prohibidos as part of a "structure of feeling," a term Raymond Williams (1977) coined to describe the emergent thoughts and feelings of a group of people at a specific historical moment that give rise to new creative practices. Adding to a sense of novelty, corridos prohibidos also gained force as they grew within participants' existing modes of listening. The emergence of Corridos Prohibidos as both commercial label and significant musical category is thus examined through this prism as thoroughly inseparable from each other and as a dialogical process.

My goal here is not to detail each album of the series Corridos Prohibidos, nor to catalogue the dozens of grupos norteños and corridos prohibidos that surged in its trail. Rather, I place more attention on individuated and collective stances of listening to, composing, singing, moving to, thinking about, and feeling with corridos prohibidos. This chapter presents personal stories of listeners, including musicians, of distinct backgrounds and social and political stances, aiming to foreground a "multiplicity of subjective cultural positions" (Turino 1993:8) and the complexity they bring to aesthetic and ethical understandings of corridos prohibidos.

Genre and Horizons of Expectation

While travelling with Ferney Bernal and the other musicians of El Grupo Zeta, we had an animated exchange of ideas over a late night meal after a performance. Talking about different types of música norteña, I asked them how they would define corridos prohibidos. Initially, their comments leaned towards the prominent conventions of música norteña used in corridos prohibidos and the thematic content of the lyrics focused on "the problems of Colombia" – the drug traffic, the war, and government corruption. Bernal summarized it in this way: "Let's say that corridos prohibidos are just like Mexican corridos, or the so-called narcocorridos, but they are about Colombia and made by Colombians." Edgar Rincón, the group's bass player, mildly disagreed, arguing that corridos prohibidos, like other Colombian música norteña more generally, was "more Colombian than that." In his opinion, a certain Colombian 'accent' was noticeable in the way some musicians sang and played their instruments.

This soon appeared problematic, however, when someone brought up that La Cruz de Marijuana was not about Colombia specifically nor made by Colombians, but would undoubtedly be considered a corrido prohibido by any musician or fan of the series. After some debate, the musicians came to tentatively defining corridos prohibidos as any song that had been released in the series Corridos Prohibidos, which they admittedly attributed to the marketing power of Alirio Castillo's label. Yet in 2012, the ubiquitous presence of pirate CDs labeled 'corridos prohibidos' and containing dozens of songs each, many of them not produced or promoted by Castillo, in makeshift music stands in downtown Villavicencio and in little mountain towns in Boyacá was impossible to ignore. If, like the musicians of Grupo Zeta concluded, the commercial force of Corridos Prohibidos had popularized songs that became associated with the term, it also created a category that served to further group together songs and styles with, even if loosely, similar identifiable traits, and shared social spaces and audiences. While Alírio Castillo usually talked about corridos prohibidos as a "movement" and seldom used the term "genre," most fans I met referred most commonly to "*el género de los corridos prohibidos*" (the genre of corridos prohibidos), or simply "*los corridos prohibidos*," in the same fashion in which someone would say she listens to rock, vallenato, or reggaeton.

Journalistic writings about corridos prohibidos have shown up sporadically in the printed media, and in this medium the music is, more often than not, referred to as a genre. A common line of criticism, however, consists in divesting corridos prohibidos of the rank of musical category by affirming its 'lesser' condition as commercial product, not unlike older critiques directed at other related musical forms such as carrilera and música de despecho, as seen in previous chapters. I encountered this type of argument

coming primarily from well-informed and educated non-fans, most of them middle and upper class musicians and intellectuals who had heard corridos prohibidos and invoked notions of legitimate Colombian culture and aesthetic more than moral values to support their critiques. According to these views, corridos prohibidos are poorly performed and produced imitations; too similar to Mexican narcocorridos to be considered a Colombian musical genre.

Nonetheless, the great majority of my Colombian middle and upper class acquaintances in Bogotá, Villavicencio, and Medellín largely ignored the term or even the existence of corridos prohibidos and the repertoires associated with it. Asking if they had heard about corridos prohibidos and, in the few cases in which they had, if they knew what the songs sounded like, I would invariably get negative answers. Upon "testing" some friends' ears, however, the musical examples I used were promptly recognized and classified in some way. For example, I explained my research topic several times to Flor,[1] a friend in Bogotá in her mid-sixties, but she had a hard time understanding what kind of music I was studying. The name corridos prohibidos didn't sound familiar, to Flor, and música norteña either. So one day I had her listen to "Historia de un Guerrillo y un Paraco" by Uriel Henao, and she said right away: "Ah! Patricia! But this is *música de cantina* (cantina music)!"

Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco, which narrates the encounter and fatal showdown between a guerrilla and a paramilitary soldier, is one of the most enduring

[1] Flor. Personal communication, 11/17/2012. Bogotá, Colombia. Flor is a pseudonym chosen by my friend and collaborator.

songs of the series Corridos Prohibidos and would have been unmistakably recognized as a corrido prohibido by the musicians of Grupo Zeta, by fans, or by most people acquainted with other Colombian corridos prohibidos. For Flor, in spite of her foreignness to the label and its songs, the song was still easily put into a category for which she had clear references. When I asked why she classified the song as 'música de cantina,' Flor pointed out what she viewed as typical characteristics such as "stories of deaths," "tragedies," and a "monotonous rhythm." The rhythm of the corrido, which is set to an upbeat norteña-style polka, sounded monotonous to Flor because, as she explained, it wasn't good for dancing ("*no sirve para bailar*") and it wasn't happy ("*no es una música alegre*"). She said contemptuously: "It is the kind of music that the little drunkards like to listen to in these *cantinas de pueblo*."

Flor then told me an anecdote to illustrate the type of setting that such sounds evoked for her. As a girl, she and her family, who owned (and still own) extensive farmlands in Boyacá and in the Rio Magdalena valley, travelled often through rural localities in those regions on their way to and from Bogotá where they lived. Whenever they made stops at roadside *tiendas*, one of her younger brothers used to run to the ever-present jukebox and always select the same song: "Mujer Paseada." It was nothing short than amusing to Flor and their family that the boy so liked the song, a narrative in first person in which the male protagonist explains that he will still take a woman that "has been around," which they heard as vulgar and lowly peasant music.

Mujer Paseada is a classic Mexican-American corrido[2] set to a polka-like binary rhythm first composed and recorded in 1954 in San Antonio, Texas, and recorded since by several Mexican and Mexican-American norteño groups. In Colombia, different versions circulated within the wide umbrella of música de carrilera by the Medellín-based music industry, and the corrido became a jukebox staple in rural Andean towns and areas of forced migration[3]. In spite of her lack of knowledge about música de carrilera and of the existence of corridos prohibidos, my friend Flor did not hesitate to correlate examples of both. For her, Mujer Paseada and Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco fit into the same music category and evoked similar extra-musical associations – cantinas, rural working class, tastelessness – even though the lyrics address considerably different themes, which suggests that her aural recognition and its signifiers were derived as much if not more from musical features than from the lyrics.

Other younger upper-class Colombians I asked -- whose knowledge of carrilera, música norteña and corridos prohibidos, similarly to Flor, do not go beyond being

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[2] The corrido was composed and recorded with norteño-style accompaniment in 1954 by Daniel Garcés for the independent label Falcon based in San Antonio, Texas. Since then it received several versions and was recorded by many Mexican and Mexican-American artists.

[3] Among the Colombians I met who are listeners of música de carrilera, this corrido is well-known in the versions of the Mexican artists Dueto Rio Bravo, Lydia Mendoza, Las Jilguerillas, and Ray y Lupita. The Colombian norteño musicians I worked with knew *Mujer Paseada* mostly from the early-1980s versions by two of the groups that most influenced them, the Mexican Chuy Luviano y Los Rayos and the duo Lupe y Polo, both of which came to be much better known in Colombia than in Mexico, also promoted by the Medellín music business, as discussed at length in previous chapters. Covers of the version by Lupe y Polo were sometimes played live by Colombian grupos norteños in performances I attended between 2011 and 2012. It is also noteworthy that the recording of *Mujer Paseada* by Lupe y Polo is in itself a cover of Ramón Ayala's version recorded in the mid-1970s for the Mexican label DLV.

occasional inattentive listeners -- did not differentiate between them and labeled them all as *música para tomar aguardiente* (music to drink *aguardiente*) or simply *música pa' tomar* (music for drinking), which aligns with Flor's 'música de cantina' label. Although Colombian fans and participants of música norteña, corridos prohibidos, and música de carrilera promptly draw distinctions between them, as exemplified by the discussions among the musicians of La Pandilla del Rio Bravo and of El Grupo Zeta previously described, among them the idea that these musical formations fit into the same 'musical family,' to use the words of Colombian norteño musician Wilson Latorre, is common. Therefore, I found that both participants and non-participants grouped these musical practices together, even if for different reasons and according to different parameters linked to different extra-musical associations, and with varying levels of differentiation. Musicologist Rubén Lopez Cano (2006) refers to this dynamic relationship between genre recognition and previous experiences related to the sounds in question as recipients' 'musical competence' perceived as 'common sense' (8), in which the common uses of music by listeners inform their process of musical categorization by bringing into play their own past experiences with those sounds and musical performances.

Hans R. Jauss, a leading scholar of reception theory in literary studies, offers a useful framework for understanding genre formations. He proposes that genres are best understood as "horizons of expectations," in which texts (songs in this case) are always perceived by recipients according to their past experiences of other texts that create sets of expectations and parameters through which new texts are grasped. According to Jauss (1982), "the new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and 'rules of the game' familiar to him from earlier texts, which as such can be varied,

extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced" (88). From this perspective, genres are flexible and changing; they don't emerge in a vacuum but are rather perceived by listeners within their own personal horizons of expectations. The meanings and associations assigned to texts and the genres they are grouped in vary according to different groups' horizons of expectations, which emphasizes the agency of recipients in the rising and recognition of new genres.

When the term corridos prohibidos came about in 1997, it provided a name for existing musical practices in formation, which had novel elements but also evoked for listeners – dedicated or casual – the 'rules of the game' already familiar from earlier repertoires and their sets of sonic, cognitive, and affective associations:, namely the norteña-infused styles of música de carrilera and música de despecho, Mexican-derived musics that were popular with listeners. While these associations certainly encompass familiar accordion-laced accompaniments, ternary and polka-like beats, and lyrics conveying fatalism and despair, they also include the contexts and practices within which music is circulated and listened to. Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of practice as structured agency (Bourdieu 1977), Fabian Holt (2007) in his study of genres in popular music has similarly argued that:

> The concept of practice opens up a different understanding of genre conventions because it shifts focus away from objectified ontologies (sign, category, recording, etc.) and toward agency and process […] Music and genre cannot be perceived only in terms of "content," of what is played, but also of how music is created, performed, and perceived (24).

This focus puts forward the idea that songs and genres, rather than fixed objects determined by conventional sets of formal characteristics, are events that can only be

grasped through performance and through the continuing responses of recipients that emerge from related sonic memories.

Rather than determining whether or not corridos prohibidos is a genre, I am more interested in understanding its significance by looking at how it articulates to other related musical practices and the ways listeners and musicians perceive and realize these connections. Continuing to explore this dynamic notion of genre, my goal is to portray the emergence of corridos prohibidos grounded in an aesthetics of reception (Jauss 1982) through an analysis of *La Cruz de Marijuana*, the corrido that kicked off Alírio Castillo's seminal series Corridos Prohibidos.

La Cruz de Marihuana – Musical Mobility

La Cruz de Marihuana was written by José Alberto Sepúlveda, a composer and itinerary musician from Sinaloa, Mexico, hardly known outside of his local circuit, where he performed on the streets and occasionally for private events. By his personal account, the corrido was recorded by several musicians from Sinaloa and other parts of Mexico without crediting him for the authorship, including Grupo Exterminador (Valbuena 2006). Although I have not been able to verify with the musicians of Grupo Exterminador when was the first time they recorded La Cruz de Marihuana, the corrido appears in their first 'official' recording, the album *Los Dos Plebes II* released in 1994 by EGO Records, a small indie label located in Tulares, California.[4] First formed as Los

[4] Earlier that year in April 1994, Fonovisa, the leading Spanish language American indie label at the time and today the main producer of Regional Mexican music in the U.S, had released the album *Los Dos Plebes*, a smash hit by their superstar música norteña act Los Tigres del Norte. The choice of the title *Los Dos Plebes II* for the debut album of the then virtually unknown Grupo Exterminador by EGO Records exemplifies

Hermanos Corona by four brothers from a small town in Guanajuato, Mexico, the group made several self-produced recordings before signing a contract with EGO Records a couple of years after moving to L.A.[5] The musical production contained no original compositions and ended up being the only one recorded by the brothers for EGO. The album did not get much attention and the group, already renamed Grupo Exterminador, remained largely unknown for most listeners of música norteña in Mexico and the U.S. until after the release of their second album in 1996 by Fonovisa. In the meantime, however, the group became a household name among Colombian fans of corridos and música norteña when their version of La Cruz de Marihuana was distributed by Alíro Castillo, first in the 1995 compilation album Cantina Abierta Vol.1, and two years later in Corridos Prohibidos Vol. 1.

According to several musicians who were active in música norteña since the early 1990s in Villavicencio, La Cruz de Marihuana was already heard in private homes, fincas, and on the streets playing from car sound systems, and was a staple in their live

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how it has been quite common in the circulation of música norteña to make explicit references to previous works, being them album and song titles, lyrics, and familiar melodies. While these practices can be interpreted as rip offs and business opportunism, they are also in tandem with long standing, common practices among norteño musicians and corridistas of making reference to and recycling previous texts, including melodic, lyric, and thematic patterns. These intertextual references may serve to articulate new and old compositions, recordings, performers, and audiences within recognizable "genre worlds," (Frith 1996) which, similarly to R. Jauss's horizons of expectations, are constantly created, maintained and modified through the presence of both creative practices and continuous production of familiarity.

[5] Grupo Exterminador Billboard Artist Biography. Accessed at http://www.billboard.com/artist/303188/grupo-exterminador/biography

performances before 1995, when it first appeared in Alírio Castillo's first compilation album Corridos Prohibidos.[6]

It is difficult, then, to determine for sure when La Cruz de Marihuana first began to circulate through cassettes in Colombia and in what version, considering that other recorded versions had been made prior to Grupo Exterminador's EGO Records album.[7] Yet, Castillo's distribution without a doubt boosted the corrido's popularity remarkably in Colombia, while in Mexico it remained rather obscure until much later.

In our many conversations about the topic, Alírio Castillo often credited his idea for the first album of the series Corridos Prohibidos to having come across La Cruz de

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[6] On a note in *El Tiempo* from 1996, for example, Las Estrellas del Norte, an early Colombian norteño group from Boyacá, is also credited for recording a self-produced album that year featuring La Cruz de Marihuana among other Mexican and original corridos ("Estrellas del Norte con Brillo Propio." *El Tiempo*, 25/10/1996. Accessed at: **http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-562124).**

The group did not exist anymore when I began fieldwork and I was not able to find any copies or other references to this recording.

[7] In 1993, the then recently formed norteño group Pesado from Monterrey, Mexico, recorded La Cruz de Marihuana in their second album, produced by Metro Casa Musical (MCM, Monterrey). MCM was one of several small labels that specialized in música norteña among other Mexican "rural-rooted sounds" such as ranchera and banda (Simonett 2001:46), and Pesado's version of La Cruz de Marihuana did not have much impact (although Pesado is currently one of the leading norteño groups with international fame in Mexico, the U.S., and Colombia, La Cruz de Marihuana never figures on their lists of memorable recordings – when I asked Colombian musicians and other fans of the group, for example, they had no idea that Pesado had recorded this corrido in the past). It is unlikely that this could have been one of the versions arriving to Colombia, also because La Cruz de Marihuana is rendered by Pesado in triple meter and with a more elaborate melody line sung in vocal duet style. These features differ considerably from Grupo Exterminador's recording of the corrido and all of the Colombian covers I encountered live and recorded which are all very similar, in duple meter, sung solo, and featuring a more stylized melodic shape.

Marijuana in 1995 during a car trip with a friend who played the Mexican corrido for him from a pirate compilation cassette. Castillo had an epiphany while listening to it:

> I was ecstatic while listening to the song for the first time. It occurred to me that there was no way that corrido wouldn't be a hit in Colombia. When I secured the rights to release it in Colombia, I had to get a package deal and bought the rights to three more corridos by the same group, Grupo Exterminador … I had to ask around to find a lead to the group, they were not very well known in Mexico either. I found out that they were based in Los Angeles and that the representative of their label in Colombia, Pepe Montaña, had offered La Cruz and *La Pista Secreta* (The Secret Landing Strip) to everybody [record producers] and no one wanted them […]. I couldn't believe it! Those stories were about the same things we were living in Colombia with the drug trafficking. I thought '*this is a gold mine*!' (laughs) (Castillo 2011).

At the time, Castillo had just established his independent label Alma Records and was in the process of preparing his first production, the compilation album Cantina Abierta Vol.1. He compiled the repertoire for the album while contacting independent artists in the 'género popular' ('genre of música popular') to offer them his professional music promotion services. Castillo requested from each of them one or two songs already recorded to promote, and in this process he found the "perfect title" for the music collection he had in mind, which he explained in his *Memorias de Don Alírio*, (Castillo 2006): "… *Cantina Abierta* (Open Cantina), a name that evokes the most classic scenario for música popular in Colombia and in all of Latin America" (315).

As a Colombian music industry veteran, Alirio Castillo knew to promote musical novelties to targeted audiences, generally identified according to regional and social class lines. With limited funds, Castillo promoted the first products of his recently created label largely by going on the road himself with his CDs. His intended audience was "*gente del pueblo*" – the *popular* classes. He sold CDs to owners of tiendas and cantinas, targeting a large number of music listeners accustomed to being introduced to new music through

the local jukeboxes, and distributed them throughout a web of music retailers and independent radio producers with whom he had relationships after decades of working as music promoter for Phillips International and Sony Music. From the time Cantina Abierta Vol. 1 was released in 1995, Castillo and his partner Alberto Chacón travelled incessantly by car and bus to small Andean towns and rural pueblos in Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Neiva, Tolima, and Santander, and along the llanos, places they knew had a strong market for Mexican-inspired music styles.

Cruz de Marijuana – a popular corrido prohibido

Cantina Abierta Vol. 1 featured a mixture of Mexican and Colombian interpreters and compositions, including corridos and rancheras, in the old style of música de carrilera compilation albums. In this album, Alírio Castillo included two corridos by Grupo Exterminador. One was their version of "La Pista Secreta" (The Secret Landing Strip) by Mexican composer Mario Lara Quintero, the bandleader of the well-known Los Tucanes de Tijuana, whose recording had made the corrido famous among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.[8] This corrido narrates the arrival of an airplane with a cargo of cocaine from Colombia to a hidden landing strip in the hills of Sinaloa, Mexico, followed by a shooting between the Mexican and Colombian traffickers who tried to outsmart each other. According to Alírio Castillo and other musicians I asked, this and a few other Mexican corridos that mentioned Colombia and /or Colombian characters became particularly popular at the time. However, the other corrido by Exterminador, Cruz de

[8] Los Tucanes de Tijuana. 1994. "La Pista Secreta," *Clave Nueva*. Cadena Musical, S.A. de C.V. ccm-5320.

Marihuana, surpassed Castillo's best hopes as it became by far the biggest hit of Cantina Abierta Vol.1, which led to his idea of an album exclusively of similarly themed corridos.

In August 2012, Alírio Castillo was asked in an interview for a Colombian online magazine to make a list of the top ten corridos prohibidos since he had launched the series[9]. Castillo listed Cruz de Marihuana at the top, which corroborated what he had told me often during conversations. Since we first met in January of 2010, Castillo several times told me the story of how he came across the Mexican corrido and how it eventually sparked his idea for the series Corridos Prohibidos. This seemed to be a significant factor for the importance Castillo gave to Cruz de Marijuana. I tended, however, to attribute it mostly to the handsome financial returns he got from securing the rights to issue the corrido in Colombia, which the producer seemed delighted to tell me about time and time again.

Initially, I could not think of other reasons why Cruz de Marijuana would be so important – it is not Colombian and it makes no references to Colombian places and people – other than Alírio Castillo's business interests, and did not give it much importance. I was more interested in corridos that reference the characters and events of the Colombian conflict. The protagonist of Cruz de Marijuana proclaims that he is a *narcotraficante*, in typical narcocorrido fashion, which is delivered by Grupo Exterminador with a sardonic, rough throaty voice that Colombian singers emulate when performing it live:

Cuando me muera levanten	When I die raise

[9] "Top 10 – Los Corridos Mas Prohibidos" 08/24/2012 http://cartelurbano.com/musica/top-10-los-corridos-mas-prohibidos

Una cruz de marihuana	a cross of marihuana
Con diez botellas de vino	with ten bottles of wine
Y cien barajas clavadas	and one hundred decks of cards
Al fin que fué mi destino?	after all, what was my fate?
Andar por las sendas malas	to walk on the bad side
En mi caja de la fina	In my fine coffin
Mis metrallas de tesoro	my treasured shrapnel
Gocé todito en la vida	I enjoyed it all in life
Joyas, mujeres y oro	jewelry, women, and gold
Yo soy narcotraficante	I'm a narcotrafficker
Se la rifa por el polvo	a badass in the dirt (several possible meanings)
Sobre mi tumba levanten	On my tomb raise
Una cruz de marijuana	a cross of marihuana
No quiero llanto ni rezo	I don't want crying nor praying
Tampoco tierra sagrada	Not even sacred ground
Que me entierren en la sierra	May I be buried in the mountain
Con leones de mi manada	with lions of my own pride
Que esa cruz de marijuana	May this marijuana cross
La rieguen finos licores	Be watered with fine liquours
Siete dias a la semana	Seven days a week
Y que me toquen mis sones	And may my tunes be played for me
Con la musica nortena	With músic norteña
Ahi canten mis canciones	There sing my songs[10]

The lyrics of Cruz de Marihuana and the mocking, defiant tone characteristic of its live performances seemed to me to be too close to exemplifying the type of corrido most detractors criticize for glorifying drug traffickers. I was hoping to find deeper meanings of corridos prohibidos and was more interested in corridos that more clearly conveyed the drama of campesinos trapped in the economies imposed by the drug traffic

[10] Cruz de Marihuana (Marijuana Cross) by Juan Alberto Sepúlveda – as recorded by Grupo Exterminador, EGO, U.S.A. 1994. Cantina Abierta Vol.1 Alma Producciones, Colombia 1995; Corridos Prohibidos Vol. 1 Alma Producciones 1997.

and the armed conflict, and preferably Colombian-made. Cruz de Marihuana did not fit in with the conclusions I expected to draw! While attending dozens of live performances in different Colombian regions and contexts, however, I came to realize Cruz de Marihuana was not a corrido I could ignore in my study. The Mexican corrido was played in virtually every one of them, the only song I witnessed being passionately requested by audiences on every occasion when the band seemed to be wrapping up the show without having played it. How to make sense of this corrido's surprising popularity? As Michel Foucault (1982) asked, succinctly synthesizing his emphasis on genealogy as a tactic to approach the past in order to unveil the present: "How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (27). What were the social, political, economic, and cultural reasons why Cruz de Marijuana, rather than another corrido, came to be the most beloved corrido prohibido?

The inclusion of Cruz de Marihuana in all of the writings within the limited scholarly literature on Colombian corridos prohibidos also attests to its importance, or at least to Alírio Castillo's influence, considering that most of the authors listed the producer and the Corridos Prohibidos series as their main source.[11] None of these studies, however, make connections between the lyrics and the musical and performance features that accompany them, which are intrinsically enmeshed with their contexts and

[11] In her thesis in semiotics, for example, the Colombian sociologist Paola Bahamón Serrano (2009) noted the popularity of Cruz de Marihuana, one among a small selection of corridos prohibidos she analyzed and classified according to thematic categories. In this study, Bahamón did not make references to any primary or secondary sources that informed her knowledge of the popularity of the corrido other than the information provided by Alírio Castillo.

circumstances of production and reception among musicians and listeners, as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

These writings, which correlate the lyrics of Cruz de Marihuana with the Colombian political and social crisis, largely argue that the corrido conveys a world shaped by the deleterious impact of drug trafficking on Colombian society, particularly on the poor. In the world of the corridos, these authors hold, the values of good and evil are inverted and illegality has a positive connotation. In this view, the underlying message conveyed by Cruz de Marihuana is that, in the words of sociologist Paola Bahamón (2009), "to exit poverty one needs to become a *traqueto* (drug dealer)" (140).[12] In her short analysis of corridos prohibidos, Juliana González (2004) similarly argued that in Colombia,

> . . . corridos prohibidos are recognized as 'the music of our narcos.' As it seems, not only its texts are tied to the narcoworld because the musicians and the compositions are paid for by people who have some importance inside the mafias; the narcotraffickers are both their principal sponsors and consumers (6).

Since the mid-1980s, the growth and maintenance of circuits for música norteña and corridos prohibidos has often supported financially by emerald and drug trafficking *patrones* who enjoy them.[13] Nonetheless, the views cited above did not seem to be

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[12] Bahamon placed Cruz de Marihuana into the category of *corridos de traquetos* (corridos of drug dealers) (140). The view portrayed in this corrido and other "corridos de traquetos," she concludes, is that:

"Illegality is what is positive, it is the path to become a respected crook, although it is necessary to go through the temptation of not being illegal to then confirm that legality doesn't pay off […] and reaffirm oneself in the non-legality that leads to the honor of being a delinquent (I am a narcotraficante)" (126).

[13] See Chapter 3.

generally applicable to the musicians and the hundreds or maybe thousands of fans – Colombians of all ages, genders, geographies and backgrounds – I observed and sang along with during live performances of Cruz de Marihuana on many a pleasant afternoon in the Colombian countryside. The corrido was enjoyed by many people who showed no signs of embracing an 'aesthetic of extravagance.'Even if I could not ask every single fan (although I did have many casual conversations with people attending live performances), I believe it is safe to assume that the majority did not aspire to becoming narcos.

Turning to the popularity of narcocorridos in Mexico, several scholars have seen them as fulfilling similar functions as the older classic corridos among their communities of listeners. Many have posited that corridos have always been part of the social fabric , commenting on issues of importance while activating collective memory. Corridos' sung storytelling thus powerfully commands the attention of listeners familiar with its conventions and the contexts depicted in the stories. When drug trafficking and violence became part of life, they became the subject of corridos: That does not mean that listeners necessarily identify with or want to be like the outlaw characters but rather recognize their personal and collective lived experiences retold in the songs.[14] The *narcotraficante* in contemporary corridos, it has been argued, is often both a committer of illegal acts and a victim of the surrounding violence. He is also someone who eludes an unjust economic and political system, which members of listening communities can empathize with.

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[14] See Avítia Hernández (1997); Nicolopolus (1997); Astorga (1997; 2005); Ramírez-Pimienta (1998; 2004; 2011); McDowell (2000); Valenzuela Arce castaneda(2002); Edberg (2004).

The enduring popularity of Cruz de Marihuana among Colombian fans could certainly be interpreted through these lenses.[15] Or, as remarked by the Colombian scholar I mentioned earlier and other observers, it could well be attributed to Alírio Castillo's shrewd branding of Mexican and Mexican-inspired corridos to local audiences. Yet the force of this corrido, enough to usher the advent of corridos prohibidos, greatly surpassed the popularity and staying power of other thematically similar corridos circulating Colombia around the same time. This, I propose, can only be understood by considering the compound effects of the lyrical, sonic, and performative aspects of Cruz de Marihuana, its relation to other songs popular among listeners at the time, and the horizons of expectations and circumstances within which listeners first received and then empowered this corrido, amplified by Alírio Castillo's commercial interventions.

Cantina Abierta Vol.1 in 1995 was the first commercial success of Alma Records, owning significantly to its biggest hit, La Cruz de Marihuana. The range of the corrido's appeal, however, was fully realized by Alírio Castillo when he set out on his first promotional tour of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1. Released in March 1997, the album reissued La Cruz de Marihuana on its first track. Castillo's first stop was in Neiva, in the Andean department of Huila, where he met with the director of the local radio station HJ Doble K, whom he knew personally. On the recommendation of the radio producer, Castillo decided to change his original itinerary, which would have largely kept him in Neiva and other Andean towns. Castillo's friend advised him to go right away to Florencia, in Caquetá, where he had heard of the excellent reception of his corridos, and

[15] One such approach is Carlos Valbuena's (2006).

visit the radio station Cristalina Stereo. Castillo flew into the Amazonian town the next morning and was given airtime to present the album during an interview at the station. To his surprise, as he was leaving, a small crowd awaited him outside:

> When I stepped out of the radio station there was this line of people waiting to buy the album! In all of my years in the music business nothing like this had ever happened to me, such immediate response. How awesome! (Castillo 2011).

When Castillo was contacted by Orlando León Restrepo for an interview for *El Tiempo*, he learned from the journalist that La Cruz de Marihuana had been one of the songs that animated the peasant protests that had taken place in the Amazonia the year before. The reporter told Castillo how he had been deeply impressed by hearing and seeing hundreds of campesinos marching and singing the corrido during the uprise in the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo, which he was covering for the newspaper.[16]

The Cocalero Movement

In the mid-1990s, Colombia rose to center stage in U.S. Latin American policy, when the United States took a much more aggressive turn on the "war on drugs."[17]Focused on eradicating drugs at their source, legislation authorizing military

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[16] Alírio Castillo told me this story with varying degrees of detail several times during interviews and casual conversations, and similar accounts appear in interviews he gave to journalists and other researchers. Castillo's own written version of the occurrence is registered in *Memórias de Don Alírio*, which is included as an appendix in *El Cartel de los Corridos Prohibidos*, the book by Carlos Valbuena that he published in 2006.

[17] Although the U.S.-led War on Drugs had been gaining strength since the years of the Reagan administration, observers note that its toughening since the 1990s can be attributed to a number of reasons. In the view of Robin Kirk (2003), Bill Clinton's campaign trail admission that he had experimented with marijuana "enticed some Republicans to portray him as a drug-addict dilettante" and led to general accusations that he was soft on drugs, which required a hard response such as Clinton's recommendation that Colombia militarized its police force (240). Other analysts stress that with the

involvement in anti-narcotics efforts escalated it into a foreign policy issue.[18] Despite the Colombian government's crackdown on the most powerful drug cartels, culminating in the 1993 killing of Medellín druglord Pablo Escobar, the United States began to openly refer to Colombia as a "narco-state" following a monumental scandal over then-president Ernesto Samper (1994-1998), accused of having received large campaign donations from drug traffickers (Tickner 2010). These pressures escalated with the "decertification" of the Colombian government in 1996 and again in 1997, a measure imposed by the U.S. State Department to show disapproval of the Samper administration's poor performance in the combat against drugs.[19] Far from being solely a symbolic gesture, decertification

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dissipation of the Cold War since the late 1980s, new rationales for U.S. military interventionism previously casted as necessary to fight communism were necessary, hence combating drugs and "narcoterrorism" filled this "ideological void," in the words of Jorge Castañeda, a scholar of U.S.-Latin American relations and former Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs (1990). Many have pointed out that as "the focus of the anti-drug war progressively overlapped with guerrilla-controlled areas – although Colombian and U.S. officials agreed that guerrillas were not the country's main cocaine traffickers … the war on drugs essentially [turned into] a counterinsurgency program intended to defeat the guerrillas" (Molano, Alfredo. 2005:35). For more on this discussion see Tokatlian 2000; Thoumi 2003. Still other observers note the strategic position of Colombia in Latin America, greatly justifying U.S interest in securing the region from a geographical and economic perspective through interventionist policies and military presence in Colombia, which progressed steadily into the 2000s (see Pécaut 2000; Richani 2002; Escobar 2004; Tickner 2010; Ramírez 2011).

[18] The National Security Decision Directive 221, signed by then-president Ronald Reagan on April of 1986, included drug trafficking as a matter of national security and authorized the use of military force in anti-narcotics initiatives (Bowden 2002:55).

[19] Passed in 1986, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was another measure that coerced compliance to the United State's interventionist policies, as it established a drug certification process that linked a country's level of cooperation with eligibility to receive financial and military aid (Crandall 2002:34).

ensued the cancellation of several millions of dollars in financial assistance and major cuts in foreign investments.[20]

In response to the pressures from the U.S. and the disrepute it confronted internally, President Samper's administration toughened its position against drug trafficking, primarily targeting major areas of illicit drug cultivation and processing. Two major moves made by his administration involved limiting the sales of cement and gasoline, both needed to process coca paste, and intensifying aerial fumigation in the Amazonia region and the llanos. The first measure further isolated the already marginal region from adequate transportation, and the second affected coca and poppy plantations as much as other crops, pastures, and human health. The indiscriminate fumigation program set off an uprising among *cocaleros* (small coca producers and harvest workers) in the departments of Putumayo, Caquetá, and Guaviare, which soon spread to regions of Cauca and Meta, who demanded public investments in health, education, infrastructure, and agriculture projects that could substitute the illicit cultivation economy.

Campesinos Cocaleros – Space, Place, Identity

In her thoroughly documented ethnography of the protests in the Putumayo, anthropologist Clemencia Ramírez (2005; 2011) demonstrated how the region and the local populations had systematically been construed as marginal and uncivilized in

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[20] Decertification resulted in "the cancellation or delay of US$35 million in counter-narcotics assistance to Colombia, a suspension of trade preferences for Colombian exports, an automatic veto by the United States of Colombian requests for funding from international financial institutions, and a hold on guarantees for U.S. investments in the country" (Ramírez 2011:1).

opposition to the centers of economic and political power in the Andean highlands of Colombia. The central government and the ruling economic elite traditionally classified the Amazonia as a *baldío* (legally vacant, unowned land), implicitly negating the existence of those living there and designating the area as a receptacle for people displaced from other parts of the country. The economic development in the Amazonía, based primarily on a cycle of commodity booms (rubber, gold, oil, and most recently coca) and no investment on infrastructure for existing communities, contributed to further the image of local *colonos* (rural workers with no property) as a contingent population that comes and goes with each cycle. Ramírez (2011) pointed out how "this construction represents the culture and identity of the migrant population as a cipher: non-native and present in the Amazonía only to extract wealth" (23).

Composed mainly by Andean migrants displaced by violence and poverty during several waves of social, political and economic turmoil, the local communities historically lacked attention from the government. The minimal government involvement in the Amazonia consisted of establishing basic services to colonos only in or close to town centers, while the remaining areas continued to lack essential services such as water, electricity, health, education, and roads. The few programs instituted by the state ultimately benefitted large landowners and corporations with interests in the area, which resulted in the widespread expulsion and loss of land for colonos who had managed to secure any small plots of land (Ramírez 2011). This loss and abandonment, as documented by sociologist Alfredo Molano's (1988) extensive fieldwork in the area, is experienced by campesinos as an injustice and as institutionalized violence, a growing sense of resentment. These feelings thus result from a historical "politics of

disparagement" towards the Amazonia and its populations, to use the words of sociologist Henry Salgado Ruíz (2009).

When drug cartels came into the Amazonía in the late 1970s, attracted by a suitable climate and limited state presence, coca farming provided an economic way out for campesinos and became a main source of income in the region. In the views of campesinos, growing coca to maintain a family does not make them criminals. Coca is viewed as one more crop like any other, but unlike planting potatoes or rice, harvesting coca provides a means of support for colonos that the other crops don't, as explained by a peasant leader in Putumayo:

> Most people are involved with coca because they don't see any solution to the social problem that is unemployment. Some people are involved with coca even though they don't really want to be […] contraband is illegal material but at the core the problem is unemployment, that's the social problem (quoted in Ramírez 2011:32-33).

Already a historical presence in the region, the FARC guerrilla increased its numbers in the area as coca cultivation became widespread. Although later it developed other interests, in the mid-1990s the FARC served to impose its own rules and law enforcement within the drug economy: regulating the work conditions for colonos in the plantations, charging taxes from large coca farmers in the same way it did from other land owners, and enforcing a monopoly on firearms. As the presence and involvement of the guerrillas grew with the increase of coca cultivation, the Western Amazonía came to be represented by Colombian authorities as a lawless place inhabited by criminals (Ramírez 2005; 2011; Salgado 2009; Rodríguez 2011).

Government officials including politicians, police, and the military conflated long-standing images of the region as marginal and uncivilized with new rhetoric like

“the law of the jungle” and “barbarism” to justify the ongoing violence while employing drastic measures such as the use of military force and fumigation to combat it (Ramírez 2011: 24). According to the military’s portrayal of the Amazonia in the 1990s, the guerrilla and the drug traffickers exerted total control over the population, a narrative that stripped local residents and communities of political and social relevance and implied their willingness to participate in criminal activities. This served to justify their mission of rescuing the region from the hands of the *narcoguerrilas*, a term that came into common usage at the time. This narrative also justified the arrival of a large number of paramilitary units into the region, which targeted guerrillas as well as anyone deemed to be their supporters, which unleashed a violent “dirty war” that military officials either pretended to ignore or tacitly supported. In this way, the Colombian center of political and economic power sought to respond to its problems without acknowledging the existing structural economic, social, and political problems in the Amazonia.

When the aerial fumigations and militarized repression began to intensify in the Amazonía in 1994, peasant organizations organized around demands for better solutions to address the causes of the problem, rooted in state negligence and social injustice. Moreover, the protesters demanded recognition of campesinos cocaleros as citizens rather than as delinquents and guerrilla collaborators.

These contrasting constructions of the Amazonía and its inhabitants have become, in the words of Clemencia Ramírez (2011), a “shared metanarrative” in which:

> The state fails to fulfill its *paternal* responsibility to provide for the people’s welfare. This results in poverty and a consequent dependence on illegal crops. It denies them citizenship and thus excludes them from the region’s future. Even worse, it leaves them alone to confront the armed conflict which its absence has promoted. For their part, national and regional government representatives assert

> that working with coca promotes a "narco mentality" characterized by individualism and a desire for easy money, that it corrupts social values and undermines the social fabric. This is a stereotyped view of the people in coca producing areas as violent, rootless fortune seekers who act outside the law in accordance whether with their own perverse set of rules, or with those enforced by the non-state armed actors present in the region (34).

The cultural and political construction of place often conflates their identities with those of their inhabitants, and thus the construction of marginal places involves "the process in which people are marginalized as their perspectives are cast to the side or excluded," as noted by Anna Tsing (1993: 5). Yet, it is also "about the ways in which people actively engage their marginality by protesting, reinterpreting, and embellishing their exclusion" (ibid). In this regard, Tim Cresswell (1996) has also discussed in length how the making of space and place as a means of imposing social ordering "simultaneously [makes] it a site of meaningful resistance" (163), which the cocalero movement well exemplifies.

Marchas Cocaleras, 1996 – A Critical Event

The cocalero movement grew in the Amazonia as several appeals were made by local civic peasant organizations demanding to be taken into account in finding solutions to substitute the coca economy in ways that improved the lives of residents. The continued indifference that met the requests led to a major event. One week after a strike of Operación Conquista, a major fumigation operation led by the police and the national army in Caquetá in July 1996, thousands of coca farmers began to mobilize. Between July and September that year, "more than 200,000 campesinos, including women, children, and indigenous people, marched from their farms to the nearest towns and

department capitals to protest the heightened threat to their livelihood" (Ramírez 2011:1).[21]

The marches of 1996 brought a climax to a string of protests taking place since the early 1990s and represented an important turning point in the peasant struggle. As shown by Clemencia Ramírez, the peasants sought not only to protest the fumigation, but to affirm themselves as independent political actors rather than "guerrilla auxiliaries and criminals" as they were persistently presented by the media, the government, and the military (2011; 2005:57). During the three-month-long marches, they clamored for recognition of their rights as Colombian citizens, including state-led economic and social development instead of fumigation and repressive measures.

Ramírez (2011) characterized the cocalero social movement as a "critical event," a term borrowed from Indian anthropologist Veena Das (1996) who defined it as "an event par excellence because it instituted a new modality of historical action which was not inscribed in the inventory of that situation" (5). The Amazonia peasant movement, infused by feelings of righteous anger, gave rise to new types of demands and to a new collective consciousness. It brought about new modes of action that redefined the campesino cocalero as a new political actor and as an individual with the "right to have rights" (Arendt 1973; Butler and Spivak 2007). Moreover, in Veena Das' conception, analyzing crucial events is meant to address precisely the articulation between the forces

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[21] The peasant mobilization ended in September of 1996 with a series of agreements between a government delegation and coca farmers, after 47 demonstrations, many deaths and over 70 wounded in clashes with police and military forces (Arcilla Niño et al. 2000:26).

of social processes and the subjectivities of experiencing, feeling individuals in instances of ordinary life.

Structures of Feeling

The concept of critical event resonates with Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of structures of feeling, in which changes in social and political conjunctures fuel emergent modes of thinking and feeling that give rise to new cultural forms. In this sense, both the concepts of critical event and structures of feeling call attention to the inextricable ties between social, political, and economic processes and the materiality of individual everyday lives, and between the realms of thinking, acting, and feeling.

These ideas are particularly useful for my analysis of the emergence of corridos prohibidos in relation to the cocalero movement, especially considering how Raymond Williams relates them to emergent creative practices. Importantly, for Williams, changes in cultural forms are not necessarily a consequence of broader social transformations. Although not using the term dialogical, he emphasizes the multidirectional relationship between the social, the cultural, and the individual, proposing that a cultural innovation "is a true and integral element of the [social] changes themselves: an articulation, by technical discovery, of changes in consciousness which are themselves forms of consciousness of change" (1981:142). From this perspective, cultural innovation is at the juncture of structure and agency, and is the material articulation of social change.

Also, Williams stresses the importance of articulating how meanings and feelings are not separate forms of experiencing and are historically, politically, and socially

situated. The notion of structures of feeling as described by Williams is "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (131):

> For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period […] We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought; practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity (131-132).

The concept of structures of feeling refers to nascent, emergent ways in which people begin to think and feel in novel ways that might not yet be clearly delineated, which Williams outlines as "experiences in solution" (1977:133). Yet Williams also noted that emergent creative formations don't appear in a vacuum, but draw from existing residual forms, an idea evoked in Hans Jauss's proposal that recipients perceive new genres within horizons of expectations, which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Those provide the "rules of the game" according to which new texts (songs in this case) are understood by listeners as belonging to familiar formations but also posing new possibilities and even changes to the horizon that reveal "newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness" that make them valued (Jauss 1982: 25).

The idea for Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1 was catalyzed by the popularity of one corrido, Cruz de Marijuana. In turn, the album fueled the growth of a new musical formation that was already "in solution," and channeled the sentiments that animated the cocalero movement and its culmination in the marches of 1996. In the next sections, I briefly outline the musical engagements that rose during the marches and analyze the reception of Cruz de Marijuana, considering its sonic and affective dimensions in relation to listeners' horizons of expectation and the emergent structures of feeling.

Sounding the Movement

As noted by first hand observers, during the cocalero movement the protesters sang songs while marching or settling in campsites along the way. Some were freshly composed verses that registered the uprising and the sentiments that animated them. Making use of octosyllabic verses in four lines, some of them followed a centuries-old formula circulated widely in the verses of romances, versos, coplas, decimas, corridos llaneros, rancheras, corridos norteños, and vallenato. Not unlike the body of revolutionary corridos composed in the midst of the liberal uprising in the llanos in the 1950s,[22] these coplas voiced dissent and indignation:

Quisieramos que Samper	We wish that Samper
se fuera a los infiernos	went to hell
con toda su fumiga	with all of his fumigation
para no volverlo a ver	so we wouldn't see him again
	(Rodríguez 2008:15)

Drawing from her ethnographic study of the peasant marches in Caquetá, media scholar Clemencia Rodríguez (2008) documented the musical activities of protesters as they went through the town of Belén de los Andaquíes. There, an outdoor stage, *La Tarima del Sol*, was set up for eight days to provide a space for people to share songs and recite coplas like the one above as they rested on their way to Florencia, the departmental capital. As registered by Rodríguez, the following copla became one of the anthems of the demonstration, composed by a campesino from the small vereda of Fraguita who incited the marchers to sing:

Se levantaron en marcha	They rose to march
Los campesinos contra el gobierno	the peasants against the government

[22] See Chapter 1

Protestan por la fumiga	protesting the fumigation
Que acabará con nosotros	that will be our end (ibid)

Although some of the lyrics were directly political like the ones outlined above, not all of the songs were explicitly about the cocalero struggle. Some songs that were popular at the time, played in the local cantinas' jukeboxes, were also part of the demonstrators' repertoire. In the mid-1990s, salsa and pop styles of vallenato had become widely popular across Colombia; however, in the Western Amazonian departments of Caquetá, Putumayo, and Guaviare, rancheras and corridos under the labels of música de carrilera, música popular, and música de despecho were preferred listening songs, as demonstrated by radio programming and by the accounts of residents at the time (Kirk 2003; Salgado Ruíz 2009; Rodríguez 2011). According to Orlando Restrepo, a reporter covering the cocalero marches for the newspaper *El Tiempo*, the sight of hundreds of campesinos singing Cruz de Marihuana struck him to the point that one year later when Alírio Castillo began his marketing campaign of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1 he was one of the first journalists to reach out to him for an interview.

Cruz de Marijuana – Horizons of Expectation

J.P., who was a taxi driver in Villavicencio when I met him and had been a *raspachín* (coca leave harvester) in Caquetá for a few years, remembered life in the Amazonía and the cocalero movement well:

> It was very hard work and dangerous because you never knew when and where the gunfire would start, but at least we had more money than we ever had. I was able to help my mother and my siblings and I saved enough to buy this taxi. One went to the cantina to drink and listen to music, and to sing if one was despechado after having had a few drinks" … "*Nadie Es Eterno En El Mundo* by Darío Gómez, *Cruz de Madera*, those were big hits at that time with the people there. But *Cruz de Marijuana*, ah, those corridos one would sing when one was

> *emberracado* … I remember people sang it on the street during the protest. People were *emberracada*! Every time the fumigation stroke people were indignant! (personal communication)[23]

Being *despechado* and *emberracado* in Colombian vernacular refers to strong feelings. The first can be translated as spiteful or resentful, and is commonly associated with a deep feeling of being wronged, betrayed or abandoned by a lover. *Emberracado* can be angry or mad, and can carry a sense of resentment and indignation that might propel one to action. *Despechado* and *emberracado* can thus be conceived as related emotions, socially recognized and subject to being enacted, with the former being more specifically incited by a romantic deception. Maribella, a singer based in Villavicencio who sang in one of the albums of Corridos Prohibidos, made a remark similar to J.P.'s when I asked her how she selects songs when performing live:

> I prefer to sing songs about love most of the time; rancheras, despecho, the type of songs that one sings with the soul and the heart [making a fist with her right hand and bringing it to her chest]. I don't sing too many corridos. One sings corridos when one is *emberracada* [brandishing her fist in front of her chest], and sings them with a louder voice and a harder pose! (personal communication)[24]

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[23] J.P. Personal communication. Villavicencio, Meta. 10/18/2012. The informant chose not to be identified by name.

[24] Maribella. Personal communication. Acacías, Meta. 8/4/2011. Maribella is the artistic name that the informant chose to be referred to as in this study. When I asked Maribella what were her reasons to be *emberracada*, instead of giving a straight answer, she told a poignant personal story about having escaped when still a child with her mother from their *vereda* when it was occupied by paramilitaries, and arriving to Villavicencio with nothing but what they were able to carry on their backs. As a teenager, she began to sing with a mariachi group and later had an abusive husband whom she had to escape from with their two children. Maribella then had a long-term relationship with a married man involved in the drug business who supported her career as a singer. After he was killed with seven bullets right next to her in a tienda in Villavicencio his widow stripped her of all of her possessions and threatened to kill her. Maribella's was one of many disheartening personal stories that musicians, fans, and other Colombian citizens shared with me and helped me better understand the terrors of living through the many forms of violence they encountered, and the feelings of *despecho*, *emberracamiento*, and

Grouping corridos prohibidos, rancheras, and canciones de despecho together based on shared spaces of sociability, and attributing to them different although related and similarly intense kinds of emotional force, J.P. and Maribella thus mapped their horizons of expectations by taking into account the practices and affective meanings they saw as associated with those musical repertoires, rather than only formal and structural similarities.

A large repertoire of canciones de despecho exists, encompassing new compositions as well as older songs previously labeled música de carrilera, música guasca, música guascarrilera, and música popular more generally. As noted by Colombian musicologist Egberto Bermúdez (2007), these labels created by the Medellín music industry and radio diffusion since the 1950s have gone through multiple processes of juxtaposition and redefinition ever since (63). They certainly share formal features, but also performance and listening contexts, with música norteña and corridos prohibidos: Mexican tinges, dramatic content, rural and urban working class associations, cantinas, jukeboxes, rural outdoor festivals, and, I will argue, a particular spectrum of "sonic sensibilities" (Feld 1996: 99; Qureshi 2000: 810) as can be surmised from J.P.'s and Maribella's emotive sonic experiences as narrated above.[25]

"*dolor de patria*," (pain for the nation) a term used by Norberto Riveros to explain the mood that compels him to write corridos.

[25] The tenuous boundaries between these interrelated musical spheres are patent in the stated influences and repertoires of the first Colombian norteño groups active at the time and in the musical mixture typical of the groups of música de carrilera and música norteña who influenced them, which was discussed in length in Chapters 3 and 4. For example, the most popular act of música de carrilera ever, Las Hermanas Calle, recorded a well-circulated version of the Mexican contraband corrido La Banda del Carro Rojo in

The two songs J.P. mentioned in conjunction with Cruz de Marijuana in recalling the peasant protests in Caquetá were widely popular in the Andean highlands and Villavicencio in the early 1990s. His comment provides a good example of the interrelation between música de despecho and the emergent Colombian música norteña in the perception of listeners as part of the same "genre worlds" (Frith 1996). It also attests to how these musical tastes permeated the soundscapes of the Western Amazonia, where most of the residents had migrated from the rural Andes into the region through successive waves of voluntary or forced displacement (Ramírez 2005; 2011; Salgado Ruíz 2009; Rodríguez 2011). Nadie Es Eterno en el Mundo (No One Is Eternal in the World) is the most popular song composed and recorded by Darío Gómez, known as *El Rey del Despecho*, whose success in the 1990s refashioned the older música de carrilera with the use of electric guitar and solo male vocal in place of the duet singing style. Cruz de Madera (The Wooden Cross) was recorded by the Mexican norteño group Chuy Luviano y Los Rayos, whose corridos, instrumentation, and attire provided a foundational model for the first Colombian norteño groups, as this corrido had become a sort of anthem in the emerald region of Western Boyacá in the early 1990s (lyrics in Appendix).[26]

Compared with the other two songs, Cruz de Marijuana introduced a sense of novelty that can partially explain its popularity, which included the sound of the Mexican

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the mid-80s and saw their popularity soar upon the release of the biggest hit of their career, La Cuchilla, an emblem of música de despecho par excellence (see Chapter 2).

[26] See Chapters 2 and 3.

norteño ensemble, then just beginning to be popularized through cassettes and live performances of groups from Villavicencio, the figure of the *narcotraficante* as the first person narrator, and the rough vocal timbre and sardonic tone in Grupo Exterminador's recording of the corrido (see lyrics in Appendix).

Joseph Quintero, who at the time had a norteño group in Villavicencio called Los Huracanes, told me once during a conversation that he really disliked Cruz de Marijuana when he first heard it and the group decided to incorporate it into their repertoire. Quintero didn't like that the corrido was sung from the perspective of the narcotrafficker and with a mocking tone, and compared it to Cruz de Madera, which the group also performed live:

> I thought *Cruz de Marijuana* was horrible; what was *that*? 'I'm a narcotrafficker, build me a marijuana cross?' No, no, no… I was the lead singer and I didn't like to sing that. And with that tone! [making an expression of disgust]. I like to sing songs that touch people, love songs, sad songs too. For example, I also used to sing *Cruz de Madera*, which was one of the songs that our public liked a lot when *Cruz de Marijuana* came along, and I always liked it even if it is also about building the guy a cross. But when one saw how much people loved that Cruz de Marijuana I started to like it too, because one could see how much this song really touched the people too. Going into those *pueblitos* in the jungle, those *pueblos cocaleros*; because of the drug bonanza there was always someone that could pay to take a group from Villavicencio up there; that was incredible to see, the whole pueblo come and sit down in front of us to hear us, elderly people, even children carrying arms and machetes, what a horrific scene. And the guerrilla keeping order; or sometimes they were not there and one knew it was even more dangerous. This was horrific and depressing, and the music gave people a moment of joy. And then I started to like *Cruz de Marijuana*. And nowadays I really enjoy singing it, it seems very cool to me (Quintero 2012).

The outstanding reception of Cruz de Marijuana given its multiple layers of violence may also be explained by the ways in which it evoked familiar themes and summoned for listeners the affective associations of similar songs of resentful fatalism,

so present within the genre world of Colombian carrilera and canciones de despecho.[27] Cruz de Marijuana fit into an archetype of nihilistic funerary songs that were popular in the Colombian Amazonia at the time. Conveying a fatalistic view of life, these songs were and still are commonly played for funerals as well as in other live performances.[28] The contemplation of one's own death is not an uncommon plot in Mexican música norteña and its earlier Colombian adaptations; however, the frequency with which this theme appeared as corridos prohibidos emerged is noteworthy, especially considering the level of popularity reached by Nadie Es Eterno en el Mundo, Cruz de Madera, and Cruz de Marijuana. Also very popular at the time was Cruz de Palo, whose recorded version by the Mexican singer Juan Valentín was distributed in Colombia in the 1990s labeled as *música guasca*, and also covered by a number of Colombian interpreters of música de despecho and música popular.

Musical producer Alírio Castillo was keenly aware of the potential appeal of a song like Cruz de Marijuana when he first released it in Colombia in his first compilation album Cantina Abierta, knowing well the tastes and listening habits of his target audience. Before coming across the Mexican corrido during the final stages of preparing Cantina Abierta, for example, he had already included in the album another similar corrido composed by his friend Alesio Espítia, also a music producer and owner of the

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[27] See Chapter 2.

[28] During my time of fieldwork in 2011-12 it was not uncommon for someone in the audience – usually middle-aged men – to ask to come on stage and sing one of these songs accompanied by the band, usually with gestural and vocal displays of emotional intensity.

independent label Discos El Dorado: “Cruz de Cemento” (The Cement Cross), which also became quite popular with fans of música popular (see lyrics in Appendix).

> El dia que me miren muerto/ que no me llore la gente
> Que me rezen en el temple / misa de cuerpo presente
> Por la musica de banda/ despidan de mis dolientes
>
> En una cruz de cemento/ encontraran mi memoria
> Veran mi nombre complete/ edad y fecha mortoria
> Me rezan un padre nuestro/ para llegar a la Gloria
>
> The day I’m dead/ T don’t want people to cy
> Pray for me in a temple/ in a funeral mass
> With band music/ say goodbye to my pains
>
> On a cement cross/ my memory will be found
> They’ll see my complete name/ age and date of death
> Pray for me Our Father/ so I can get to glory

Not only do the lyrics of these corridos feature similar themes and formal patterns, but their melodic contours and harmonic progressions are also strikingly similar (see transcriptions in Appendix). This points to the importance of the sonic features of La Cruz de Marijuana in mediating its reception among listeners as much as the messages conveyed in the lyrics, as they all fit right along the recipients’ horizons of expectations.[29] Cruz de Marijuana became popular among listeners who were familiar with conventions that could readily be identified in its musical sounds and lyrics. Importantly, the corrido

[29] The practice of putting new lyrics onto familiar songs has been a common feature in the circulation of corridos in Mexico and Colombia, which can be understood within a continuum of common procedures in the centuries’ old corrido and cordel traditions of the Iberian peninsula and its colonial extensions. Although under the logics of the contemporary transnational music recording business the production, distribution, and authorship of music is regulated in vastly different ways, adapting formulaic tunes to new lyrics has continued to be a stylistic feature in música norteña and corridos in particular, and a practice widely adopted in música de carrilera in Colombia as well.

was part of the same repertories and participated in some of the same types of socialities of other similar songs, such as the environment of the cantina, which implicated it in potentially larger connotative fields.

Understanding the pull of *La Cruz de Marihuana* as partly deriving from the familiarity it evoked for recipients underlines how songs can display a cumulative function, in which they are not only associated with previously known sounds and formal structures, but also with habits of listening and feeling that become attached to musical forms.[30] The recognizable shapes of verses, melody lines and harmonic structures resonate with the memories of listeners, evoking not only a genre world and other familiar songs but the accumulation of emotions and experiences that have become attached to them. Following Charles Pierce's theory of semiotics, Thomas Turino (1999; 2008) refers to this process as "semantic snowballing," proposing that music often functions as a sign that stands for something and creates an effect on the observer (the index). Turino observes that indices may take on multiple meanings that derive from various associations collected over time, a process that creates "ambiguity as well as affective potential," calling forth "densely layered meanings" experienced as feelings (2008:175). The initial reception of Cruz de Marijuana in the Amazonía was thus

[30] In her study of fado in Lisbon (2013), Lila Ellen Gray refers to the capacity of genres and songs to act "as an object around which affects, histories, life worlds, and social practices coalesce" (9). She draws from Sara Ahmed's concept of "stickiness" (2004), which stresses that emotions are social and circulate as they attach to objects that become "sticky" and "saturated with affect" (11).

refracted by the recipients' shared histories, sociopolitical circumstances, habits of listening and modes of feeling.

As argued previously, Cruz de Marijuana had a more aggressive stance than other similar corridos that were well known and popular with fans at the time, which is corroborated by its use during the peasant marches in the cocalero movement. As described by J.P., a raspachin in the Caquetá at the time, the fumigations carried out in the Amazonia instigated common feelings of indignation among campesinos, and the corrido was sung by people on the streets and during the marches. In this light, Cruz de Marijuana can be understood as a song that could readily afford provided campesinos cocaleros a mode of mediation an outlet for deep feelings of anger and disappointment in face of the unworthiness with which disdain the authorities had for their lives were regarded by the ones to whom they pleaded. Rather than the concept that Cruz de Marijuana is a cynical display of an "aesthetic of extravagance" that serves for the "construction of the imaginary of the drug dealer and of those who belong or want to belong to the business" as proposed by a Colombian historian (González 2007:47), during the peasant uprising in the Amazonia, the corrido was a song of lament and defiance against injustices.

Agreeing with Robert Walser's (1993) idea that song lyrics are important inasmuch as they are viewed as elements of larger sets of "communicative practices that go 'beyond the vocals' into the realm of oral tradition and performativity," Bob White (2008) devised a systematic approach to the analysis of song lyrics in the emergent genre of rumba in Zaire. Outlining semantic transformations in the uses of words and phrases

that occurred in a number of songs over time, White focused on revealing "how language is used in particular historical moments to mobilize power and sentiment" (167).

Similarly to White, my analysis of Cruz de Marijuana was set within a continuum of musical forms and songs and grounded in a particular historical moment. However, I took Walser's suggestion in another direction, emphasizing the sonic and affective as well as the performative dimensions of the corridos' reception and use, treating the experiences of listeners and musicians equally. My view thus aligns with Regula Qureshi's call for attention to the "sonority of words and music," as providing a crucial dimension to "sensing musical meanings" (2000: 830).[31] As discussed, the lyrics as well as the structure and sonic features of several songs in the genre within which Cruz de Marijuana emerged in the Colombian context evoked emotive connotations for dedicated listeners, both familiar and new. While it cannot be transcribed, the mocking, rough vocal timbre employed in Cruz de Marijuana and other corridos prohibidos articulated the mood that emerged in the context of the cocalero movement, and is intrinsic to their performative force.

Furthermore, particularly considering the conditions of people living under violence, the importance of using language and voice in this case goes beyond the lyrical message, to allow for "the subject to be projected outwards" (Das and Kleinman

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[31] Emphasizing the usefulness of an anthropology of embodiment and the senses for musical analysis, Regula Qureshi stressed that "sounded words are an integral part of the sensorium, although Western scholarship finds it easy to exclude them from the acoustic realm in the entrenched spirit of print culture and linguistic metasignification," (2000: 830). A number of music scholars emphasizing a "sound oriented" perspective have made similar arguments (see Feld 1996; Sterne 2003; Ochoa-Gautier 2013; Daughtry 2012; 2014).

2001:22). In her 2012 article "Multiple Voices," Adriana Cavarero (2012) made a similar point as she cited the writings of Italo Calvino (1988): "A voice means this: there is a living person, throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voices." Although I apply Cavarero's proposition to a collectivity while her focus was on the uniqueness of individuals, I share her view of the materiality of the voice as an important dimension in analyzing discourse and the politics of speech.

As Hans R. Jauss (2000) proposed, genres develop and function within various "life worlds" and transform in tandem with the cultural and historic climate, which pushes the boundaries of recipients' horizons of expectations and leads to the acceptance and popularity of new genres. While Nadie Es Eterno en el Mundo, Cruz de Madera, Cruz de Palo and Cruz de Cemento continued to be classified using existing labels – música de carrilera, música guasca, música de despecho, música popular – Cruz de Marijuana catalyzed the advent of corridos prohibidos and became an archetype for this new category in Colombia.

The Anthem of the Raspachines

Upon the release of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1 and Alírio Castillo's initial promotional tour, most of the corridos on the album became very popular among an incipient fan base. Only a few months into his marketing campaign, Castillo was again reminded of the force they had gained in the Amazonía. In the wake of the attention campesinos cocaleros generated in the media since the peasant marches, *El Corrido del Cocalero* (lyrics in Appendix), one of the album's original compositions, made the headline of an article featured in the newspaper *El Tiempo* in June 1997:

> ‘The Anthem of the Raspachines’ (El Himno de los Raspachines)
>
> The reality of the *raspachines* and day workers of the *cocinas* (drug laboratories), in their majority excluded and displaced from other regions of the country, originated in the last years popular codes that now are written by anonymous minstrels. For the last two months a musical theme that talks about the clandestine work of the *raspachin* is repeated vehemently in the sound systems, local radio stations, and brothels of the riverside villages of Bajo and Medio Caguán.
>
> El Corrido del Cocalero, composed by the Colombian Uriel Henao, arrived in the form of compact disc, side by side with the floating population, through the trails, the jungles and the rivers of this extensive zone of Colombia. The musical theme, composed in the wake of the marches of the cocaleros in Caquetea and Putumayo, interprets de anguishes and hopes of these populations in which the inhabitants don’t know any law other than that of sowing or scraping the coca leave with their own hands, to be able to survive.
>
> Corridos Prohibidos has sold so far 6,000 copies, a high number for this kind of music. But we think that the pirated versions have sold more than 40,000 copies. The theme plays in 800 radio stations of Colombian pueblos. Castillo agrees that the songs interpret antivalues, but has the opinion that these are also present in this society. [32]

Uriel Henao composed “El Corrido del Cocalero” inspired by one of his own brothers’ experience *raspando* (picking) coca in the Caquetá. According to Alírio Castillo, this corrido had a spectacular reception in the Amazonía and propelled the initial sales of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1 along with Cruz de Marijuana. At the time of my fieldwork it was still one of the most requested songs at Henao’s live shows. Another of his compositions from the album became an enduring hit, La Kenworth Plateada (The Silver Kenworth Truck), which Uriel Henao had previously recorded in an independent production in 1993 that had gained local popularity in the regions of the emerald mines

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[32] León Restrepo, Orlando. “El Himno de los Raspachines” *El Tiempo.* June 8th 1997.

Accessed at http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-585201

and the Magdalena Medio.[33] By the time Alírio Castillo released the second CD of the series Corridos Prohibidos in 1998, Henao was already being referred to as the "king of corridos prohibidos." Featuring characters of the Colombian war common to his personal experiences and those of his listeners, Henao's songs created an intense current of empathy between him and his fans, a topic that will be addressed further in my final chapter.

"You won't hear them on the radio" – The Political Economy of Musical Circulation

Initial sales of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1 surpassed Alírio Castillo's expectations; in five months he had distributed it in most of Colombia and sold 5,000 copies.[34] For this reason he accepted an offer for a TV promotion from a previous colleague and invested nearly $100,000 in a marketing campaign. His main targets were Cruz de Marijuana, El Corrido del Cocalero, and La Kenworth Plateada, which yielded excellent results. Three

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[33] See Chapter 3.

[34] The promotion of Corridos Prohibidos was done mostly through small towns and their local radio stations that Castillo or one of his assistants visited in person, in addition to placing the albums in (mostly independent) record stores. A main channel of dissemination for Corridos Prohibidos, not differently than música de carrilera in its early days, were the jukeboxes in local cantinas whose owners became some of Alírio Castillo's main clients. The distribution targeted mainly the Andean departments, the Amazonia, Meta, and Cauca. In Bogotá as well as other capitals, the main radio chains and large TV channels did not support Castillo's campaign, with the exception of a few programs in radio channels such as *La Cariñosa*, a branch of the national chain Caracol that is dedicated to música popular.

months later album sales had surpassed 25,000 copies, earning it a gold record award,[35] which Castillo celebrated in an upscale nightclub in Bogotá with the album's musicians.[36]

Before the release of Corridos Prohibidos Vol. 2, Castillo's TV promotion was suspended by the channel's administration, and most mainstream radio stations in Bogotá refused to play corridos prohibidos. Although this was not a case of official censorship, corridos prohibidos have been barred from traditional media ever since, a topic I will address in more detail later in this chapter. Some fans and musicians that recorded in the series attribute the self-censorship of radio programmers to the fact that "corridos prohibidos say the truths that are disturbing to Colombian society," as reasoned by a fan. Some critics of corridos prohibidos I met are convinced that they don't play on the radio or TV because they are too vulgar and crude, while others just consider them too "non-Colombian" to be taken into consideration.

The unofficial censorship gave Alírio Castillo a powerful hook for his sales campaign, as he took advantage of the "power of attraction of everything that is forbidden," as he put it. Castillo launched a new marketing strategy with the slogan "Buy them, because you won't hear them on the radio," and renewed his focus on audiences

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[35] The gold record award was first instituted by the American RIAA, and presently in the U.S. it is awarded for sales above 50.000. The number of records sold to qualify for the award varies by country. In Colombia in 1997 it was 25.000 and it has since gone down to 10.000.

[36] Corrido Prohibidos Vol.1 sold 200.000 copies. Castillo did not pay the musicians for the sales, as his initial deal only included the distribution of the album and promotion for the groups. Some of the tracks, such as Uriel Henao's La Kenworth Plateada, had already been previously recorded, thus incurring in no production costs for Castillo. This is one of the reasons why many of the artists, including Uriel Henao, stopped participating in the series Corridos Prohibidos after some time.

among campesinos, in the urban peripheries, rural towns, and small local radio stations. The banning of corridos prohibidos from the mainstream public view didn't prevent the commercial success of the second and third albums in the series, or the popularity of new corridos among fans.

Producing Corridos Prohibidos

Alírio Castillo collected new corridos for his productions in various ways. Some came to him, whether directly via their composers or anonymously, as in the case of *La Rondonera*, a corrido composed by a FARC commander. On a few occasions he announced in local radio stations in different towns that he was selecting corridos for a new recording. Many of the corridos in the series, however, were commissioned by Castillo, who asked songwriters to write about a topic he had in mind. He often wanted these corridos to be based on factual occurrences related to the conflict, the drug trafficking, or a political scandal. Castillo not only commissioned them, but also edited them at will before selecting a norteño group or putting one together to record the new song.

The way in which most corridos prohibidos were selected, crafted, produced, and distributed, thus, makes Carlos Valbuena's (2006) assertion that "Castillo opened a channel for the repressed expression of the sentiment of the people" (15) rather problematic. It is telling that the majority of the corridos manufactured by commission are not played live by grupos norteños, thus limiting tremendously their longevity and significance. The corridos prohibidos that have endured are those by musicians who already had a community of listeners, with whom they share spatial, sonic, affective, and

historical associations. These affective alliances infuse the songs with renewed energy every time they are performed live, thus building upon a web of cumulative experiences, associations, memories, and feelings shared among musicians and listeners as in the case of Uriel Henao, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Feeling the pulse – the musical producer as intermediary

Alírio Castillo's role in the rise and spread of corridos prohibidos is indisputable. The success of Corridos Prohibidos Vol.1, however, was contingent on the conditions of its reception, which I have strived to map out in this dissertation by establishing much larger networks and histories than those determined by the influence of 1990s Mexican narcocorridos and the tastes of drug lords sponsoring various strands of Colombian música norteña.

Exalting the role of Castillo in the creation of corridos prohibidos, Carlos Valbuena (2006) wrote that the producer knew how to "feel the pulse" of the people (*el pueblo*) and gave voice to their cries repressed by the Colombian centers of power (53). Although Valbuena's analysis fails to explain who 'the people' were and to contextualize the production and reception of corridos prohibidos, he makes a worthwhile point that fittingly describes Castillo's role and has been emphasized by popular music scholars. In his study of popular music producers, for example, Antoine Hennion (1989) highlighted the importance of thinking not only about the musical production (the musicians) and the musical reception (listeners) but also about the many layers of interaction between them to more deeply understand the emergence of popular music styles. In his view, the producer serves "not at the interface of two known worlds" but as "the one who

constructs these worlds by trying to bring them into relation" (406). Hennion used the term "intermediary" to refer to producers, an assertion later echoed by Keith Negus (1999; 2002), who argued that producers bridge the gap between musicians and listeners and play a key role in constructing the viability of music, which makes them important in both material and symbolic ways (2002: 506). The job of the music producer, stressed Hennion (1983) in an earlier article, requires empathy and intuition as much as any corporate structures or formulae. Using a similar expression to that of Carlos Valbuena (2006), Hennion argued that the music producer does not "manipulate the public so much as *feels its pulse*" (1983: 91; my emphasis). Castillo's involvement in building up the scene of corridos and música norteña, however, turned out to be controversial at best, which is addressed in the following section.

Commodifying Corridos Prohibidos

From the start, Alíro Castillo aimed to achieve the highest degree of commercialization for his series of compilation CDs labeled Corridos Prohibidos. As with other popular musics, musicians and producers involved with corridos prohibidos were (and are) mainly interested in recording new material, promoting themselves, building an audience, and placing musical products in a broader music marketplace: in other words, commodifying their music. Understanding commodity within the frame of Marxist theory to mean "something that can be turned to commercial advantage, bought and sold," Timothy Taylor (2007: 281) noted that in studies and discourse about popular music, the status of music as commodity is often taken for granted. Taylor proposed that music as a commodity has to be understood vis-à-vis specific historical, social, and

cultural forces, and that it has to *be* commodified. Understanding processes of commodification, thus, is crucial in the analysis of popular music genres, as the "music-commodity […] is utterly dependent on the circumstances surrounding its commodification, which are largely driven by its means of reproduction" (ibid). And, I would add, by its marketing, promotion, and support from existing cultural industries and institutions, or lack thereof, which is the topic of this section and the next.

Beginning with the choice of the name Corridos Prohibidos,[37] which he considered enticing because, as he said often, everything that is forbidden attracts, Castillo's marketing strategies were based on sensationalizing the already marginal status of corridos and música norteña. His CD covers, for example, featured "symbols of narcocultura," as he explained, including pictures of fancy sports cars and SUVs, gold bars, and beauty queens, mixed in together with marijuana leaves, men in camouflage, and machine guns.

Castillo also sought to reinforce this image by favoring corridos more closely modeled after Mexican so-called narcocorridos, which he commissioned for his compilations and marketed as a novelty to Colombian audiences. While the advent of the series provided one of the few commercial opportunities for Colombian grupos norteños and brought unprecedented attention to Colombian-made corridos and música norteña, Castillo's strategies also played a role in their stigmatization. Moreover, by including mostly corridos that followed very similar musical and textual formal structures – mostly

[37] Alírio Castillo inspiration in baptizing his CD series came from the homonymous 1989 album by Los Tigres del Norte.

binary polka-like rhythms and the core instrumentation of the norteño ensemble – Corridos Prohibidos also served to standardize Colombian música norteña. In a way, Colombian corridos and norteña, which until then had been more of a hybrid as they had emerged within the more mixed musical practices of música guasca and carrilera, became more "mexicanized" than ever before.

Conditions of possibility – logics of war and discourses of peace

While the series Corridos Prohibidos initially received considerable interest from the Colombian mainstream media, this attention was often sensationalistic and corridos were soon shunned from most major national radio and TV chains. The conflation of corridos prohibidos with cocaleros promoted by the media, their association with stories about emerald thugs, drug trafficking and war violence, and their alleged "cultural foreignness" made them unwelcome in the sphere of mainstream Colombian popular music. Also, their musical qualities evoked other genres that had long been associated with the lower class, intellectual inferiority, opportunistic commercialism, and vulgar emotional excess such as música guasca, carrilera, and música de despecho, which made corridos prohibidos unattractive to cultural elites and middle and upper class Colombians. A finer understanding of their marginal status, however, requires situating corridos prohibidos in relation to changes in the Colombian socio-political and economic climate that began to loom while they rose in popularity. As the drug economy fueled the growth of the FARC and of paramilitary groups, the war intensified and further hampered the

conditions of possibility for corridos prohibidos as a viable Colombian mainstream popular music in at least two ways, which I outline next.[38]

War and self-censorship

1997, the year corridos prohibidos were launched, was also the year the Colombian paramilitary fronts consolidated under a national coalition, the AUC (United Self-Defenses of Colombia), which contributed to the escalation of armed violence in rural and urban areas. For the next several years, paramilitary groups conducted "*limpiezas*" (cleansings) of entire towns under the banner of eliminating 'degenerates' and those deemed to be guerrilla sympathizers, and hundreds of massacres of civilians, peasant leaders, and politicians were perpetrated.[39] Concurrently, the FARC intensified its military actions, including kidnappings of civilians and attacks in urban areas.[40]

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[38] My employment of Foucault's (1993: xxii) notion of "conditions of possibility" follows Simon Frith's use of the term specifically in reference to the relationship between music and the music industry. Conditions of possibility are those that "allow work of the imagination to take an exchangeable form" (Jones 2014: 59). In other words, these are the conditions that allowed and/ or constrained the process of commodification of corridos prohibidos, which was the intent of the musicians involved and of Alírio Castillo.

[39]For a painstaking and daunting first-hand account of one such cleansing (the methodical elimination of people deemed to be immoral or accused to side with the guerrilla) in a Colombian town, see Michael Taussig's (2000*) Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*.

[40] In 1997, paramilitary organizations expanded their areas of control to about 300 Colombian municipalities. The total membership in insurgent groups rose by sixty percent throughout the 1990s and by the end of the decade the number of municipalities with a presence of the guerrillas had increased fivefold. The violence associated with the expansion of the armed groups increased sharply, with the highest number of massacres being registered in 1999 with a rate of one per day (Rubio 2001:59).

A state of fear not only descended upon communities occupied by guerrillas or paramilitaries, but also infiltrated many layers of Colombian life. The importance of asserting one's neutrality in the conflict became an imperative for Colombians, as a means of survival in face of an omnipresent physical threat, and a mode of regulation and self-regulation permeating social, political, and economic interactions. Ana Maria Ochoa (2003) noted that these "citizenships of fear" (Rotker 2001:5, quoted in Ochoa 2003:19), "drastically redefined the relationship of citizens with power, with fellow humans, with space" (Ochoa: ibid). In Ochoa's words, these are "citizenships in which one of the determinant factors in the mediation of the social is that of cultural anguish" (20).

The banning of corridos prohibidos from the mainstream in late 1997 after its successful initial marketing campaign happened in this context of collective fear and tacit knowledge of the importance of distancing oneself from possible associations with any side of the war. Norberto Riveros, the songwriter who contributed most corridos to the series Corridos Prohibidos to date, explained it as follows:

> The corrido prohibido on the radio in Bogotá was and *is* (stressing the word) vetoed. It is not a law, but if you program music like this then comes the Ministry [of culture] and takes your patent away and you lose your station (Riveros 2011).

Although the lyrics of many corridos prohibidos tell stories about guerrillas and paramilitaries, the majority are characterized by intentional neutrality, usually narrating events that result fatal for all of the characters in the plot, or describing the life events of well-known characters after their death.[41] Even so, the "cultural anguish" that Ochoa

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[41] All of the composers of corridos prohibidos I met were adamant in explaining that, while their lyrics may criticize government officials, they very consciously and carefully stay away from favoring either the guerrilla or the paramilitaries, which they

refers to manifested as self-censorship among radio programmers in fear of retaliation by the armed groups and kept corridos prohibidos away from Colombian major radio chains. According to Caterine Black., a Colombian journalist who has written about corridos prohibidos, this is the dilemma for radio producers:

> Automatically, if you play a corrido [perceived to be] *guerrillero*, the paramilitaries call you and say 'you also have to play a corrido for me.' So if you play music for one side you also have to play something for the other side (Black 2011).

For Norberto Riveros, the real risk of physical violence prevented radio programmers from airing corridos prohibidos:

> As there were two mobs, the guerrilla and the paracos, you were caught in the middle. If you played [a corrido] for one, then the other one would come and say 'why did you play it for them? Do you have anything to do with them?' So then, who would pay for the broken dishes? The radio station, because they would come and explode two sticks of dynamite, and then goodbye, *mijo*. So it is not so much because of the law [that radio stations didn't play corridos] but as precaution (Riveros ibid).

The impossibility of mediating between factions and the concrete danger of falling into this situation thus created a pattern of self-censorship in the Colombian media that hindered the possibility of the mainstream acceptance of corridos prohibidos. In this case, the perception that corridos prohibidos needed to be censored did not stem from any perceived potential to incite violence through their violence references, which has been a power often attributed to a range of vilified musics. In the case of the mainstream Colombian media, the perceived need for censorship often derived from individuals' very present fear of being drawn into the war as possible targets of physical violence, a facet

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consider would be the same as "committing suicide,' in the words of Norberto Riveros (ibid). A survey of the lyrics contained in corridos prohibidos readily supports these claims.

of the “war against society” that has been the Colombian war in the view of Daniel Pécaut (2001). This is a diffuse war in which violence is displaced from the armed action in a battlefield to “the spatial quotidian” of civilians (Ochoa 2003:20). War has shaped Colombian everyday life, encompassing the regulation of cultural practices of a population who, against its will, “finds itself inscribed in the logics of war” (Pécaut 2001:18).

Discourses of war and peace

Since the 1990s in Colombia, the idea that “culture” has the potential to create spaces for peaceful coexistence gained widespread currency, and achieved institutional status with the inscription of multiculturalism in the 1991 Constitution as a founding principle of the nation. In 1997, the start of an era of extreme violence, the notion of culture as a path towards non-violent responses to the armed conflict was further reinforced by the creation of the Ministry of Culture, conspicuously also called *Ministerio de la Paz* (Ministry of Peace). The power of cultural expressions as peace-building resources has been since promoted by government initiatives as well as advanced by intellectuals in various fields, arts organizations, social movements, and learned artists (Ochoa 2003:18).

As Ana María Ochoa (2003) stressed, instrumentalizing cultural practices as a path to peace plays out in an arena in which cultural politics can be conceived as disputes between “differentiated forms of conceiving the relationship between arts, culture, and society” (26). On one hand are the dominant cultural practices sanctioned by the status quo and on the other, those practices that do not abide by socially and culturally validated

codes and practices for a variety of reasons (ibid), including a non-conforming stance towards dominant social and political discourses and aesthetics.

The practical manifestations of the Colombian rhetoric of culture = peace have often resulted in the silencing and/or disciplining of a variety of musical expressions that do not fall within these socially, politically, and aesthetically sanctioned cultural models (Ochoa 2003; 2006; 2013; Birenbaum 2006). Ana Maria Ochoa (2013) wrote about how *champeta*, an urban dance music associated with the Afro-descendant population of the Colombian Caribbean, has not crossed over to the national mainstream sphere of Colombian popular music. Its fusion of a variety of transnational sounds, initial association with poor neighborhoods in Cartagena, use of informal means of music production and circulation, loudness, and no explicit links to recognized regional musical traditions complicated its mainstream acceptance. Champeta does not fit into the logic of multiculturalism and "pushes the borderlines of the acceptable while exhibiting the unacceptable, simultaneously outside and within the law" (24).

Michael Birenbaum Quintero (2006) demonstrated how the aesthetics of Afro-Colombian musical practices of the Pacific Coast have been transformed for festivals and other public performances in order to fit into the staging of multiculturalism. He stressed that the "eclipsing of local aesthetic logics" not only silences sounds not considered to be aesthetically pleasing, but also trivializes the violence that Afro-Colombians live on a daily basis. Using the example of the song *Qué pasa con mi Colombia?* (What is happening with my Colombia?), selected for performance at the prestigious Petronio Alvarez Festival, Birenbaum Quintero showed how the lyrics used a language that conveyed a general idea of violence, utilizing impersonal figures rather than characters

that had personally been affected by the war. He demonstrated how the lyrics literally prescribed Afro-Pacific culture as an alternative to violence, while overlooking "the complex reasons – violent pressure and economic necessity, among others – why many people adhere to the fronts of the armed groups."

Similarly to champeta, corridos prohibidos achieved considerable commercial success, even if mostly produced and distributed independently and in spite of the lack of endorsement from major Colombian mass media channels. They gained a significant fan base, mostly in rural areas and impoverished urban peripheries where the populations had been most affected by the war and drug trafficking related violence. Yet, falling outside of the parameters of multicultural artistic practices and being too explicit about the violence and paradoxes of the war, corridos prohibidos continued in the margins of Colombian popular musics.

Conclusions

Building upon and adding one more layer of specificity to the discussions in the previous chapters, in this chapter I analyzed the emergence of corridos prohibidos as a product of context, considering "context" a term that encompasses a social, political, and economic specificity as well as a temporal and spatial dimension that relates present and past events, modes of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world. As Larry Grossberg (1997) proposed, the idea of context is not to be taken for granted as a backdrop against which things happen. He stressed that "contexts (everyday life) are not static structures but active configurations of possibilities, of mobilities and stabilities, of the spaces and places at which forms of agency become available" (18). The context of the emergence of

corridos prohibidos was a very particular moment that coalesced in the crossroads of various types of spatial and temporal mobilities , and the songs that catalized it also participated in shaping the very context of their emergence.

My analysis included a close examination of a critical event, the Colombian cocalero movement of the 1990s, and of the emergent structures of feeling which framed the initial production and reception of corridos prohibidos. I argued that corridos prohibidos gained significance in the Colombian Amazonia as they fit into the listeners' horizons of expectations and mediated the articulation of strong feelings that rose in the context of the cocalero peasant marches of 1996. The reception of Cruz de Marijuana and the multiple articulations it afforded recipients were tightly linked to this very particular historical and socio-political conjuncture, despite the corrido's Mexican provenance and the range of associations attributed to Mexican narcocorridos in Mexico and the U.S. It is a case that readily illustrates the following argument made by Tia DeNora (2000):

> [M]usical affect is contingent upon the circumstances of music's appropriation; it is, as I wish to argue, the product of 'human-music interaction,' by which I mean that musical affect is constituted reflexively, in and through the practice of articulating music with other things (33).

Alírio Castillo's series Corridos Prohibidos collected and named musical practices that were already in circulation at the time, creating new paths for the commercialization of Colombian corridos and música norteña. The series gave musicians access to means of production and distribution independent from the private sponsorship provided by wealthy emerald and drug trafficking patrones who had been until then the main sponsors of recordings and live performances, as seen in chapters three and four. Castillo's enterprise motivated the formation of dozens of new groups and energized the expansion

of new live music scenes of música norteña that gave rise to the careers of Uriel Henao and many other musicians. On the other hand, his marketing strategies served to further attach negative stereotypes to an already disreputable musical practice.

The latter sections of the chapter contextualized the reception of corridos prohibidos within a wider sphere of Colombian public social life and broader socio-political developments at the time of their emergence. The escalation of the war stimulated a culture of fear and acts of self-censorship that partly explained the exclusion of corridos prohibidos from the Colombian mainstream media. Concurrently, official discourses of multiculturalism that reinforced the canons of Colombian folkloric and popular musics and emphasized cultural practices as correlates for peace gained force within Colombian cultural politics, which worked to push Colombian música norteña and corridos prohibidos even further out to the fringes of recognized Colombian popular culture.

Yet, corridos prohibidos and música norteña more generally continued to grow in popularity among fans of música popular, Alírio Castillo's main target audience. By the time Corridos Prohibidos Vol. 4 was released in 2001, however, selling CDs had ceased to be as profitable as it had been for Castillo as pirated versions of his recordings began to take over his market. While he continued to produce Corridos Prohibidos with a much smaller profit margin, some musicians began to produce their own music as digital recording technologies became more affordable, and eventually began to take advantage of the informal "pirate" network of musical distribution, which gave some of them as much publicity as Castillo's series. Corridos prohibidos and música norteña more generally continued to be heard in rural and urban cantinas, jukeboxes in *tiendas* of

barrios populares, and in the *ferias y fiestas* that happen every weekend in the rural towns of the Colombian Andean highlands.

Chapter 5 – Corridos Prohibidos and Música Norteña Colombiana: Multiple Practices and Meanings

Listening to Corridos Prohibidos

In 2000, singer and songwriter Uriel Henao wrote Story of a Guerrillero and a Paraco[1] in the midst of the escalation of violence between all armed groups. The corrido quickly gained a wide audience through Henao's local performances and recordings, mostly in the regions most affected by the war. Now, several years after its release, Story of a Guerrillero and a Paraco remains a favorite among fans of the genre:

Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco (Story of a Guerrilla Fighter and a Paraco[2])

En la cantina El Despecho/ sucedió esta gran historia
lo que les vengo a contar/ lo recuerdo como si fuera ahora.
Parece que fuera ayer/ no se ha borrado de mi memoria.

Domingo Dia de las Madres/ del mes de Mayo de 97.
Los personajes de que hablo/ no corrieron con gran suerte.
Nadie penso que ese dia / se encontraran con la muerte.

Estaba un hombre tomando/ ese dia en la cantina
Estaba medio borracho/ y maldecia su vida
Esta noche llueva bala,/ si no les gusta pues nomas digan
At the cantina The Spite/this great story took place
What I come to tell you / I remember as if it was now
It seems like it was yesterday/it has not escaped me

Mother's Day Sunday/ in the month of May of 97.
The characters I'm talking about/ ran out of luck.
No one thought that on that /day they would meet their death

No one thought that on that day/ they would meet their death.

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[1] Uriel Henao. 2000. "Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco." *Corridos Prohibidos Vol. 6*. Bogotá, Colombia: Alma Records.

[2] In Colombia, *paraco* is a slang for paramilitary.

There was a man drinking at the cantina/ He was a drunk and was cursing his life.
Tonight he will get a bullet/ if you don't like it just let me know

An important reason why this corrido and others like it continue to appeal, I was told time and again, is the way in which listeners feel that they say "the pure truth," in the words of Jaime Romero, one of my interlocutors. "They tell our stories," he said. As the armed conflict gradually cooled down since the mid-2000s, however, stories like *El Guerrillero y El Paraco* now allude more to a recent past than to the immediacy of physical violence that once saturated everyday life for many Colombians. Over the last decade, a significant number of guerrilla units were dismantled as their leaders were killed, and to a certain extent non-state armed groups have adhered to the government's demobilization plans.[3] Various official measures towards peace and reconciliation have been taken, including historical memory building projects and truth-telling initiatives. As many of these projects promote musical practices as crucial resources for the development of peaceful coexistence,[4] questions arise regarding what kinds of musical practice fit the purpose that these initiatives seek to accomplish.

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[3] The Colombian government began the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process in 2003 with the signing of the peace agreement of Santa Fe de Ralito. Two years later, the Justice and Peace Law (law 975 0f 2005) was passed and constituted the main legal framework for the process, with provisions for the reintegration of ex-combatants and for the fulfillment of victims' rights to be awarded reparations, find justice, and know the truth.

[4] There are countless examples in most regions of Colombia, including projects that are officially sponsored as well as supported by NGOs and private initiatives such as media outlets. See, for example, the projects "Arte y música como pedagogia de la no-violencia" (Art and music as pedagogy of non-violence).

https://www.unodc.org/colombia/es/fundacion-musica-y-paz.html

The first part of the chapter considers the interplay of truth, private memory, and public recollection within the narratives of and about corridos prohibidos, informed by Paul Ricoeur's (1988, 1999, 2004, 2005) work on memory, narrative, and recognition. I'm especially interested in how these narratives interact with acts of listening and remembrance, and in how they compare to the state's truth and memory projects that promote Colombian musics as a vehicle for peace and reconciliation. Circling back to one of my primary research questions, I explore how listening to and composing corridos prohibidos can work as powerful mechanisms for the individual memories of individuals, and for bringing into being collectives of listeners that engage in particular ways of knowing, remembering, and narrating a violent past. As this musical expression falls in the margins of what is considered the sphere of validated Colombian popular musics, participants do so in ways that go against the grain of official projects of collective memory and reconciliation.

"Música y transformación social" (Musica and social transformation)

https://www.britishcouncil.co/seminario-internacional-música-ytransformación-social

"Canta por la paz en Colombia" (sing for peace in Colombia competition)

http://www.telesurtv.net/news/Ganadores-de-Canta-por-la-Paz-destacan-papel-de-teleSUR-20160322-0077.html

The novelty of Story of a Guerrillero and a Paraco and a body of similar corridos that arose in the 1990s in Colombia lay in the haunting, direct lyrics with inevitably tragic endings depicting familiar places, events, and characters involved in the war. Low budget productions and new digital technologies enabled the rapid dissemination of the new corridos and the independent label Corridos Prohibidos provided the commercial moniker for the new songs, which served to identify the emergent genre. By the late 1990s, corridos prohibidos had become widely popular in the rural and peripheral urban areas where the war was most intense and the civilian population most vulnerable to being caught in the crossfire. A fan of corridos prohibidos, Antonio Ruiz told me of his first time hearing one, when as a teenager he arrived to Bogotá and settled into Barrio Bolivar on the outskirts of the capital city where thousands of people displaced by violence arrived daily from the rural interior.

"I felt lost and scared. I was a kid and was alone," Ruiz remembered:

> We lived my mom, my older brother and I in La Calera about two hours from the capital, and we were struggling to get by. One day my mother left and it was just my brother and I until he told me he was going to the hills to join the FARC. I cried all night and the next morning he was gone. I had no other options than to try and survive in Bogota. […] One day I decided to go […] to a local cantina and that's where I heard El Guerrillero y el Paraco. I couldn't believe there was a song like that" (Ruiz 2012).

> En la mesa de en seguida/ habia otro hombre tomando solo. [5]
> Le dijo: " Querido amigo/ yo lo acompaño, quiero ser su socio
> vamos a tomar los dos/ en esta mesa estamos solos."

> Luego de estar bien tomados se sacaron los cueros al sol.
> El uno le dijo al otro:/ "vamos a hablar de nuestro patrón
> no andemos con maricadas/ no habran secretos entre los dos."

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[5] Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco, verses 4 and 5.

At the table next to him/ another man was drinking alone.
He said: “Dear friend,/ ”I’ll join you, I want to be your partner
let’s drink together/at this table we are alone”

When they were very drunk/ they began to show their colors.
One told the other:/ ”let’s talk about our boss
let’s not be sissies/ there will be no secrets between us.”

The *Story of a Guerrillero and a Paraco* told a compelling tale that resonated among the youth in several ways. It was set in a cantina, an important space of sociability for the rural and urban poor, where stories like the one conveyed in the corrido were lived and told. Even more powerful, it was a parable of the violent division that was happening all around within families, between neighbors, and between brothers. It was a tale of being forcefully recruited into one of the armed bands or being left with no survival options other than to join the guerrilla or the paramilitaries, a constant threat for disenfranchised youth.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the strengthening of all of Colombia’s armed groups, fueled by the spectacular influx of money from the illicit international drug trade, in which Colombia became a leading exporter and producer. The Colombian war exploded into a complex system of strategic coalitions and multiple forms of violence that also involved the Colombian government and military, which received large amounts of U.S. military and financial aid. This time period saw record numbers of human rights violations and people displaced by violence, soaring numbers of lives lost, and widespread suffering.[6]

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[6] See Palacios, Marco. 1995. *Entre la Legitimidad y la Violencia: Colombia 1875–1994*. Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma; Richani, Nazih. 2002. *Systems of Violence:*

Although there hasn't yet been a definitive end to the conflict in Colombia, many peace agreements and demobilization programs have been implemented since the 1990s. With the implementation of the new constitution in 1991, a renewed notion of the Colombian nation based on multiculturalism sought to promote and grant protections to regional traditions and minority groups. While providing paths for more inclusive civic participation, the new cultural politics also served in many ways to qualify what and who fits or doesn't into validated models of Colombian culture.[7]

In 2005, the government initiated the National Commission for Reparations and Reconciliation (CNRR in Spanish), which spawned a working group called Memória Histórica (Historical Memory) and several related projects tasked with the goal of historical clarification and memory. These projects bring people together, often through musical and other artistic practices, and encourage them to talk and share traumatic experiences. The act of "hacer memoria" (to "make memory"), which implies to retrieve memory with difficulty, is presented within Colombian peace projects as a therapeutic resource to overcoming trauma and a path towards the reconstruction of a painful but more comprehensive collective history. The Museum of Memory, created in 2011, is one

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The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia. New York: State University of New York Press; Rojas, Cristina. 2001. *Civilización y Violencia*. Bogotá: Norma.

[7] Centro Nacional de Memória Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory)

http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co

https://www.radionacional.co/noticia/cultura/canciones-explicar-paz

of the largest of these projects, and asserts its mission to "restore the dignity of victims and to disseminate the truth about what happened.[8]

Yet, what counts as truth and who decides how it needs to be told? How does an understanding of truth arise when secrecy has been a means of survival for so long? Who wants to talk about the past when it is too painful? What gets remembered, and why not forget?

Writing about the ethics of memory and the connection between memory and forgetting, Paul Ricoeur (1999) suggested that "the best use of forgetting is precisely in the construction of plots, in the elaboration of narratives concerning personal or collective identity" (9). Ricoeur developed the notion of "the help of fiction," (1992:161), and stressed that the narrative unit of life "must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize retrospectively, after the fact" (ibid). Therefore, there are no marked distinctions between historical or factual and fictional narratives for Ricoeur and both have ethical and moral significance.

When I asked Uriel Henao if his corridos were about real people and events, he answered:

> I write songs about all Colombians in the conflict, stories I hear about and see everyday, but not about this or that one person. The characters in my songs can be borrowed by anyone who feels identified with them and their stories. And this is why my songs are so popular. Our stories are all too common, all too similar, all too sad, poor Colombian people. I only write corridos about real people when

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[8] "Historical Memory in Colombia: The Work of Grupo de Memoria Historica." Accessed on October 20, 2016 at http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/IEDP_2012_COLOMBIA_Human_Rights_Report_GMH.pdf

> they are public figures and household names… Sometimes someone will come to me or send me their personal story and ask for it to be turned into a corrido. I usually write one inspired in their story but never referring to the real names and places. It is a matter of safety for me and for them (Henao 2012).

Henao's straightforward response addressed how the concept of truth, in the context of his corridos, exists in a fluid relationship with the boundaries of what can or should not be said. Although official truth-telling initiatives grow in Colombia through legislative and cultural policies, the complex balance between what can and cannot be spoken and the negotiation of "knowing what not to know" become an "art of survival and the basis of social reality," to borrow Michael Taussig's (2003:12) observations of Colombian paramilitary violence.

The protagonists of Uriel Henao's corridos draw from the gamut of characters featured in the conflict, and his stories are as true as templates, aggregating all too common experiences of violence, loss, and pain. Such is the case of *El Guerrillero y el Paraco*, based on someone's personal story he learned and fictionalized, and one of his most enduring and popular corridos to this day.

> "A mi me apodan 'El Perro'/ y mi patron es Carlos Castaño.[9] L SEP
> Soy muy bueno para el tiro/ y no hay forma de negarlo. L SEP
> Vengo desde Monteria/ y no lo niego soy un paraco." L SEP L SEP
>
> "Ahora me toca a mi el turno"/ el otro le contesto. L SEP
> "Mi patron se llama Tirofijo/ y a mi me apodan 'El Camaleón.' L SEP
> Soy guerrillero de las FARC/ no se imagina con quien se metio" L SEP L SEP
>
> Se formo una gran balacera/ de los hombres de diferentes bandos. L SEP
> Esta historia fue en el sur de Bolivar/ alli quedaron dos hombre tirados L SEP
> Y aqui termina el corrido/ del guerrillero y del paraco
>
> They call me 'The Dog'/ and my boss is Carlos Castaño. L SEP

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[9] Historia de un Guerrillero y un Paraco, verses 6, 7, and 8.

”I’m really good at shooting/ and there’s no denying it
I come from Montería/ I won’t deny it, I’m a paraco.

“Now it’s my turn”/ the other replied.
”My boss is Tirofijo/ and they call me ‘The Chameleon.’
I’m a FARC guerrilla fighter/ “You’ve no idea whom you’re dealing with.”

A great shootout began/ between the men of different bands.
This story happened in southern Bolivar/ there remained two men laying
And here ends the corrido/ of the *guerrillero* and the *paraco*

When I asked Jaime Romero what he liked about corridos, he did not give me a direct answer. He began with a story:

> The first time I saw someone die was the day I was going to the market to buy some food with my brother and we were walking on the street when people started running. We heard explosions and a man dropped dead at our feet. I was about five, my brother a few years older […] Years later the paramilitaries arrived to our town and people just disappeared everyday - neighbors, cousins. When I was old enough I joined the Colombian army. My brother had gone with the paramilitaries. I never saw him again […] Corridos are the stories one lives in Colombia. El Guerrillero y el Paraco is my favorite because it is a real story that happened in the town next to mine (Romero 2012)

Romero was not the only person I talked to who made a claim to the truthfulness of a corrido and to having personal ties to a character or a place in the story. In addition to his perceived personal link to it, Romero talked about how sometimes when listening to El Guerrillero y el Paraco his brother also comes to mind, but not so often. It depends on his state of mind; if he is happy, or more somber, or drunk. More often, the corrido makes him feel “the nearness of death; how suddenly it can come and a sense of valor in face of it. Feeling like *un berraco*[10] in life.”

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[10] *Berraco* is a Colombian slang that can be translated as tough or savvy, or better yet, a much stronger and vulgar word that I will leave to the readers’ imagination.

Both Romero and Ruiz, as well as several more listeners I met during fieldwork, enjoy listening to corridos in silence while drinking, either by themselves or with friends, and feeling "like un berraco" while listening appears as a common trope among habitual listeners. Listening to corridos inevitably brings memories that, in the words of Romero, "surely one remembers, even if one would prefer not to remember," and these are not to be talked about. Not talking about it is a gesture of respect to others' suffering; of respect to those who died, disappeared into a "bad" life, or "were disappeared" (Romero 2012).

In her study of memory and trauma with a youth group in Medellin, Colombia, anthropologist Pilar Riaño (2006) found that the participants eventually opened up to talking about personal experiences of trauma. However, never mentioning possible "dubious" pasts of relatives or friends, either dead or alive, was an unbreakable and unspoken rule among the youth. The silence regarding questionable conduct of close ones was seen as a matter of respect: people had to do what they had to do and the youth had no interest in talking about it (ibid).

Norberto Riveros is one of the most prolific composers of corridos prohibidos, having penned nearly one hundred of them. When I asked Riveros if he had ever written a corrido about a personal story of his own, he responded with a story:

> I had a woman and two children, a boy and a girl, and she started disappearing with the kids for months at a time. The first time I went crazy without knowing what had happened to them. I found out she had gone to be a cook in the jungle at a drug factory. The money was good and she wanted it, she told me when she came back. I begged her to never do it again, but it didn't work. Once in a while she would disappear again, and I just prayed everyday that they would come back safely. One night when she was gone, I was drinking by myself at a cantina and overheard two men talking. One was telling a story he had heard about that day, which had happened in the jungle at a drug operation when the guerrilla arrived and set camp. A boy about fifteen years old who was living in the settlement met one of the guerrilla girls and they had a fling. A few days later

> when the guerrilla was getting ready to leave the girl asked the boy to join them and come with her. The boy said he was going to think about it and would let her know the next day. When they met the next morning he told the girl he couldn't go and leave his mother behind. The guerrilla girl shot him in the head on the spot.

"As I heard the man telling this story," continued Norberto, "I knew the boy was my son. It was like a nightmare. My wife and my daughter arrived with the body the following day." He continued:

> No, I don't write down my own stories. I don't write anyone's stories. How could I? People have suffered too much. The real stories are too painful, who wants to remember in a song? We have to respect the dead and the living. Live them all alone. It is good to forget but without forgetting (Riveros 2011).

Marc Augé (2004) stressed that forgetting should not to be construed as a failure of memory, but as a productive process and constitutive of memory. For Augé, in order to remember it is necessary to forget, and oblivion plays a crucial role in the construction of life's "fictions" (34). Resonating with Norberto Rivero's necessity to "forget without forgetting" in order for life to go on, Augé's idea of oblivion is that it is needed for the process of "re-beginning" (57). For many habitual listeners, the practice of remembrance and listening to corridos supports the necessity of remembering and forgetting in which memory works as an interpretative reconstruction of selected experiences, events, and subjective states, and allows for life to continue.

As corridos prohibidos is not attached to any ethnic, regional, or other identifiable and identified category of Colombian identity, and is not music of the middle-class like rock, it doesn't participate in official truth and memory projects. As Paul Ricoeur (1999) observed, two kinds of relationship between memory and the past emerge: knowledge and action. Following Ricoeur, memory is thus an exercise. It can be used and also

abused as in the "excess of certain commemorations […], festivals [and] myths which attempt to fix memories in a kind of reverential relationship to the past" (9). Ricoeur saw the instrumentalization of memory for projects of the "heritage industry" as an ethical problem and was concerned with what he called the "duty to remember" (ibid). He saw, however, that while memory can be manipulated there is also a possibility that "the work of memory is a kind of mourning," and that mourning is "a reconciliation with the loss of some objects of love" (1999: 6). As a possible technology of mourning, the familiar stock characters and events of corridos work as flexible templates and allow for a multiplicity of meanings, recognitions, sentiments and truths to be assigned to them by different listeners and at different moments.

While official memory projects seek to enforce channeled modes of remembering the indignities of the war, they often overlook codes of conduct and modes of feeling of entire groups of people that are best served by more flexible understandings of memory as a complex and fluid interplay of remembering as well as forgetting, and that memory can elicit truths that are as much about the present as about the past.

Anthropologist Veena Das (2006) reminds us that trauma is often better addressed by letting pain be inscribed in everyday life than treated in a public forum like a memory project. In her view, people are resilient and deal with pain and trauma not by purging them out of themselves, but while conducting mundane acts (140-41). Corridos prohibidos do not participate in official programs for peace and reconciliation, as they are deemed too commercial, too non-Colombian, and too crude to have positive therapeutic effects on victims of the war. However, they address the great divide between those considered victims and those considered perpetrators in the Colombian war, which is a

blurred line and in need of reparation. I suggest that this is exactly where the potential of corridos lies: reconciliation for all sides. The practices of listening and remembrance in Colombian corridos' spaces of sociability allow simultaneously for private memories and public recollections, and for participants to inhabit a temporal community of shared experiences and multiple sentiments.

Música Norteña Colombiana

The Festival

On November 4th of 2012, the 8th *Festival Nacional de la Música Norteña* (National Festival of Música Norteña) took place in Siachoque, a small locality in the Andean department Boyacá. The attending crowd included people of all socio-economic strata, but specially rural workers from neighboring veredas, fincas, and nearby towns. Buses coming from Tunja, the departmental capital located two hours away, also brought more people than usual into Siachoque throughout the afternoon, and by the start of the event, the central plaza had a sizable crowd that got larger as the evening progressed. From 3 pm until noon the next day, fifteen groups performed for over ten thousand people who animatedly participated through the night in spite of the continuous drizzle and cold temperature typical of that part of the Andes. Aguardiente, beer, and a variety of vendor foods were available and shared by people in front of the single stage who also sang along, danced, or just listened quietly. All of the tiendas, restaurants, and small markets surrounding the plaza were packed with festivalgoers escaping the weather, also drinking beer, aguardiente, and tinto.

The festival kicked in with a performance by *Montana*, a group formed only a few years earlier that was considerably lesser known than some of the other acts scheduled for later in the evening, which was to culminate with the presentation of the Mexican group *Bronco, Gigante de América*, the one international act and centerpiece of the event. Most of the groups scheduled for earlier in the afternoon and evening were, like Montana, among the newer generation of groups of música norteña colombiana. Their repertoires overlapped considerably, specially the covers of corridos and carrilera hits that fans always request and expect to hear in live performances. As the afternoon went on, I heard Cruz de Marihuana, for example, performed at least four times, which the audience really didn't seem to mind, singing along with enthusiasm each time.

Aside from the crowds, the stage, and a large banner over it, nothing else in Siachoque indicated that something out of the ordinary was taking place. Although the number of attendees in 2012 was not as large as in previous editions of the festival, such as three years earlier when it reached up to twenty thousand, the attendance of close to ten thousand people was still considerable, even in comparison to the many annual festivals with full institutional support that happen in Colombia through the year. The Colombian Festival Nacional de Música Norteña is produced every year with limited resources, contingent on how much financial and logistic support Gabriel Acuña, its sole organizer, is able to raise throughout the year[11] counting primarily on funding from the

[11] In 2012, the festival was actually under threat of not happening, as the new administration of Chivatá, the town that had hosted it for the previous years had announced early in the year that they were no longer interested in supporting it. The new host, the town of Siachoque, had not agreed to commit any resources towards it until a month earlier.

(very small) hosting town's administration, commercial sponsors, and friends of Acuña who are fans of música norteña and have the means to contribute financially.

Born in 1982 in Bermejo, a small vereda in the department of Meta, Gabriel Acuña grew up listening to música norteña, música de carrilera, and later corridos prohibidos as they reigned in the jukeboxes of his pueblo's tiendas and billard halls. Acuña told me that hearing Alírio Castillo's campaign slogan in the 1990s promoting the series Corridos Prohibidos – "you won't hear them on the radio" – inspired his career goal of ensuring that corridos prohibidos and música norteña in general played on the radio. At fifteen he got his first job at the local radio station and was assigned to assist in a program dedicated to vallenato, but soon managed to start a one hour program of música norteña called *Frontera Norte* (Frontier North) that broke the record of number of calls from listeners on its first day on the air. In 1998 Acuña moved to Tunja, the capital of the Andean department of Boyacá, for a job at the AM radio station *Armonías Boyacenses* (Harmonies of Boyacá) where he started the first program dedicated to música norteña, *Noche Norteña* (Norteña Night).

Since then, Acuña's radio shows have grown in frequency, length, and audience size and the DJ has become one of the primary promoters of música norteña in Colombia, programming new and older productions of Colombian groups as well as old and new hits of Mexican norteña. Since 2011 the online version of the radio program came about and streams music 24/7. Playing more Colombian than Mexican selections on his radio show is a priority for Acuña, as is promoting new local groups by playing their music and organizing live events. The idea for the festival grew out of his desire to "have a space where everyone could come together, as [música norteña] was a movement that was

growing in importance." Through his efforts, Acuña believes that now "Boyacá is the home of música norteña." In odd concurrence, the Festival Nacional de Música Norteña taking place in Boyacá every year since 2005 has no counterpart in Mexico or anywhere else, which Acuña is admittedly proud of (Acuña 2012).

At around 8 pm, the group *Francotirador* (Sniper) took the stage on their first ever appearance at the national festival. Formed a few years earlier, the group at the time was finishing their first production, a self-funded recording that was taking place at a slow pace, dependent on how many income-producing live performances the group was able to book each month. They were, however, extremely optimistic about their prospects and ecstatic to be performing at the event and introduce their musical and performance style, intentionally designed to give the group a distinguishing edge in a sphere of musical activity that values familiar repertoires and covers of past hits where groups can sound and look very similar.

With a mixture of original compositions and covers of current Mexican and Mexican American música norteña, Francotirador's played mostly *cumbias norteñas* and *quebraditas*,[12] a danceable repertoire that the audience seemed to thoroughly enjoy

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[12] Since the 1980s, Mexican groups experimented with mixing elements of música norteña, *balada romantica*, and cumbia – a genre originally from Colombia that since the 1960s had been adopted and transformed in Mexico into varieties of cumbia that were then circulated throughout most of Latin America (see Madrid 2012). The trend of the 1980s gave rise to a mixed style identified as *música grupera*, of which Bronco, for example, became one of the most famous representatives. It also brought cumbia's rhythmic patterns into the repertoires of groups more readily identifiable as norteños. Hence, cumbia is thus fairly common in the repertoires of Mexican and Mexican American norteños, but in Colombia it was still quite a novelty in 2012. *Quebradita* is a faster paced rhythm that draws from Dominican merengue and several other Mexican, African American, and Anglo American styles adopted by Mexican American grupos

judging by the vigorous dancing that took place and the interaction between musicians and audience members. As the musicians explained, their musical choices deliberately come from believing that the faster dance pace of quebradita and cumbia norteña should work real well for Colombian audiences familiar with cumbia and accostumed to dancing fast dance rhythms (Rojas 2012)).

I was almost 3 am when *Bronco, el Gigante de América*, came on stage and drew the largest crowd present at any moment during the festival. One of the exponents of Mexican música grupera since the 1990s, their mixed style manifested in the repertoire heavily based on cumbia norteña and the instrumentation featuring accordion, bajo sexto, and also electric guitar and synthesizer. When Bronco performed their best known international hit "Que No Quede Huellas" I was convinced that absolutely everyone in the crowd was singing the song to the very last word.

As Colombian musicians give of their time and labor to be at the festival, the reasons to be there are not immediate financial gain, but part of the complex economy that fuels the scene of música norteña colombiana.[13] As put by Ferney Bernal, band leader of Ferney y el Grupo Zeta, being at the festival offers a certain degree of exposure that may translate into opportunities to perform in the future, but a reason he sees as important to musicians and to the fans is that being there enables one to "really feel that

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norteños that became hugely popular, specially in Los Angeles, in the 1990s (see Hutchinson 2007). It has been adopted by grupos norteños in Mexico and the U.S. as part of their repertoires since, and, as cumbia norteña, was just becoming more common among the newer Colombian groups in 2012.

[13] Acuña only pays the performing groups a stipend that corresponds to less than a third of what they would normally get for a live performance. The newer groups are only given transportation, meals, drink, and a place to stay if they need it.

you are part of something that really exists, that there are other groups and producers, people working really hard that love this music and want it to be out there" (Bernal 2012)[14]. The festival continued uninterrupted until noon and truly created a space for musicians and fans to come together, which I felt mostly when late in the morning musicians from several of the participating bands where standing in front of the stage, comingling with fans, and cheering for the ones performing.

Although the national festival is a success in the assessment of Gabriel Acuña, musicians and fans who attend, they are all keenly aware of how much música norteña colombiana continues to be in the margins of Colombian popular music and broader socio-cultural life. Scholars have called attention to the importance of margins as peripheries where inhabitants, and in this case, the sounds, performance practices, and participants of this music scene, find themselves between inclusion and exclusion[15]. The margins inhabited by música norteña colombiana are material, considering first the financial and social marginalization of both the music and of many of those who produce, distribute, and consume it, and second, the lack of avenues towards increased participation in the broader cultural public sphere in Colombia.

Engaging with Bauman and Briggs' (2003) notion of "entextualization," Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2005) framed it as a process that is tied up with the rise of genres in popular and folk music as it works in the "cultural construction of a bounded, sonorous

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[14] Ferney Bernal fell sick and had to cancel his participation at the festival at the last minute. He shared these thoughts during a phone conversation the day after the festival.

[15] See Tsing 1994; Das and Poole 2004.

item" (208). Entextualization refers to processes through which musical genres become consolidated, recognizable, and validated, which usually happens simultaneously in the realms of folklore and the popular music industry. These processes can be of many varieties, such as the creation of festivals, and support from the political and artistic elites, as was demonstrated with the case of música llanera in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

In times of multiculturalism in Colombia, processes of entextualization and ways in which social significance is ascribed to musical expressions have been progressively mobilized. These enterprises come increasingly from not only official initiatives looking to strengthen regional and national politics and from the music industry, which has ever more channels to market local musics of the world, but also from social and artistic movements looking to translate into resources the new emphasis on diversity and on the relationship between place, music, and identity that characterizes the political moment[16].

The Festival Nacional de Música Norteña can be understood as an effort of Gabriel Acuña towards validation of the music scene of música norteña, as he and norteño musicians express the desire for recognition and festivals in Colombia are not only opportunities for pleasure and musical sociability but have become instrumental in achieving visibility and validation for musical practices. The complex of music activity of this genre world, however, including música norteña of several varieties, corridos prohibidos, and música de despecho, do not serve a regional or national project, do not fit

[16] George Yúdice (2003) calls this phenomenon the "expediency of culture," which he sees as a paradigm spreading in contexts of neoliberal politics and globalization.

into any ethnic or racial categories to be mobilized and cannot be attached to a particular place. They are rather forged and maintained within the nexus of several types of mobility, and expressive of the experiences of migrants and displaced people.

Not only the music but the participants in this musical complex occupy spaces in-between the local and the global, the rural and the urban, not fully accounted for by the new narratives of Colombian multicultural identities. In his study of Turkish *Arabesk*, Martin Stokes (2007) refers to it as "music of identity crisis," perceived by the middle classes as rooted in "rural cultures of grief, melancholy and lament" and scorned by the local intelligentsia (8-9). These are qualities that have for long been ascribed to the complex of Mexican-inspired musical styles of which the newest strand of música norteña colombiana is part of, and readily associated with even if much of its musical sounds and performance practices could be described very differently. The resonances of musical melancholy, grief, and *despecho* attached to this musical genre world have had a deeper impact in their marginalization than, for example, the lyrics of corridos prohibidos which are often blamed for the genre's marginalization. The ethos of grief, despecho, unsophisticated rural urbanity, and melancholy attached to these musics meets with disgust by the middle classes and intellectual circles, as they lie in stark contrast to the tropical and exuberant musical identities embraced by Colombians progressively since the 1950s[17].

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[17] For the adoption of música tropical of the Caribbean coast in Colombia as the nation's primary musical identity, see Wade (2000). For a focused analysis of how and why the melancholic bambuco and other Andean genres were displaced in favor of the "happy" musics of the Caribbean coast, see Hernández Salgar (2007, 2016).

The national festival, as do the current scenes of música norteña colombiana, rely on multilayered relations between people and businesses outside of official institutions traditionally involved with producing and disseminating artistic production, such as the music industry and government initiatives. They include free labor, particular types of sociality, and patronage provided by "the system of the gift and its multiple modes of exchange," that, as put by Ochoa Gautier (2013), contribute to the "coalescing of musical practices that arise from creative desire beyond the 'culture-as-resource paradigm'" (20).

Being Norteños

During the time of my research, hundreds of grupos norteños were active in Colombia, and I heard of new ones all the time. One of the questions I asked several of the younger musicians in música norteña colombiana who were just starting out was why they chose this musical style rather than another one, considering the limited options to commercialize the music and make a living. Contrasting with norteña in Mexico and the U.S. nowadays, populated by platinum-selling stars and Grammy award winners, Colombian musicians who choose to "be norteños," an expression they commonly use, generally don't gain access to large record labels and distributors, nor to traditional mass media. In the best-case scenario, they might make a modest living out of live performances.

Humberto Rojas, singer and bandleader of Francotirador, responded that he is well aware of the difficulties of a career as a Colombian norteño. He considers, however, that his musical choices are not merely motivated by wanting to be a professional

musician, which is not easy in Colombia no matter the style, but rather moved by a connection to family and what he sees as his musical roots:

> My inclination for música norteña comes from my parents; from my dad, most of all. He has always been a fan of a group that has disappeared called Lupe y Polo. That's how my love for música norteña began, these are my roots. Then I started listening to Los Alegres de Terán, who are the founding fathers […]. I think that here this taste has been very common, because my grandpa, RIP, also liked listening to Lupe y Polo and to those old duets and that's why my dad liked it too.(Rojas 2012b)

Humberto Rojas told me that his main musical influences come from current Mexican and Mexican-American groups that he knows from Youtube, as much as from the "old duets" liked by his dad and grandfather. As he stated, from his musical "roots," which simultaneously evoke personal and local affective experiences, and are produced through networks of media circulation that cut across multiple times and places. Rojas explained that he also enjoys vallenato and música tropical, but that the deepest "*conexion de sentimiento*" - "feelingful connection" - he has musically is with música norteña, a term he grew up with, as well as with the sounds and names of groups he considers his musical heritage.

"El Mao" Ruiz, the bajo sexto player with Ferney y El Grupo Zeta, spoke similarly about the connection he feels with música norteña, which he considers part of his musical heritage rather than solely a foreign musical influence. Born in 1988, at age eight he began playing bajo sexto taught by an uncle who played the instrument with a norteño trio in their neighborhood, in the impoverished outskirts of el Sur de Bogotá. A student at Universidad Nacional, Ruiz told me about the stigma of música norteña among his middle and upper class peers, who criticize him because of his musical preferences:

“They accuse me of imagining myself Mexican. I don’t see it like this. Identifying with Mexican music doesn't make one less Colombian” (Ruiz 2012).

Taste for Mexican music, especially the styles most associated with the rural and urbanizing poor such as música norteña and música de carrilera can be seen by upper class Colombians as tacky, as explored in the previous chapters. The following passage by Colombian musicologist Egberto Bermúdez (2004) conveys his view on the matter:

> Since the 1960s it was already clear the difference between the public for jazz, bossa nova, bolero, the Beatles, the songs by San Remo and Charles Aznavour, and on the other side, the followers of Jose Alfredo Jimemez (1926-1973), Javier Solis (1932-1966) and Vicente Fernandez (1940), whose audience managed to consolidate local products such as Las Hermanitas Calle” […]. “It wasn’t a confrontation between foreign and national music, but of culture and social class” […]. This music has been stigmatized from moralist, classits, and political angles, from left and right, called *arrabalera* (of the marginal periphery) and plebeian, or conformist and stultifying. For the upper class youth: the day before yesterday, *loba*; yesterday, *charra*; today *mañé* and *música de iguazos*[18] (42).

Hence, the criticism directed to El Mao by his upper class colleagues had more to do with a classist bias tied to a devaluation of musical taste than to a perceived lack of nationalism when they accused him of wanting to be Mexican. Restrepo Duque, prolific chronicler of Colombian musical life and pioneer of the Medellín music industry since the 1940s, conveyed a very similar mode of thinking when, writing about música de carrilera, he stressed that:

> There is no doubt that *el pueblo* accepts música de carrilera and enjoys it. But it is also true that their *colombianismo* (Colombianess) does not reach beyond forty percent and this only if one supposes that the nationality of its authors […] would grant a certificate of nationality to melodies which, when they are not exact copies

[18] These words are Colombian slangs that mean trashy, tacky, and of bad taste. *Charro* in Antioquia can mean funny, but in Bogotá means of bad quality.

> they remind one immediately of the themes, both literarily and musically, of José Alfredo Jimenez, Valdez Leal or Victor Cordero[19] (1989: 70).

This type of criticism conveys a pervasive, classist notion that, rather than considered creative and attuned to the global flows of musical circulation, which is the general perception about most Colombian rock, salsa, and hip hop, for example, the musical work of adaptation and recontextualization of Mexican musics is viewed with suspicion, associated with rural and urbanized peasants who are culturally colonized and marginal in relation to what it means to be Colombian.

Several of the younger Colombian norteño musicians believe that the marketing tactics of Alirio Castillo to promote Corridos Prohibidos and the type of publicity they generated contributed to conflate música norteña with the underworld of the drug trafficking economy. Although it is widely recognized among Colombian norteños that Castillo brought unprecedented attention to Colombian música norteña, his strategies further served to imprint this already disreputable musical style with the stigma of *música de traquetos* (music of drug dealers).

Dispelling negative associations of música norteña thus arises as an important project for the youngest generation of Colombian norteños. Many of them have consciously distanced themselves from the term corridos prohibidos, which is still a popular appellation for norteña in Colombia, and emphasize the newer concept of música norteña colombiana. They play new compositions and experiment with cumbia and

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[19] The three names are of well-known Mexican composers whose many corridos and canciones rancheras were well-circulated both by the carrilera musica industry in the recorded versions of its Mexican and Colombian stars, and by Mexican cinema.

hiphop mixes. Play covers of current and old hits of música norteña, and return to old classics of música de carrilera, with its mix of Colombian, Mexican, and Mexican-American corridos, rancheras, and other hybrid genres. Groups in Colombia maintain contact with musicians in Mexico and the U.S. through the Internet, exploring new forms of musical mobility that increasingly add to the rich webs of roots and routes that have always constituted música norteña. Intense musical exchange takes place through the trade of compositions, musical instruments, and online lessons, and some of the groups engage in distributive recording technologies and practices. Musicians bring into being and expand contemporary translocal spaces that add new layers to the "blurring of boundaries" suggested by Cathy Ragland in regard to the flexible transnational networks of música norteña in the U.S.-Mexico border[20].

The sentiments expressed by El Mao Ruiz, introduced earlier, as he says that "identifying with Mexican music doesn't make one less Colombian" i(Ruiz 2012), n many ways purport a cultural narrative of self and belonging that is flexible and cuts across national boundaries and local imperatives of class and taste. Feeling Colombian and finding expression in Mexican-inspired sounds are thus not mutually exclusive in the way it is imagined by young Colombian norteños who trace their musical roots back to the 'music that arrived by train,' a favorite expression of older record collectors and cantina owners I met in Medellín.

When Humberto Rojas from the group Francotirador told me that for him, "música norteña is culture, is love, it is feeling, it is art," I asked him what he meant by

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[20] Ragland, Catherine. 2009.

‘culture,’ to which he responded: “I carry música norteña in my blood. There are people here who tremble with emotion when they hear a melody on the accordion. […] Let’s defend our music, *my* music, *our* music (his emphasis). I feel like the owner of música norteña!” (Rojas 2012b).

In this statement, Rojas clearly made references to place, his idea of a musical heritage, and the feelings that attach him to the music he loves. With other members of the new generation of Colombian norteños, he partakes in Gabriel Acuña’s project that asserts that “Boyacá is the home of música norteña” referenced earlier in this chapter. This idea of place is thus produced in terms of multiplicity, dislocation, and “mobility alongside moorings” (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006). Similarly, “[p]laces may be thought of as open articulations of connections,” as proposed Doreen Massey (1999), while peoples’ and places’ identities viewed as constructed through interrelations “challenge notions of past authenticities” (288).

Writing about sungura, Tony Perman explains that in spite of being Zimbabwe’s mot popular music genre, it has nonetheless occupied a marginal position as well as been dismissed by academics interested in the country’s popular musics. Similarly to música norteña colombiana and corridos prohibidos, sungura emerged within social, political, and economic turmoil, and became an expressive form for people who did not fit the discourses of nationalism and modernity being officially deployed and of interest to academics.

“These communities,” argued Perman, “cohere not through an engagement with older models like the nation, or ethnicity, but through efforts to belong to the community they find themselves in through happenstance of migration, labour, and conflict” (397).

Like sungura's fanbase, música norteña colombiana and corridos prohibidos includes people unaccounted for in current multiculturalist explanations of Colombian identities. Humberto Rojas, El Mao Ruiz, and Gabriel Acuña forge their senses of belonging through connections to place and musical heritage that are shot through with rich histories of mobility and friction that tie them in particular ways to a complex and multi-faceted Colombia.

As Graham, Graham, and Ashworth (2000) suggested, people are the creators of heritage, not merely passive receivers of it. They create representations and objects of heritage as they need to, and manage them for a range of purposes. For Colombian norteños, the making of their musical heritage serves identification processes that transcend multiple boundaries and counter difference and stigmatization. Mobilizing personal histories and interpretations of the local musical past and present, they sustain both translocal subjectivities and familial ties, and assert the social legitimacy of their musical sensibilities.

Appendix 1: Images

Chapter 1

Image 1. Ferney y el Grupo Zeta. Puli, Cundinamarca, Colombia. November, 2012.

Image 2. Crowd after the bullfight. Puli, Cundinamarca, Colombia. November, 2012.

Image 3. Las Aguilas del Norte at El Rancho de las Aguilas. Villavicencio, Colombia. 2012.

Chapter 2

Image 4. Alberto Chavarriaga, record collector. Medellín, Colombia. October, 2012

Image 5. Cuarteto Carta Blanca. Okeh Records, 1920s. From the record collection of Gabriel Ochoa. Envigado, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

Image 6. Album of Las Estrellitas, Discos Zeida, 1950s. From the record collection of Jose Ospina. Medellin, Colombia. October 2012.

Image 7. Ramiro Arias and El Kaiser. Caldas, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

Image 8. Cantina El Kaiser. Caldas, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

Image 9. Exitos de Carrilera. LP. All of the tracks feature Mexican and Mexican-American artists. From the record collection of El Kaiser. Envigado, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

Image 10. Lupe y Polo. LP. Musart/ Codiscos,1970s. From the record collection of Alberto Chavarriaga. Medellin, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

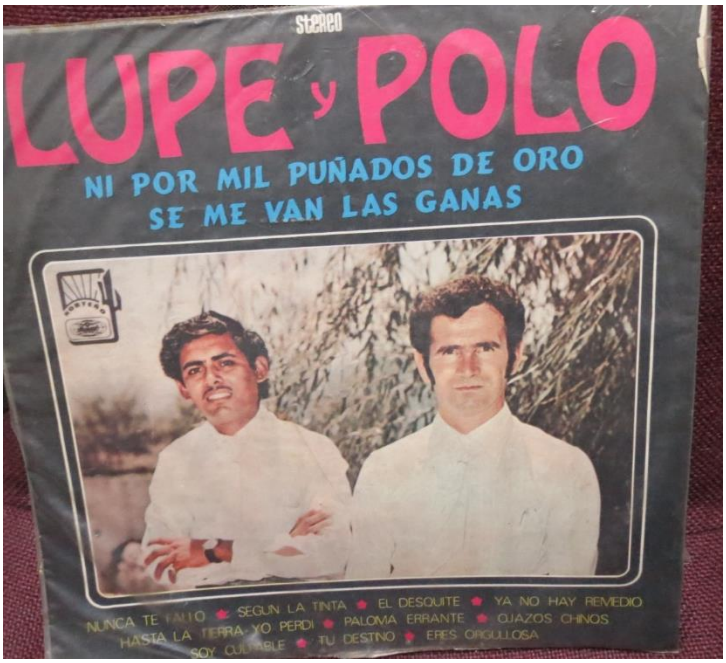


Image 11. La Banda del Carro Rojo, Las Hermanas Calle. 1980s. From the record collection of Alberto Chavarriaga. Medellin, Antioquia, Colombia. October 2012.

Chapter 3

Image 12. Oscar Díaz at his shop. Villavicencio, Meta. 2012.

Image 13. Alirio Castillo. Villavicencio, Meta. July 2012.

Image 14. Cruz de Madera. Chuy Luviano y Los Rayos. Discos Fuentes 1988.

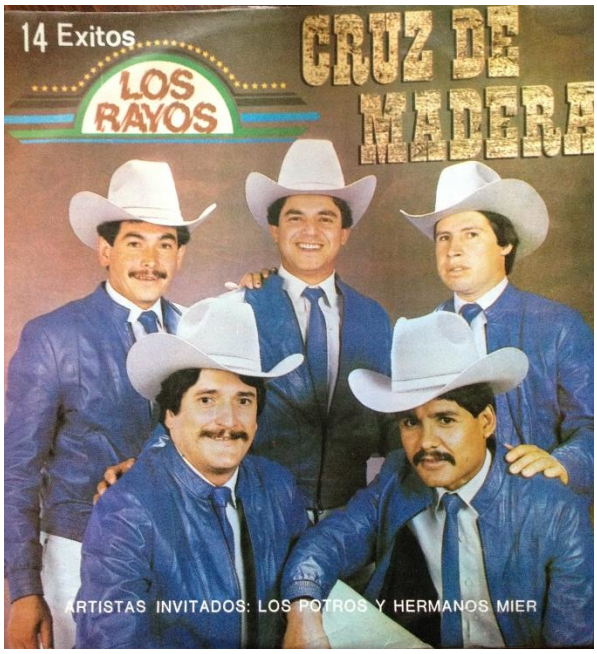


Image 15. La Playa. Villavicencio's Mariachis. 2012.

Chapter 4

Image 16. Uriel Henao, el Rey de los Corridos Prohibidos (the King of Corridos Prohibidos)

Chapter 5

Image 17. Festival Nacional de Música Norteña poster. November 2012.

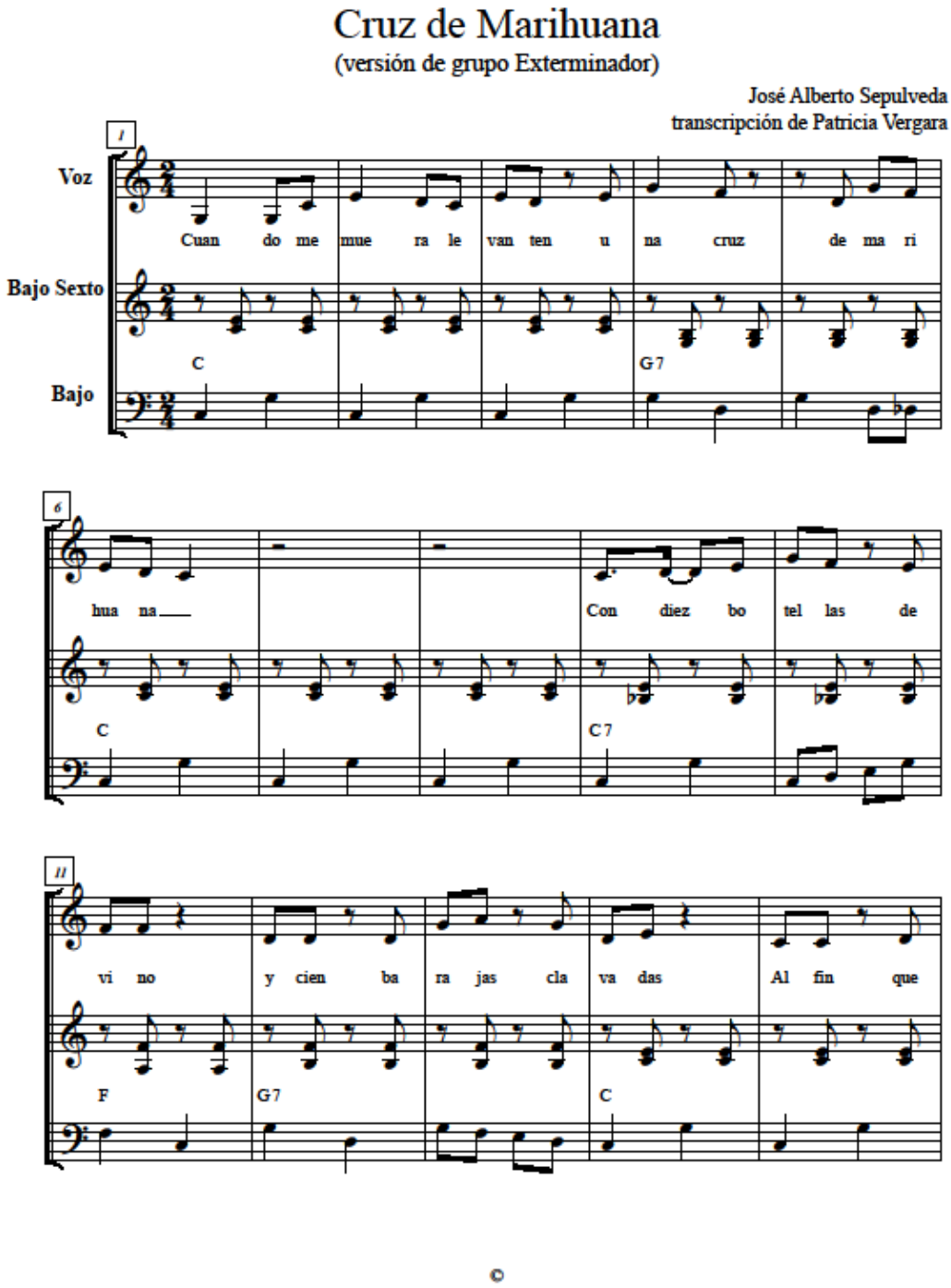
Image 18. Gabriel Acuña at Festival Nacional. Siachoque, Boyacá. Novermber 2012.

Image 19. Crowd at Festival Nacional. Siachoque, Boyacá. Novermber 2012.

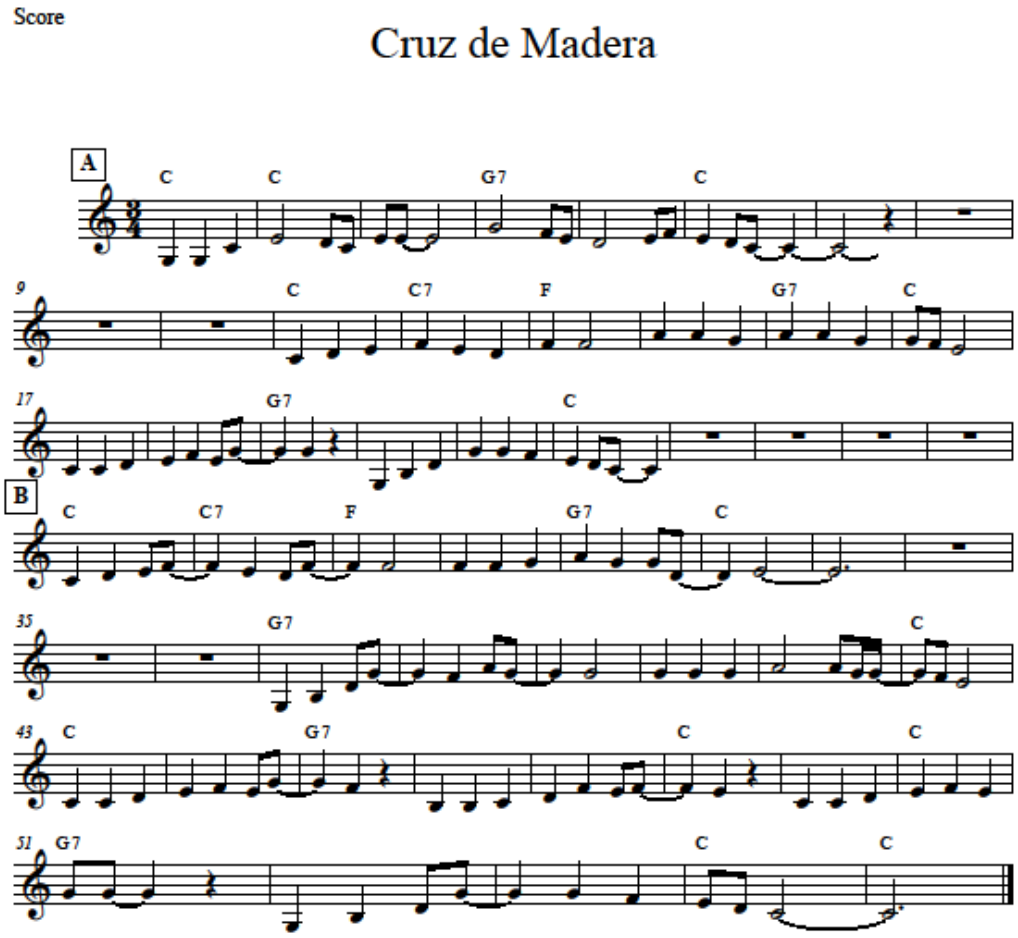
Image 20. Grupo Francotirador at Festival Nacional. Siachoque, Boyacá. November 2012.

Appendix 2: Transcriptions

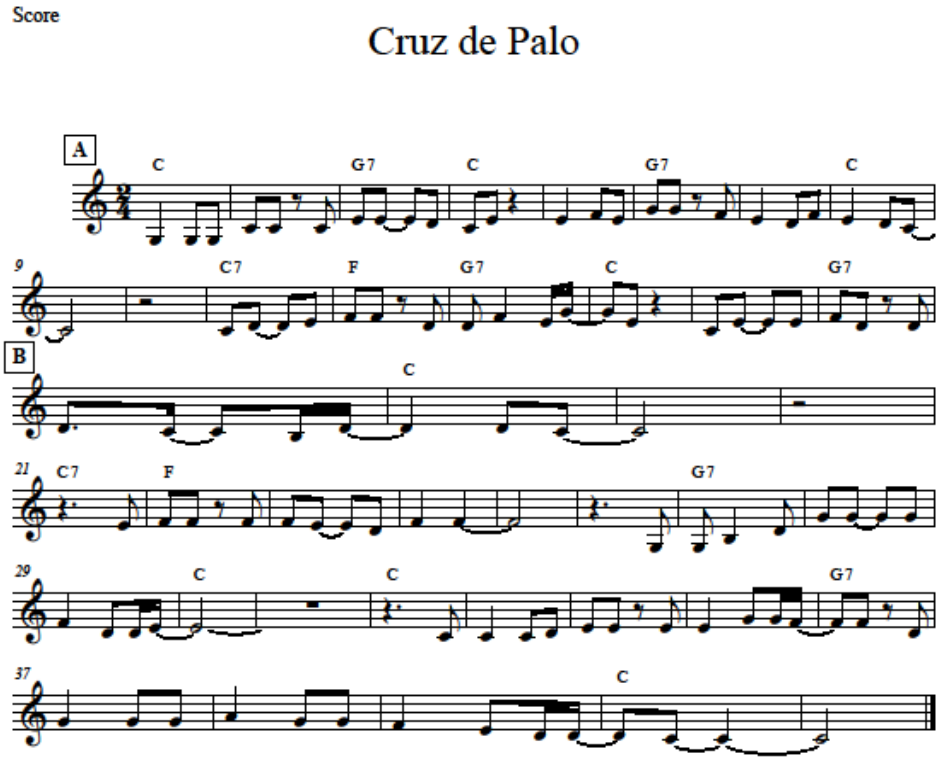
Music Transcription 1. Cruz de Marihuana



Music Transcription 2. Cruz de Madera



Music Transcription 3. Cruz de Palo



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Tocancipá-Falla 2013 Chapter 3 Page 11

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