TRANSGRESSING GENDER AND SEXUALITY ROLES OF MEXICAN FOLKLORIC DANCE: Disidentification in Raíces de mi tierra's 2013 Performance of "La mujer de colores"

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Abstract: As Olga Nájera-Ramírez and others have demonstrated, the Mexican folkloric dance form, or ballet folklórico, was constructed as a cultural tool of the Mexican State to articulate and disseminate a hegemonic narrative of Mexico as a modern nation of "mestizos" in the early part of the twentieth century. While twenty-first century U.S. Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x folklórico dancers of Raíces de mi tierra engage this dance practice as both a method of resistance and community building through cultural representation, the post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism which birthed folklórico continues to impact their performances. This essay examines the performance of "La mujer de colores" by Grupo folklórico de University of California, Santa Barbara: Raíces de mi tierra at the 2013 Danzantes unidos Festival. Drawing from Chicana feminist and queer scholars to examine the intervention Raíces de mi tierra student-choreographer Alejandro Góngora and fellow student dancers make in "La mujer," I argue that by centering lesbian subjects, "La mujer de colores" transgresses the heteronormative and patriarchal roles that underlie the interactions of various raced, gendered and classed bodies of folklórico as they perform the imagined courtship that underpins Mexico as a "mestizo" nation. "La mujer de colores," thus, disidentifies with the carefully guarded repertoire of the folklórico tradition as a performance of nation. The "La mujer" performance demonstrates the limits and possibilities of engaging folklórico as a cultural practice of resistance and community-building in the United States today.

As Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Gabriela Mendoza-García, Anita Gonzalez, and Sydney Hutchinson have demonstrated, the Mexican folkloric dance form, or ballet folklórico, was constructed as a cultural tool of the Mexican State to articulate and disseminate a hegemonic narrative of Mexico as a modern nation of "mestizos" in the early part of the twentieth century. While twenty-first century U.S. Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x

folklórico dancers of Raíces de mi tierra engage this dance practice as both a method of resistance and community building through cultural representation in an era of neoliberal multiculturalism, the post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism which birthed folklórico continues to impact their performances. My analysis of "La mujer de colores," a performance by Grupo folklórico de University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB): Raíces de mi tierra at the 2013 Danzantes unidos Festival (DUF), reads the staged choreography as a potentially transgressive dance practices historically and ideologically. Specifically, I draw from Chicana feminist and queer scholars José Esteban Muñoz, Juana Maria Rodriguez, Deborah Vargas, Olga Nájera-Ramírez and others to examine the intervention Raíces de mi tierra student-choreographer Alejandro Góngora and fellow student dancers make in "La mujer." I argue that by centering lesbian subjects, "La mujer de colores" transgresses the heteronormative and patriarchal roles that underlie the interactions of various raced, gendered, and classed bodies of folklórico as they perform the imagined courtship that underpins Mexico as a "mestizo" nation. "La mujer de colores" disidentifies with the carefully guarded repertoire of the folklórico tradition as a performance of nation. Thus, the "La mujer" performance demonstrates the limits and possibilities of engaging folklórico as a cultural practice of resistance and community building in the United States today.

To build my analysis, I will first describe the dance under examination, "La mujer de colores." I will then flesh out Muñoz's concept of disidentification (1999) and explain how I extend it to theorize how the choreography, song lyrics, and story arc of this performance disidentifies with a Mexican nation that codified folklórico repertoire using a heteropatriarchal courtship narrative. Finally, in order to consider the implications of their decision, I will contextualize Raíces de mi tierra's decision to perform this piece only once, and at a community-based cultural institution rather than the university to which their group belongs within twenty-first century U.S. neoliberal multiculturalism.

Encountering "La mujer de colores" as Performed by Raíces

I joined the Mexican folklórico student dance group Raíces de mi tierra at the University of California, Santa Barbara as a new member in 2013. It was at that time that I learned about a transgressive performance entitled "La mujer de colores" the group danced at the 2013 Danzantes unidos Festival (DUF), an annual national Mexican folkloric dance conference. Choreographed by then-student director Alejandro Góngora, "La mujer de colores" is set to Linda Ronstadt's "Mi ranchito" (1991) and depicts the tragic love story not of a heteronormative couple, but instead of two women from different social classes who love each other despite the social forces and people working to separate them. As a result of the unexpected positive responses from the festival audience—composed of folkloristas and their families—some members of Raíces wanted to include this piece in the group's annual show on the UCSB campus. Entitled "Leyendas divinas" and co-directed by students Dominique Fletes and Alejandro Góngora, the show was filled almost to capacity at 860 seats with community members both from campus and the surrounding area in attendance.

Other members expressed concern that this piece would upset the more "traditional" family members of dancers and the local children enrolled in the group's mentorship program, Semillas de la tierra, who were also dancing in the show. In the end, Raíces decided not to include "La mujer de colores" in the final show that year, leaving members of various gender and sexual orientations split over the decision. The following describes the elements of this contentious performance that I accessed via a digital recording of the dance uploaded onto YouTube.[1]

The clip begins mid-action as recorded sounds of a mariachi playing the fast-paced, joyful end of a song envelope the stage while women dressed in red and

white silk tops and skirts of the upper-class gala dress of Jalisco direct their steps and skirt work towards men in black charro suits. However, one dancer dressed in a yellow ranchera dress and another dressed in gala are flirting, dancing cruzado steps and moving their skirts towards one another in time to the violins. Suddenly, a male dancer dressed in a black charro pulls the Gala woman away by the arm and a second later, another charro and another woman dressed in gala pull the Ranchera to stage right. The rest of the couples stream off-stage as the Gala woman pushes away the first charro, reaching towards the Ranchera. The Ranchera finds herself caught between the remaining couple, as the woman takes hold of the Ranchera in two gentle hands, as though pleading, and the second charro scolds the Ranchera with large hand movements. The Ranchera finally turns away from the couple, who hurries away arm-in-arm as the woman hides her face in one hand and the man holds his hat securely. Meanwhile, the first charro turns away from the Gala woman, throwing his hand up dismissively as the Gala woman continues to reach for the Ranchera. The Ranchera, now alone on stage with the Gala woman, takes a step towards her but then bends down in frustration and pain, clutching her rebozo, as the Gala woman steps away hesitantly, looking down and back at the Ranchera as the final chord of the song is struck.

There is no pause as a soft guitar begins the mournful tempo of "Mi ranchito," and the Gala is left with her hand cradling the side of her face, staring at the Ranchera who holds her rebozo to her mouth and nose in despair. The two wander away from each other in an arc that brings them, unseen, past one another through center stage and back to opposite sides of the stage. With the first syllables of the first verse, they begin to move with sweeping motions on opposite sides of a counterclockwise circle; the Gala sways her skirt and the Ranchera sways her rebozo as they turn back time, mirroring the past-tense of the lyrics and the sense of lost time and place that the nostalgia of rancheras lives in:

"Allá, al pie de la montaña, donde temprano se oculta el sol,"

They split center stage and turn in place, kneeling down with their backs to each other.

"Quedó mi ranchito triste y abandonada ya su labor."

Embodying the physical and emotional space of the ranchera's "ranchito triste," they mirror each others' movements, reaching out with hands outstretched first upstage, then towards the audience and again back upstage. Symbolizing their connection and intimacy, they reach overhead in an open, yearning motion, backs and heads arched towards one another, hands meeting, grasping, and moving down together before breaking apart.

They run to opposite sides of the stage, and with the beginnings of the second verse, they again move in a circle:

"Allí me pasé los años, allí encontré mi primer amor;"

On "encontré," they turn towards one another, visible to each other once again, and with the long, belted-out notes of "mi primer amor" and a sense of young love, they run towards one another, arms encircling one another as they sink down in an embrace, faces pressed together. This closeness is disrupted suddenly as a charro strides on stage towards the Gala, arms stretched out in a questioning motion, carrying with him the disappointment of Ronstadt's voice as she ends the verse:

"Y fueron los desengaños. Los que mataron ya mi ilusión."

The charro drags the Gala away from the Ranchera as the Gala reaches back to her lover, pushing the charro away as the Ranchera clutches her skirt to her face

center stage. The charro leaves as the Gala turns back toward the Ranchera just before Ronstadt's voice belts out the first heart-rending line of the chorus,

"Ayyy corazón, que te vas para nunca volver. No me digas adiós."

The Ranchera and Gala stretch out their skirts with their heads held high as they take dignified, strong rhythmic steps, punctuating the melancholic cry in unison before turning towards one another on "corazón." They mirror one another's skirt work and step towards one another through the end of this verse and the beginning of the next:

"Vuelve a alegrar con tu amor. El ranchito que fue de mi vida ilusión."

On "de mi vida ilusión," the two women turn to face the audience as the first verse returns.

"Allá, al pie de la montaña donde temprano se oculta el sol,"

The Gala grabs the Ranchera's hands and brings them up and over as the Ranchera turns to gaze over her shoulders in a playful movement often used in folklórico partnerwork. On "se oculta el sol," the Gala grabs the Ranchera by the waist as the Ranchera lifts her hands from balancing on the Gala's shoulders up into the air, opening them wide as though embracing the sun.

"Quedó mi ranchito triste y abandonada ya su labor."

The Gala gently bends down, placing the Ranchera on the ground. The Ranchera turns to the side and is held in the Gala's arms on "triste," swaying together in an embrace on "y abondonada." The two break apart with a turn and the Ranchera lifts her rebozo from her shoulders, stretching it out in front of her skirt before twirling it in a circle above her head on "ya su labor" as the

Gala daintily holds her silk skirt stretched out before her, moving back to the Ranchera. On the drawn out last syllable of "labor," the Gala stands behind the Ranchera, wrapping her arms around her waist as the Ranchera brings down the rebozo over their heads to cover them both. The song ends and the audience whistles and claps as the Gala quickly seizes the rebozo from the top of her hair comb where it is caught. The sounds of a more upbeat mariachi song begin as the two talk excitedly to one another, moving towards center stage. The Gala runs off stage, cradling the rebozo as she looks back to the Ranchera at center, who is left with her arm outstretched in yearning towards the Gala before quickly turning and running to the opposite side of the stage, hand raised to cover her mouth; whether in anguish or worry is unclear. She turns back to face center, grabbing the edge of her skirt to begin the next dance as the video ends.

While I did not see this number performed live, I, as a new member of Raíces, certainly navigated the repercussions of the decision not to perform it again. I began to understand this choice as reflecting some of the cultural politics of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x folklórico dance practice, and illuminating the limits and potential of performing nation as a form of resistance in the twenty-first century United States. In my experiences with Raíces, as well as with other national folklórico spaces such as DUF, I have observed that the cultural politics of Chicana/o/x and/or Latina/o/x folklórico practice are rooted in a concern for "authenticity," seeking to protect a notion of "tradition" that carries within it heteropatriarchal roles of gender and sexuality. While the 2013 folklórico performance of "La mujer" challenged heteronormative gender and sexuality roles by centering lesbian love, ultimately this intervention was minimized by the dancers' anxieties about performing a queer narrative of Mexicanness for their own families. Dancers feared their families would experience the performance as a *mis*representation of their heritage and country of origin.

Disidentification in "La mujer de colores"

To better theorize this tension, I analyze this digital recording of a one-time performance of "La mujer de colores" at the DUF conference, drawing from Muñoz's concept of disidentification to articulate how the performers distanced themselves from the narrative of Mexican nation that is reproduced in codified folklórico repertoire—ultimately transgressing heteronormative and patriarchal gender and sexuality norms (1999). To ground my application of this concept, I first depart from Muñoz's understanding of "disidentification" as a strategy that marginalized cultural workers can call upon to challenge performance of the world as made by the State. I then move to a historical contextualization of the Mexican nation, embodied by codified folklórico repertoire, which was developed during the twentieth century post-revolutionary Mexican State project. In this contextualization, I also include a discussion of the heteropatriarchal courtship narrative. It is this world with which the "La mujer" performance disidentifies.

Before I employ this concept, I acknowledge the legacy of cultural workers who, as queer Chicana feminist scholar Deborah Vargas has documented, have engaged gender and sexuality to "break out of the accommodation/resistance binary" and challenged limiting imaginings of Mexican nation and culture (2012, xiii). Likewise, Chicana feminist art historian Karen Mary Davalos agrees that Mexican and Chicana feminist and queer visual and performance artists have a tradition of using their work to "advance a critical commentary about Chicano [and Mexican] cultural politics, such as patriarchal gender expectations, skin color privilege, and heteronormativity" (2017, 38). Singers Lucha Reyes and Rita Vidaurri challenged gender norms by performing rancheras in charro suits (Vargas 2012, vii). All-female Jarabe tapatío performances in 1923 and 1924, as well as performances in 1930 by sisters and folkloristas Nellie and Gloria Campobelloas, which Gabriela Mendoza-García argues demonstrate

a history of cultural performances that both contest and reify patriarchy (2013). And as Chicana feminist and queer studies scholar Laura Gutierrez has demonstrated, a legacy of Mexicana and Chicana feminist artists are evoked today by contemporary artists such as Nao Bustamante and Astrid Hadad, who "reappropriate Mexicanidad to both challenge and critique its nationalistic, patriarchal, and heterosexist constraints and pay homage to it" (2010, 32).

These scholarly insights inform my exploration of how Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x folklórico has been, is, and could be performances of Mexicanness. As a practitioner who has seen the power and potential of folklórico in building empowerment and resiliency for its practitioners, I find it irresponsible to dismiss the growing folklórico dance form as merely a problematic and inauthentic cultural expression born of the twentieth-century Mexican State's consolidation of power. Nor do I move to uncritically celebrate folklórico and ignore its history. Rather, due to the great influence and emotional power that folklórico evokes, we must work to understand folklórico and its heteronormative and gendered performance of Mexicanness in order to transform it.

I read the "La mujer" performance as culturally provocative and productive, as it depicts lesbian love while maintaining engagement of powerful cultural symbology that invokes "we," such as the widely recognized ranchera dress, rebozos, and the romanticized rural Mexican landscape as demonstrated in the song "Mi ranchito" (Ronstadt, 1991). It is a tense navigation between engaging the iconography of Mexican nation and disrupting it that lead me to extend the concept of disidentification as a useful theoretical lens for analysis.

Folklórico: Embodying the State Project of Mexico as Heteropatriarchal Mestizo Nation

In his foundational work, queer of color performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz builds on the works of Chicana and women of color feminists to

theorize disidentification as "survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere" that makes no room for them in the construction of "normative citizenship" (Muñoz 1999, 4). Significantly, disidentification serves to bring subjects outside of the identification/counteridentification binary and its never-ending, mutually constituting conflict of oppressor and oppressed (97). In other words, this strategy works through and against the status quo rather than submitting to it, as in assimilation, or completely rejecting it, as in separatism (11). Rather, the power and potential of disidentification as a strategy is that it transforms and reworks dominant culture (12). It "cracks open" the code of dominant culture and claims elements as raw material, "recycl[ing] and rethink[ing] encoded meaning" in order to "represen[t] a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31) and to construct a new world from the old (196). As a disidentificatory performance, "La mujer" cracked open and exposed the dominant narrative of Mexico that has been codified in folklórico repertoire as part of the post-revolutionary Mexican State's performance of Mexico as a heteropatriarchal mestizo nation. This dominant narrative is the raw material of iconography and social scripts that "La mujer" "recycles and rethinks" (31).

Muñoz (1995) reminds us that the State and other elements of hegemonic order perform the world that serves its interests and that ideologies such as "whiteness, heteronormativity and misogyny" are some of its "performative projects" (199). Indeed, as many feminist scholars of color have argued, the construction of nation is undergirded by the State's performance of racialized, patriarchal gender relations and heteronormativity. The nation-state becomes a timeless and homogenous entity by racializing, sexualizing, and gendering subjects as either ideal citizens or marginalized "outsiders," while "the woman/feminine signifier continues to serve as an alibi or figure of resistance in the fraternal struggles for control of the nation-state and the national project" (Kaplan,

Alarcon, Moallem 1999, 6-7). While the State maintains its power by various channels, the arts can also be employed by the State to embody and visualize its hegemonic vision of the world. In the post-revolutionary period, in the midst of the nation-building project, the emerging Mexican State performed its power through cultural programs. Such programming includes ballet folklórico, which was developed as a State-funded staged performance of "mestizaje," the State-backed official narrative of the Mexican nation that worked to consolidate State power. As Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem discuss, such uses of categories of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as the figure of woman to interpolate ideal citizen-subjects, can be seen in the Mexican nationalist project of the twentieth century and the State-funded art forms of the period (1999).

As Gabriela Mendoza-García (2013), Anita Gonzalez (2004), Ruth Hellier-Tinoco (2011), Sydney Hutchinson (2009), and most significantly, the Chicana feminist anthropologist and folklorista Olga Nájera-Ramírez (1989; 2009) have demonstrated, the Mexican folkloric dance form or folklórico was constructed as a cultural tool of the Mexican State to articulate and disseminate a hegemonic narrative of Mexico as a modern nation of "mestizos." While twenty-first century U.S. Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x folklórico dancers of Raíces de mi tierra engage this dance practice as both a method of community building and resistance through cultural representation, the post-revolutionary nationalism, which birthed folklórico, continues to impact their performances.

At the end of the Mexican Revolution, elites were faced with the challenge of unifying a deeply divided country, the result of not only civil war but also centuries of casta divisions (Sue 2013, 12-13). As they struggled to create a cohesive, united nation-state, elites required an official narrative to outline the story of México and identify whom the "authentic" Mexican citizen is. These elites engaged with European and U.S. "vocabularies of modernization" in

creating the structure and narrative of their own nation-state (Hedrick 2003, 3). In using the "vocabularies of modernization," Mexican elites had to rework European scientific racist ideas so that racial hybrids, who composed much of the nation, were no longer seen as inferior. Rather, they began arguing that racial mixing would lead to the improvement of the Mexican nation as well as national unity, as seen in the works of José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio (Hedrick 2003, 14). The "mestizo" is defined as being the formulaic result of the cultural and racial mixture of Indigenous, particularly Aztec, and Spanish peoples (Moreno Figueroa and Saldivar-Tanaka 2015, 523).

Mestizaje thus relies on the central assumption that there are "primordial" origin races—Spanish and Indigenous—that are fixed cultural and racial anchors for mestizo identity (Wade 2004, 356). Afro-Mexicans are erased, as this does not fit the Spanish-Indigenous formula (Moreno Figueroa and Saldivar-Tanaka 2015, 524). Within this narrative of mestizaje, Mexican artists of this time period engaged in developing and disseminating Mexican nationalism, framing "the maternal body, the Indigenous body, the land" as "originary"—the birthing source of Mexico's existence—throughout their work (Hedrick 2003, 7). Women's primary role in the story of Mexico thus becomes that of the "unmodern, provincial" mother (22). In line with Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem's theorization, we see that the State's narrative of Mexico as a mestizo nation is reliant on the racialization and enforcement of heteropatriarchal gender roles on its population. In addition to literature and murals, the State also employed choreographers and dancers to develop ballet folklórico mexicano as a vehicle for disseminating nostalgic remembering of a romanticized, Mexican past.

As a cultural tool for transmitting and inculcating the ideological components of the mestizaje ideology, by the late 1930s the Secretaria de la Educación

Pública (SEP) had collected various local dances from across the nation and organized them into a repertoire of regional dances that were framed as either Indigenous and rural, or mestizo and urban (Hellier-Tinoco 2011, 138). This repertoire was drawn from and fused with ballet and modern techniques by Amalia Hernandez to develop ballet folklórico as a dance tradition rooted in spectacular performances of Mexican nationhood (Hutchinson 2009). The SEP categorization of these dances as Indigenous or mestizo laid the foundation for the racialized and classed coding of Amalia Hernandez's presentation of the totality of Mexican "mestizo" nationhood as composed of "regions" such as Jalisco ranchero, Jalisco gala, Veracruz sotavento, Nayarit mestizo and many others. As such, the raced and classed bodies that populate folklórico repertoire and embody Mexico as a "mestizo" nation are rooted in the Spanish colonial casta system.

Created to control non-white, non-Spanish born subjects, castas as racialized classifications were enforced by legal codes that restricted rights and mobility based on the individual's casta. Spanish archival documentation of casta hierarchy include El Libro de las Castas and El Libro de los Españoles. These visual representations of castas differentiated between groups through clothing and poses intended to reflect racialized beliefs about different castas (Díaz-Sánchez and Hernández 2013). Attempts to categorize skin color and bodily traits were also key to the Spanish colonial casta system (Hellier-Tinoco 2011, 54). The main racial "stocks" of the casta system were Spanish, African and Native American (Díaz-Sánchez and Hernández 2013, 190). Experiences of racial caste regulation were differentiated by class, gender, and sexuality. For example, casta laws were implemented to regulate the cut and color of clothing to keep mulattos and Indigenous peoples from wearing European fashions and to maintain aesthetic distinctions between castas. While upper-class women had to adhere to strict dress codes limiting their sexual expression, racialized women of lower classes were less regulated and at times had more agency to

dress boldly (Vargas 2012, 43). The importance of clothes in indexing casta during the colonial period is continued in the use of costuming to differentiate between characters in folklórico performances, as originating from and representing different socio-cultural groups in certain geographic locations or "regions." Importantly, the female dancer undergoes visually significant costuming changes in the most widely recognized dance, the Jarabe tapatío, to signal either representation of the state of Jalisco, in which case the woman figure wears ranchera, or Mexican nation, signified by the china poblana.

The Heteropatriarchal Courtship that Underpins Mexican Nation

As articulated by Gabriela Mendoza-Garcia, when performed as a representation of the entire nation, the Jarabe tapatío portrays the colonial figures of the male charro and female china poblana as mestizo bodies that enact the post-revolutionary Mexican State's narrative of the colonial period (2013). In using this dance and the folklórico dance tradition more broadly to "perfor[m] its national identity through the staging and mythification of what it considers to be (usually in the singular) its racial body," (Taylor 2003, 95) folklórico, then, is developed as a repertoire of imagined colonial gestures performed by largely mestizo bodies as well as supporting bodies coded as more Indigenous or Spanish, engaged in courtship within their castas. The movements of folklórico repertoire, like all gestures, are relational and thus powerful physical and conceptual moves that make the "we" of Mexican nation and people possible in extending beyond themselves (Rodriguez 2014, 2). However, the "we" that is performed through folklórico as articulated by post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism, is a bounded collective, representing mestizos as the ideal subjects who are gendered through particular notions of womanhood and manhood (Gutierrez 2010). As Vargas has argued about canonical Chicano/Tejano music, folklórico also performs a heteronormative imaginary in which "people come to understand, relate, and connect to

notions of belonging, history, place, and cultural sensibilities" of Mexican-origin peoples "via the cultural nationalist definition of 'home' and 'community'" (2012, x-xi).

Heteronormative, patriarchal scenarios of love and romance serve as the many regional stories of origin that, together, found the "mestizo" nation of Mexico. Underlying folklórico's performance of these bounded and interconnected home, community, and nation spaces, then, are its heteronormative and patriarchal courtship narratives. The political implications of this courtship narrative are demonstrated by Mendoza-Garcia, who documents and analyzes the "love narrative" of previous Mexican State agent and renowned folklorista Alura Flores de Angeles's widely influential interpretation of the Jarabe tapatío.

Mendoza-García argues that in Flores de Angeles' interpretation, improvisations and modifications were frequent; however, what remained consistent was the heteronormative and patriarchal story of courtship. The charro's physical movements and "musical renderings" of the Jarabe tapatío "serve as a bodily archive" of machismo as the ideal Mexican masculinity (Mendoza-García 2013, 124). The charro figure reflects back the hinging of hegemonic Mexican masculinity on a performed heterosexuality within patriarchal power relations, as his masculinity is validated by aggressive flirtations and pursuit of the china poblana, as well as his "joyous celebration of his conquest" at the end (125). This embodiment of machismo as the ideal Mexican masculinity is mirrored and supported by the china poblana's embodiment of marianismo as ideal Mexican femininity. Adhering to the sinless mother role, she attracts the charro figure through a passive sexuality (127). After some resistance, the dance ends in a choreographed acceptance, achieved through "an oppressive force of sexual coercion" where the china poblana is expected to submit to the charro's relentless desires. In this "love narrative," Mendoza-García finds that

the charro's decision to intoxicate himself when initially rejected by the china poblana is "designed to persuade the china poblana of the charro's desirable masculine traits," who is then "obligated to sober him up" (126).

While Mendoza-García reads this dance by centering its gendered power relations, I add that this narrative also obscures patriarchy's reliance on heteronormativity. By tracing desire, I read this drunkenness not only as a move to persuade the china poblana of the charro's desirability, but a calculated invocation of the woman's expected gender role of sacrificing her own desires to care for others. The courtship narrative that drives the Jarabe tapatío, as *the* show-stopping representation of Mexican nation, is organized around heterosexual male desire while women's desires are marginalized and queer desires are made invisible. Heternormativity thus underpins folklórico's performance of Mexican nation. These gender and sexuality roles pervade the folklórico repertoire. Nájera-Ramírez notes that choreographer Gabriela Rodriguez justifies modification and experimentation to the Jalisco folklórico repertoire by ensuring that she maintains the "essence" of Jalisco, i.e., the male courting the female (2009, 288). In my own experiences dancing folklórico, courtship narratives drive much (but not all) of the choreography. As a result, heteronormativity continues to be a critical dimension in validating folklórico performances as legitimate and faithful to "tradition." In the following section, I interrogate the disidentification with these heteronormative and patriarchal representations of Mexican nation that took place in Raíces' 2013 performance of "La mujer de colores" via a close-read of the choreography, lyrics, and costume choices.

"La mujer de colores": Disidentifying with Mexican Nation

In his examination of black gay male cultural productions of the late '80s and '90s, José Esteban Muñoz makes clear that what these cultural workers

share in common is that they go beyond the burden of merely representing the marginalized in their "(re)telling of elided histories that need to be both excavated and reimagined" (57). In excavating and reimagining the past, some disidentificatory cultural productions engage in a queer melancholia in which "the lost object returns with a vengeance […] as an ideal, a call to collectivize, an identity-affirming example" (52). By engaging melancholia to remember a queer past, cultural workers develop "an active kernel of utopic possibility" that points toward a future that makes space for queer subjects (25).

In moving beyond merely including and representing lesbian bodies in the performance of Mexican nation, "La mujer" used melancholia to reimagine official accounts of Mexican history, filling the erasures to affirm and make visible lesbian mexicanas. In doing this work, "La mujer" cracked open the dominant code and exposed the norms and violence that have worked to erase and repress LGBTQ mexicanos. The performance broke outside of the identification/counteridentification binary by neither merely assimilating nor fully rejecting Mexican nation. Rather, "La mujer" challenged the post-revolutionary State performance of Mexico as a heteropatriarchal "mestizo" nation by breaking away from codified folklórico practices. It engaged the folklórico repertoire's footwork, costumes, and symbols as raw material to expose the violence of that official narrative and gesture towards a better world where Mexicanness encompasses queer subjects.

As a performance set to Linda Ronstadt's "Mi ranchito," "La mujer" displayed the typical ranchera elements of melodrama with parallels drawn between concepts of rural place, lost home space, and lost love. Like folklórico, rancheras developed in the post-revolutionary nationalist period as "an expressive musical form intimately associated with Mexican identity" in the U.S. and Mexico (Nájera-Ramírez 2003, 184). Furthermore, similar to the ranchera genre,

codified folklórico repertoire typically "express(es) nostalgia for a provincial lifestyle and project(s) a romanticized idyllic vision of the past," (185) often in a celebratory tone, and is interwoven with issues of social class, gender, and I would add, race and sexuality (189). While still touching upon many of these themes, "La mujer" as a disidentificatory performance departed from the uplifting, nostalgic celebration of the romanticized past that folklórico repertoire usually performs, instead moves to a queer melancholia that points to an alternative world that could be. This can be seen in the rapid shift from the joyful, fast-paced notes of the song played at the beginning of the recording to the mournful sounds and lyrics of "Mi ranchito." As this song resounded across the stage and auditorium, the circular, counterclockwise steps of the Gala and Ranchera at the beginning of the performance signaled to the audience the dance's reflexive movement to the past love between Gala and Ranchera, affirmed by the lyrics locating us "allá al pie de la montaña," where the Ranchera met her first love. By drawing the audience into the tragic lost love story of the protagonists, the melancholy of the performance provoked a sense of yearning, not for a lost idyllic heteropatriarchal mestizo past, but for a queer world where the two protagonists would not be torn apart. By ending with the two parting ways after facing pressures to separate, the spectator is compelled to ask, what happened to the protagonists? How did their love story end? The moment prior to separation in which the Ranchera flourished the rebozo—a symbol of Mexican femininity—in front of her body for the audience to see, and twirled it overhead to bring it down as a protective covering on both the Ranchera and her Gala lover, gestures towards a queer Mexico that could and should be. In using a sign of "authentic" and legitimized Mexican femininity to protectively cover their bodies and their love, a move is made towards reimagining Mexican nation through a melancholic remembrance of a lost love that could have been allowed to flourish in an alternative Mexico. In this momentary gesture towards queer Mexico, lesbian love was claimed as

"authentically" Mexican in a direct rejection of the post-revolutionary State's defining of Mexican subjects within heteropatriarchal mestizaje.

Similar to folklórico, as a cultural production of the nationalist project, rancheras also perform Mexicanness as heteropatriarchal mestizaje, centering heteronormative cis-male desire. However, Nájera-Ramírez argues that when women perform rancheras and become the protagonist, they flip the patriarchal script of the ranchera repertoire on its head and "powerfully expose male privilege" (192). In "La mujer de colores," not only was the privileging of male subjects exposed, but lesbian subjects and desire were made visible through a reflection on the history of sexual and gender control in Mexican societies since the casta system of the colonial period.

As in all folklórico performances, costuming signifies the characters' casta in "La mujer de colores." Rooted in mores from the colonial period, the woman dressed in the Jalisco ranchero costume wore a headpiece of multicolored ribbons that entwined into two bows at either side of the head in front and was dressed in a yellow skirt and high-necked top of cotton cloth with green, orange, and blue ribbons on the ends of the heavy skirt, and in ruffles at the chest. The ranchera, through both the name of the costume and the clothing itself, was marked as working-class, mestiza, and rural. Her accessory of an orange rebozo, a cultural symbol of Mexican femininity, accentuated her casta as, not Spanish, but mestiza. In contrast, the woman dressed in Jalisco gala wore a golden hair comb at the top of her bun and was dressed in a white silk top and light-weight red silk skirt with white lace, pink ribbon and gold thread details. White, gold and pink ribbons ran around the skirt with black lace at the edge and a long white petticoat underneath. Similarly, through the name of the costume and the clothing itself, the gala was marked as upper-class and Spanish. The physical labor it would take to keep the Ranchera's weighted, ruffled skirt at shoulder height and move it in

waves and flourishes, in comparison to the lighter silk skirt of the upper-class Gala, underscored class division of labor. The other characters who surrounded and interacted with the Ranchera and Gala at the beginning of the performance were also dressed in gala dresses and fine black charro suits, communicating to the audience that this was a social scene from the Gala's upper-class world. The Ranchera, in her bright yellow dress with multicolored ribbons and orange rebozo, was immediately located as out of place. The difference between their social position as reflected in their costuming helped to situate their courtship as threatened by the race and class casta system that divided them, in addition to heteronormativity, established through the choreography between the masses of gala and charro couples seen at the beginning of the video.

Through its narrative of tragic love as a consequence of casta and nation, this performance revealed the interwoven nature of oppressive systems of gender, sexuality, race and class, as heteropatriarchy and casta system are at work to keep the Ranchera and Gala apart. At the beginning of the video, the Gala and Ranchera ended the first song dancing towards one another rather than the customary end of Jalisco songs with heteronormative couples dancing steps towards one another as the women used their skirt work as a tool of flirtation towards the males. Before the song ended, the Ranchera and Gala were met with charro and gala figures who physically forced them away from each other in attempts to reimpose the choreography of heteropatriarchal courtship. The disruption of the normative choreography revealed that, beneath the narrative of joyful courtship and celebration, lies a reality of coercion, control, and repression that reproduces the Mexican State's choreography of heteropatriarchal courtship. It was only when they were alone, without couples around them as agents of colonial society, that the two women were able to embrace. In these physically intimate scenes, they were not courting, but already loving each other, again departing from folklórico's usual emphasis on heteronormative courtship.

Importantly, the performance cut out a verse from the original version of Ronstadt's rendition of "Mi ranchito" which allowed the choreography to make clear that society was to blame for their inability to love, as the Ranchera did not damn her lover's eyes for bewitching her into love and desire:

> "Mal haya los ojos negros
> Que me embrujaron con su mirar.
> Si nunca me hubieran visto,
> No fueran causa de mi penar." (1991)

This performance broke away from codified folklórico, not only through its song choice but also through its original choreography and storyline that engaged the raw material of the folklórico tradition (the steps, the costumes, the movements) to move away from the "traditional" choreographies that embody the heteropatriarchal mestizaje narrative. By breaking away from these practices and focusing on the individual relationship expressed between two dancers rather than a group of dancers moving in unison, as is customary, this performance invites the audience to the margins of the collective, and allows more complex minority subjects to emerge as visible. In addition to exposing the oppressive systems at work, the performance also engaged powerful nationalist iconography of the "ranchito" and the Ranchera character as an ideal Mexican "mestiza" subject to excavate lesbian love in the Mexican past.

Through the use of Linda Ronstadt's "Mi ranchito," Ronstadt's voice became the voice of the Ranchera, as she was the protagonist of the piece and frequently center-stage, from the moment our eye was drawn to her in the crowd of upper-class dancers at the beginning of the video to the end of the piece when she was left alone on-stage (1991). In sharp contrast to much of the ranchera genre where heterosexual cis-male desire is centered and both woman and land are

lost, absent, yearned-for objects of the past, here the Ranchera protagonist was our subject and her love and desire for the Gala were foregrounded. Importantly, the centrality of the rebozo in the Ranchera's performance, especially when used to express anguish in covering her mouth and face when forced apart from the Gala, further mark a proximity to indigeneity as an originary category on which mestizaje relies. Remnants of the passive Indigenous woman trope are carried through the rebozo as it was the Gala who more actively resisted the reimposition of heteronormative colonial society by physically pushing away the charro in two scenes and lifting the Ranchera up in a moment of romance foreshadowed to end by the lyrics of the song.

The sad and abandoned ranchito as a metaphor for the Ranchera and her tragic love for the Gala maintains the nationalist trope of representing romanticized rural homeland through women's bodies. The lyrics located us immediately within the rural home space of the Ranchera within the first two lines of the first verse. The location of the ranchito "al pie de la montaña" contextualized the ranchito as cast in the shadow of the mountain, paralleling the Ranchera and her lover who were also overshadowed by the overwhelming social odds stacked against their non-heteronormative and cross-casta romance. Furthermore, the Ranchera's "ranchito" as working-class home space and origin of her subjectivity was defined in part through the labor required to maintain it. As the sun set early, a reference to the early loss of young love with the Gala, the labor of love maintaining the home space that defined the Ranchera was left undone. As they reached out in yearning towards one another to symbolize the lost home space of "mi ranchito triste" with their own bodies at the beginning of the dance, the performers made clear that this ranchito was lost due to the social forces that tore their bodies apart from one another. Significantly, while folklórico performances typically end in male conquests of women, it was through this tragic lesbian love narrative that the audience was confronted with

the possibility that home space is not possible when love and desire are denied. Thus, while this performance engaged familiar symbols of nation, it revealed the destructive and debilitating consequences of nationalism that denies subjects who do not fit within its ideal heteropatriarchal mestizo citizenship.

In moving away from the underpinnings of codified folklórico repertoire that perform the story of Mexican nation in line with the interests of the elites' constructing the nation in the post-revolutionary period, "La mujer de colores" disidentified with "heteropatriarchal mestizo nation," gesturing us toward a queer Mexico by reimagining the past, not as a romanticized lost past, but as a mourned lost queer past that served as a call to action for a queer, utopic future. The "Mi ranchito" song and choreography transported us to a past that is often forgotten and lost; a queer mexicano past often silenced and buried. This disidentificatory politics is reflected even in the title of the piece, as "La mujer de colores" can be read to allude to both the widely recognized Mexican folk song "De colores," used in Chicano Movement protests, as well as the rainbow flag of the LGBTQ civil rights movement. The power and potential of this disidentificatory performance is that it engaged two female dancers who perform a love and desire for one another while maintaining engagement of powerful cultural symbology that invoked "we." It was a reminder that LGBTQ communities have been part of Mexico and, in going back to the past, it worked to remind the audience of the present existence and marginalization of LGBTQ members in our community and culture. In centering lesbian subjects, rendered unthinkable in the romanticized Mexican past of the nationalist State project, "La mujer" as a minoritarian performance critiques the dominant ideology and worldview that oppresses and elides queer mexicanas/os/xs. To state that queer communities are also Mexico, and not assimilate or reject hegemonic Mexican narrative raised the question, is this heteropatriarchal narrative of mestizaje what we must accept or is another Mexicanness possible?

Implications under 21st Century U.S. Neoliberal Multiculturalism

The transgressions of "La mujer" were limited as the specter of heteropatriarchal mestizo nation and normative citizenship loomed over them, in addition to the immense social odds that were stacked against their cross-casta romance. The challenge to heteronormativity was short-lived. This performance did not perform a queer nation outright; rather it deconstructed and challenged the world that the twentieth century post-revolutionary Mexican State imagined, and pushed us to begin to collectively imagine and yearn for a queer Mexico.

The lived cultural politics that led to Raíces members' majority decision to not perform this piece as part of their annual show demonstrates that these post-revolutionary definitions of Mexicanness continue to gatekeep what, where, and when folklórico is performed. However, there is also the context of twenty-first century U.S. multicultural neoliberalism that adds a further layer to potential interpretations of folklórico performance, whether replicating or disidentifying with codified folklórico repertoire.

In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Jodi Melamed provides a new theory of U.S. racial formation in the post-World War II period. Melamed argues that it is during this period that "a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity" emerges and has been driven forward by three phases of official, State-recognized antiracisms including: racial liberalism (1940s-60s); liberal multiculturalism (1980s-90s); and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s) (2011,1). Melamed finds that the university is a central site for developing present-day neoliberal multicultural politics (45). Bruce Spear (1993) and Petersen and Davies (2010) agree that the modern-day university aligns itself with neoliberalism and that under this model, difference is only valued as far as it is exploitable. Universities increasingly draw on claims to a "diverse" campus population to pull in prospective students, arguing

that being part of a diverse campus better prepares students for experiences in the job market and society at large (Grasmuck and Kim 2010, 222). In this context, a diverse student body becomes an important legitimizing symbol of the university while in actuality, departments and entities on campus that provide diversity-focused programming are cut, underfunded and devalued (Schlund-Vials 2018, 71). The funding channels have also narrowed to privilege "ethnically exclusive" approaches to cultural production rather than cross-cultural works of solidarity, both at the university and off-campus (Gonzalves 2009, 96). Working-class students of color and the diversity initiatives that aim to address inequality become like backgrounds to the training ground for the new multicultural professional-managerial classes.

For members of the ethnicity-based student dance group Raíces de mi tierra, their university—like universities across the nation—is immersed in neoliberal multiculturalism at an institutional level. The school was on the brink of becoming a federally recognized Hispanic Serving Institution at the time of the "La mujer" performance in 2013 (recognized 2015), something that, under neoliberal multiculturalism, not only brings recognition for its validation of a statistically diverse student body, but also an attached pool of funding for the university. Similar to Eduardo Gonzalves' findings in his 2010 study on university Pilipino Cultural Nights, Raíces members carry out cultural work for Latinos on campus, in the local area, and for their own families to claim a space and redress the lack of institutional cultural resources at this now-recognized Hispanic-Serving Institution (90). Ultimately, Raíces' presence becomes a legitimizing element, while the group continues to face institutional obstacles such as a lack of committed funding and a lack of access to sufficient practice space that has led to the group practicing in university parking lots on cement in the last few years.

The ultimate decision to not perform "La mujer" as part of the annual show in order to maintain "tradition" was not about the school or access to funding

by maintaining their "ethnic exclusivity," which is valuable in the neoliberal university. Rather, the decision was driven by cultural politics and the impulse to preserve the heteropatriarchal mestizaje narrative as "tradition" in order to avoid offending family members. Significantly, Raíces' performance was maintained within the hegemonic narrative of Mexicanness at the neoliberal university, while the disidentificatory performance of "La mujer" was performed at a community-based conference centered on cultural preservation. As a performance for the DUF audience of practitioners and artists of all levels of expertise, "La mujer" was not focused on performing "diversity" for the mainstream but on advocating for complicating and re-envisioning Mexicanness and Mexico to make space for its queer people. It was not simplifying and packaging folklórico for pleasurable, palatable consumption, but engaging it as a vehicle for cultural transformation at an institutional site dedicated to preserving heritage.

Conclusion

Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x folklórico groups, like Raíces de mi tierra, engage with the legacy of the twentieth century post-revolutionary Mexican State project in their own context of twenty-first century U.S. neoliberal multiculturalism. Underlying folklórico's performance of Mexico as a "mestizo" nation are its heteronormative and patriarchal courtship narratives. These courtship narratives are organized around heterosexual male desire, while women's desires are marginalized and explicitly queer desires are made invisible. The power and potential of the "La mujer" performance was that it centered lesbian love and desire *while* maintaining engagement of powerful cultural symbols that invoke "we" such as the widely recognized ranchera dress, rebozos, and the romanticized rural Mexican landscape as invoked by Ronstadt's rendition of "Mi ranchito" (1991). It was able to balance a tense navigation between engaging with iconography of nation and disrupting the boundaries of nation at once; however the performance

was not yet beyond nation. "La mujer" does the cultural work of asking us to consider, what would a folklórico performance that reconfigures gender and sexuality roles and centers women and queer desire look like? What would performances of "Mexicanness" and Mexican community look like outside of the heteronormative and patriarchal? As more choreographers and groups continue to queer the folklórico dance form, caution must be maintained, as a piece that merely brings in queer bodies and does not change the dance tradition itself could be read to be in line with the neoliberal multiculturalist push for "inclusivity" rather than a moment of queer world-making, as Muñoz describes. "La mujer de colores" is one piece that went beyond mere inclusivity. Such pieces might push against the neoliberal multicultural grain as they are not easily reduced down to a neatly packaged, uncomplicated performance of "Mexicanness" that is easily ready for consumption.

Notes

[1] The video is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlPjHcqqaOU.

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