Si Yo Vivo A Mi Manera (If I Live My Own Way):

narrative, persona, and challenges to machismo in the songs of Mélida Rodríguez

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Bachata is a popular Dominican musical genre that emerged as an international phenomenon during the early 1990s. In the preceding decades as far back as the ’60s, bachata grew out of the margins of Dominican society where it could express the social means of the low-class inhabitants of impoverished urban neighborhoods and communities. With only a few exceptions in the early decades, bachata was performed and written by men. One such exception was Mélida Rodríguez, whose brief career posed challenges to the patriarchal norms of Dominican society writ large and the dominance of men within the genre. This thesis explores the different ways that Rodríguez subverted gender norms through bachata and its unique position as a music in flux at the border of tradition and modernity. I argue that Rodríguez’s voice as a composer and singer was a nimble vehicle to oppose machismo. Markers of her singing style, such as her ability to shift rapidly between delivery methods, are also expressive and meaningful within her cultural context. Through analysis of Rodríguez’s treatment of narrative and performance persona, I point to a clearer understanding of bachata’s expression of immediate social needs of the time.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> Mis amigos de Fiesta, nosotros la presentamos ya hace unas dos o tres semanas y ha sido un escándalo. Mucha gente ha escrito que la vuelvan a poner, las personas han llamado a nuestro querido director Aquiles Durán, y a un servidor. Inclusive hay personas que han preguntado por ella, respecto a dónde estaba. Nosotros estamos orgullosos de traer a una artista que es esencia del pueblo, Mélida Rodríguez. – Anthony Ríos[1]
>
> (My friends of Fiesta, we brought her here about two or three weeks ago and it was a sensation. A lot of people have written to bring her on again, they even called our dear director Aquiles Duran, and myself. There are also people asking for her in respect to where she has been. We are proud to bring [you] an artist who is the essence of the people, Mélida Rodríguez.)

In his introduction to a performance on the Dominican television show Fiesta de Teleantillas in the early 1980s, Anthony Ríos, in typical showman fashion, hypes the audience up for Mélida Rodríguez, the show's guest. He explains that people keep asking for her, that they want to know where she has been (in this case because she had not performed to the mainstream public in many years), and that having her back on the show is something special. As he leaves the stage, two guitarists begin playing and the video eventually focuses on Rodríguez as she begins singing. For all the buildup and excitement of the introduction, Rodríguez starts off with such a quiet and low voice that the words are unintelligible, and she cannot compete with the close-miked acoustic guitars. At first this seems like it could be a problem of the audio production on set, but it becomes apparent as the song goes on that Rodríguez's voice easily cuts through the guitars when she intends to. She performs with an emergent intensity. At first, she sings with her eyes closed or looking up, not engaging directly with the audience or camera, as if she were

[1] "La Pionera En La Bachata Melida Rodriguez - Porque Te Fuiste - Micky Suero Videos - Video Dailymotion," accessed June 12, 2024, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7xz8sg.

singing only to herself. But just as she uses her voice to push past the guitars, she begins to look directly at the audience as the song becomes more intense.

In this gradual emergence, Ríos's description of Rodríguez as an artist becomes unquestionable: she appears in control of not only how she sings, but also how she presents herself as a persona, storyteller, and participant in her narrative. Throughout her career, Rodríguez appears to have had the drive to tell stories through song and performance, ones that reflect both personal and communal experiences. Bachata came out of poor rural communities that had migrated into urban centers in the Dominican Republic during the middle of the 20th century. In these communities, patriarchal gender norms prevailed. Rodríguez was one of very few women writing or singing bachata in this period. Despite this, Rodríguez's musical output was substantial for her relatively short career. Born in Dos Ríos, Hato Mayor in 1940 before moving to the capital Santo Domingo, she produced three LPs from 1967 to 1972 as well as many singles before her death in 1982. In total, she composed over 20 songs and covered many others by a variety of Latin American artists. Rodríguez's impact on bachata and Dominican music has usually been summed up in two points: that she was the first woman to sing bachata, and that the title track of her first album (and stage name) "La Sufrida" presents some of the sociological issues that surrounded bachata's early decades and setting (Matos 2002, 22). Of course, these observations are true, but what else about Rodríguez's career and her musical creativity can speak to bachata's early history?

This thesis investigates bachata's influences and how they impacted the work of Rodríguez. But it is also an exploration of the many ways that she chose to express herself as an individual artist, a woman, and as someone who lived among and spoke for the marginalized class within which bachata emerged. Bachata as a genre is notoriously hard to define, mostly

because as a style it merged with many other different ones. It was for a long time associated with the lowest classes in Dominican society and not taken seriously as a kind of music. Bachata displays the artistry of its practitioners often in a practical way: speaking about the social environment where it was popular and yet providing new expressions with which its audiences could resonate. For Rodríguez, music in part expressed a changing norm with regard to gender and expectations about women and her especially powerful voice seemed to fit the new image of empowerment that being in cities brought to women. In the following exploration of Rodríguez's music and of bachata, I interrogate how Rodríguez's voice tells a story within the real story of Dominican marginality through lyrics, narrative, and portrayal of different personas. It is a story that speaks not only about what it was to be a member of that community, but also to be at the point of contact between different modes of being: traditional vs. modern, upper vs. lower class, and the sometimes fluid boundaries of gender.

Rodríguez's use of expressive vocal techniques is particularly interesting to me. Being one of the few women singing bachata in her time marked Rodríguez's voice, but it was also marked by how she used her voice. Rodríguez sometimes shifts rapidly between registers and vocal techniques. For example, she might belt (singing in a high register while still using chest voice) but then quickly drop into a "sob" (a resonant use of chest voice) as she does in the performance of "¿Por Qué Te Fuiste?" on Fiesta mentioned earlier. In other cases, she varies her vocal delivery in subtle ways like when she uses breathy phonation at the beginning of a sentimental bolero to signal both diegetic and aural intimacy. When Rodríguez is projecting defiance, her voice can sound blunt and strident. In brief, Rodríguez was apt at altering her voice to heighten drama and that quality further enriches the story that bachata's emergence tells.

Bachata as music and social practice

By the late 1970s, bachata had finally become something of its own genre. Developed initially out of cosmopolitan guitar-based bolero in the 1950s and '60s, bachata gradually changed and incorporated features of other genres like merengue, guaracha, and ranchera. The eventual success of bachata as an international genre draws attention to the more recent developments of its history. Research covering the early decades is minimal. A major influential work that covers the history and social context of bachata is Deborah Pacini Hernandez's *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (1995). This book offers an extensive history of bachata as it moved from a rural setting into an urban one and the specific sociopolitical events that permitted it to proliferate. Pacini Hernandez focuses especially on matters of class and hegemonic relations within the Dominican Republic and how that corresponds to the genre. Central to her thesis is the intricate connection between the economy (both the national and more importantly the informal sector) and the Dominican Republic's popular music industry. Pacini Hernandez seeks to explain the gradual development of the genre from being in the margins of society to coming into the mainstream. In Pacini Hernandez's opinion, intrinsic to bachata is

> its ability to articulate needs and concerns of people being forced to adapt to the difficulties of urban experience under conditions of extreme poverty. Over time, bachata has successfully expressed the cultural values, such as attitudes about sex, money and power, that its practitioners and patrons have adopted in response to life on the margins of modern Dominican society. (33)

In response to this assessment, Pacini Hernandez questions the reasons for the minority role of women in bachata as a popular music. She considers the predominance of male practitioners, the emergence of chauvinism in the *amargue* style in the 1980s, and the fact that women musicians in the Dominican Republic typically performed in other styles or genres. Though the first two are cause and effect, the third posits an important question of identity and significance: for those few

women who created and performed bachata, how does their performance and expression of voice correspond to the social context and needs of its community? Some of these dynamics can be elaborated through a dissection of the broader social context, which I show through Rodríguez's music and creative voice.

In addition to Pacini Hernandez's book, Julie A. Sellers's *Bachata and Dominican Identity* (2014) addresses the greater social and political trends that affected bachata specifically through its transition from the margins into an international market during the 1990s and '00s. Sellers's focus is on Dominican identity and subjectivity in relation to the genre. Her argument about the formation of "dominicanidad" (Dominicanness) circles around aspects of race and hegemony established under the regime of Rafael Trujillo lasting from 1930 until 1961. Sellers also compares two sides of the discourse of Dominican identity: the essentialist perspective that argues that individual identity comes from collective identity and the constructionist perspective that sees individual identity arises in reaction to external social or political causes (12). In other words, in the essentialist model individual identity emerges from a collective body or a conglomeration of cultural and social traits and traditions held in common by members of a community. Meanwhile, the constructionist model makes identity a subjective reaction to various influences, often controlled by those in power. For bachata and its emergence in the 1960s and '70s, these models broach two versions of history: that bachata came essentially from within or was constructed as a reaction to the influence of hegemonic power.

How these two sides of identity creation apply to women, however, remains problematic in bachata's early decades as a genre. Specifically, an artist such as Rodríguez "[challenges] the social constructions of marianismo and machismo" (Sellers 2014, 109) by expressing agency to do as she (i.e., her persona) pleases even when that includes disreputable things like drinking or

infidelity. Such a position is at odds with traditional social norms, bringing into question whether identity is truly collapsible into either an essentialist or constructionist model. To put it another way, Rodríguez was able to reconfigure her persona as she saw fit to express traditional and non-traditional ways of life. Is there the possibility that identity exists somewhere in the middle, where subjectivity and positionality can shift in alignment with the models? Within Rodríguez's musical identity, I propose that this middle ground option allowed for variations in style and expression likely unachievable if she was not a woman who also pushed back against what a woman was expected to be in society's view. As a Spanish literature scholar, Sellers approaches bachata from a lyric-first standpoint that can provide interpretive insights about narrative; my research intersects with Sellers with a particular interest in the musical significance of narrative in Rodríguez's works.

This thesis examines closely the multifaceted circumstances surrounding Rodríguez's emergence as the first bachatera recording artist. I am specifically interested in the creative ways Rodríguez express issues of gender, class, identity, and subjectivity in her compositions and performances. I will draw on music-theoretical work done on persona, narrative, and vocal timbre in popular music in conjunction with cultural studies to inform my analysis of Rodríguez's musical output. Through this analysis and investigation, I will attempt to build an understanding of bachata and its significance through the voice. In doing this work and detailing feminine vocality, I will consider in part what Pacini Hernandez questions: why women did not produce more bachata in its early decades, especially when female artists in bolero (and to an extent in merengue) were well-respected.

Persona, narrative, vocal authority, and address

In his book *Song Means* (2012), musicologist Allan Moore—building off ideas from Simon Frith (1996) and Philip Auslander (2009)—suggests that a singer's identity in recorded song can be understood in three interconnected parts: performer, persona, and protagonist. For Moore, the performer is an individual with "an observable historical position and identity" but whose position is not essential to a listener's experience of their performance (180). Stemming from the two-facet ideation of the performer (the performer as a person aside from performing and in the act of performing), Moore's persona is the performer's musical presence: an illusion of an embodied entity (through the performer) that in recorded music is created by the recording, production, and engineering. Moore's final category is the persona's existence within the song's lyrics as the narrative's protagonist (181).

How these three parts of the singer's identity relate is usually connected in some way to the song's story. I am particularly interested in the juncture of performer and persona, as Rodríguez's close ties to her social setting express a complex interweaving of those categories. While his theory is formulated around popular music from the United States and Europe, Moore's conception of the persona serves as a viable model for describing and analyzing bachata. For bachata's practitioners, establishing a musical identity both in terms of developing the genre and individually as artists was always tied to their social setting. Being able to adapt or respond to the tastes of an audience also influenced the reification of identity. For Rodríguez, she accomplished these through the use of multiple musical and narrative personas, which reveal some of the social factors circulating in the margins of Dominican society.

Another take on persona in popular music in Latin America has been described and explored in the book *The Great Woman Singer* (2017) by cultural theorist Licia Fiol-Matta.

Tracing the lives and careers of four Puerto Rican artists who she calls "great woman singer[s]," Fiol-Matta seeks to reconfigure how women are often treated as only singers and not artists who have some form of agency (4–5). To facilitate this perspective the book proposes that the artists subverted societal or cultural norms of gender and performance through the use of a "thinking voice" (7). In addition to highlighting the ways that these singers individually opposed the norms contextually, Fiol-Matta is also interested in "querying instances where singularity erupts despite heterosexism and misogyny, through the vehicle of voice" (4). This thesis proceeds with both of these views in mind and evaluates how they can coexist. Moore's interest in the singer-listener connection and Fiol-Matta's in the singer-culture/community connection provide a rich intersection of perspectives. I believe a richer understanding comes from a pluralistic methodology rather than an exclusive one particularly when dealing with music set in society's margins. Bachata's musicians and artists deserve the respect and dignity of being individuals, *and* we need to retain a view of the context in which they lived.

One of Rodríguez's important musical personas is the self-assured, street-savvy woman. In the Dominican Republic, Rodríguez's persona might be called a *tíguera* (female tiger), in part because she is able to occupy the liminal space of *la calle* (the street) but also because of her personality. Along with the more common masculine form the *tíguere*, these identities have become fundamentally attached to urban Dominican society especially within low- and working-class settings. Musically, the phenomenon of *tigueraje* has been associated with *merengue típico* and was examined by Sidney Hutchinson in *Tigers of a Different Stripe* (2017). As a mode of transgressing gender norms, Hutchinson argues that *tigueraje* began taking hold in Dominican society as a reaction to the dictatorship of Trujillo. Her book offers many intersectional perspectives that relate to bachata, namely in the analysis of gender, genre, and class in

Dominican society and its music. Rodríguez's performance of *tigueraje* reveals some of the social undercurrents that were affecting bachata and Dominican bolero in the 1960s.

Bachata emerged just as the pan-Latin bolero craze was beginning to taper off. Tracing some of the stylistic traits that are held in common between the two genres helps formulate an understanding of where bachata began and how it changed over time. Like bachata, the history and development of bolero is somewhat unclear. Originating in Cuba, eventually bolero became a ubiquitous style in Latin America during the first half of the 20th century. George Torres's survey of the genre (2002) connects Cuban bolero to the ultra-popular Mexican form of bolero, which ended up being an enormous influence. The Mexican style of bolero had a strong following in the Caribbean in the 1940s and '50s, especially in the Dominican Republic. Leon Garcia Corona (2019) analyzes bolero as an expression of economic struggle through sentimentalism in the music of Guty Cárdenas, Agustín Lara, and Pedro Infante. Rodríguez's music was influenced by the trendy kind of bolero, as she covered standards and wrote songs in the romantic style. In using a vocal style more in line with singers of the cosmopolitan bolero, Rodríguez was able to occupy the same musical space as artists who practiced a style that was more couth.

Many bolero-focused scholars react to and explain the tendency for bolero to express a masculine perspective. Frances Aparicio, for instance, ponders the absence of women in the genre in *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (2010,125–141). Aparicio makes the point that bolero's lyrics adopt a patriarchal and heteronormative treatment of gender and sexuality primarily from a male point of view. In this case, Aparicio is most concerned with the boleros of Puerto Rican singers, who also had substantial influence on the boleros and bachatas of the Dominican Republic. Iris Zavala (2000)

also problematizes bolero; she argues that bolero allowed for an inversion of male and female vocal styles where men sing relatively high and women low. Rodríguez, using her voice, her knowledge of different styles, and use of intricate narratives similarly pushes the boundaries of gender norms musically.

To contextualize this last concept, I draw on Lori Burns's idea of vocal authority (2010) and Matt BaileyShea's work on lyrical address (2014; 2021). The ability of song to express the act of claiming (or reclaiming) power through the voice is an important consideration for bachata. Specifically, it was associated with marginality and its practitioners were often excluded from the mainstream music industry. Since song permits the singer to assume several positions at once (see discussion of Frith, Auslander, and Moore) they can also gain authority over voice and narrative. Lori Burns addresses vocal authority in her chapter "Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement" (2010). Burns argues that vocal authority is ascribed and "through careful examination of an artist's musical expression of narrative voice, the music analyst can interpret the ideologies, values, and authority of the multiple agents within the narrative structure" (156). This point connects on a surface level with the work of Fiol-Matta (2017), as both scholars are focused on popular music performed by women and interested in analyzing women singers through their social contexts. While Burns is interested most in the musical-narrative implications of vocal authority, she and Fiol-Matta are both making claims about the power of the voice and the power it gives a singer.

Burns proposes a framework derived from Seymour Chatman that explains the transmission of narrative from real author to real reader, which in the case of song is done through the singer. Within this framework, the process of transmitting narrative is active. The singer (and more importantly for Burns, the singer-songwriter) is free to enlist the narrative

strategies in different, interactive ways, but the listener also has a role to play in the realization of those strategies. My research on bachata and Rodríguez has obvious differences with Burns's interest in 1990s rock but interrogating the idea of vocal authority as an expressive strategy will help bring into focus bachata's intrinsic "sociocritical message" (156).

In a specific way, address shifted during bachata's early years as it transitioned from predominantly in the romantic bolero tradition to the more jaded *amargue* (bitterness) style. It was around that time that bachateros began addressing women in third person more frequently and their complaints to friends about women were often hostile and misogynistic. Crucially, how Rodríguez uses address expresses subversion twofold: first, by simply being the voice of a woman in a male-dominated space (i.e., representing women), and second, by writing and performing her own songs. Pacini Hernandez writes "the narrative space constructed in bachata evolved from an intimate one occupied by only the two people involved in an emotional relationship (into which a listener could insert him/herself) to a wider, more inclusive public space occupied by a group of people" (1995, 161). She also notes the prominent use of the second person familiar *tú* in bachata lyrics from the 1960s.

One way that a listener infers narrative space is through address and the treatment of pronouns. Matt BaileyShea (2014; 2021) presents different modes of address—defined based on the presence of various pronouns such as "I" or "you"—as indicators of narrative proximity between agents in pop songs and the listener. For example, a song in "direct address," where an "I" speaks directly to a "you," implies closer proximity than a song with just an "I" or one using only third-person pronouns. His main thesis is that the address can shift within a popular song, and those shifts often correspond to musical changes. The songs of Mélida Rodríguez use a variety of treatments of address. Many are directed toward the second person familiar, but others

are written from the first person only and utilize a particular persona. There are also occasions when the address shifts but are typically from an intimate address to a distant one.

Thesis outline

The thesis is organized into three main chapters. Chapter 2 is an investigation of the history of bachata and its parent genre bolero. Since both genres have limited documentation historically, I trace the more recent history that connects bachata and bolero during the Mexican *época de oro* (era of gold) in the early- to mid-20th century. In addition to common stylistic traits, bolero and bachata followed similar historic paths: both came from rural origins into urban centers and expressed aspects of urban existence. While bachata also had influences from other genres like merengue and other regional styles of bolero, the influence of Mexican music through film and radio left a significant mark. In the analysis of the classic Mexican bolero "Frío en el Alma," I compare three versions of the song to illustrate how subtle differences of style began redefining bolero's musical relatives. In particular, Rodríguez's version with its very intimate arrangement shows how she creatively reimagined mainstream bolero within the stylistic borders of bachata and cultural setting in the barrio.

Chapter 3 centers around Rodríguez's persona "La Sufrida" and how her songs relate to the listener as part of barrio culture. By portraying women characters who participate in urban night life, Rodríguez subverts prevailing gender norms. These characters include women who have access to locales normally reserved only for men such as bars. Through her characters, which often are a prostitute or sex worker, Rodríguez often calls attention to issues of sexual liberty and offers an alternative to Dominican society's repressive gender norms. Rodríguez also portrays women who have power through money, which is telling of some of the bigger picture societal shifts occurring in the Dominican Republic. I analyze three songs from Rodríguez's

album *La Sufrida* that illustrate these characters and the creative ways they are expressed musically and lyrically.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I explore the way Rodríguez impersonates the cultural phenomenon of *tigueraje* in her music and as part of her persona. Self-assured and tenacious, Rodríguez as *tíguera* showed that women could be just as quick-witted and strong as their male counterparts. As a social practice, *tigueraje* highlights differences between traditional values and modifications that occurred in urban settings. As I explore how these concepts weave together, it becomes clear that gender identity is particularly prone to shape shifting. In fact, *tigueraje* encourages fluidity between gender identities. In my analyses I position Rodríguez amongst bachateros who were beginning to show signs of the thematic shift in bachata toward misogyny.

CHAPTER TWO

BOLERO IN THE BARRIOS

> At the time the movies were vital. Mexican films that were shown in the country were mostly musicals. People could see the Luis Aguilars, the Jorge Negretes singing on the screen and people would go crazy, seeing artist from another country that was supposedly more developed. The style was copied assimilated, and in fact was assimilated into bachata as well.
>
> Luis Días (interview excerpt by Deborah Pacini Hernandez published in *Bachata*, 1995)

Bachata has been called by many names throughout its relatively short history: *canciones de amargue* (songs of bitterness), *música de guardia* (music of the watchman), even *cachivache* (worthless/junk). These were mostly derogatory terms devised by social elites and the upper class to set merengue apart from (and superior to) the uncouth popular music of the urban poor. Though merengue and bachata both have rural roots, merengue benefited as a tool for nation building under the long rule of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. After the assassination of Trujillo in 1961, the Dominican social structure was changing and people from rural communities began migrating to urban centers in search of better economic circumstances. Within the barrio*s* (neighborhoods) where the rural poor settled, music like bachata served a vital social role as a critical means of expression and community building in an urban setting. As musician Luis Días points to in the quote above, urban settings can open communities to the outside world, particularly as a byproduct of modernization.

As the Dominican Republic's (largely urban) upper class began consuming international popular culture through music and film—especially after the fall of Trujillo—the urban poor gained limited exposure too. Encounters with mainstream popular music and culture happened at work (e.g., in the homes of the upper class as housemaids or working as chauffeurs) and in

community settings like at *colmados*, neighborhood minimarkets. Popular music of the urban poor like bachata came into contact with international popular music often indirectly and was being changed by it. In this chapter, I will connect bachata to musical, social, and cultural trends of Latin America as one of the many offshoots of Cuban bolero. Bolero's rise in Latin America in the 20th century was influenced enormously by its popularity in Mexico. Like bachata, bolero in Mexico followed a path from rural to urban and from the margins into the mainstream. As they formed, both genres functioned as expressions of social needs and customs and therefore were adaptable. The indelible influence Mexico had on bolero also affected bachata's development in specific ways, which serves as an important point of departure as I begin to take a closer look at the music of Mélida Rodríguez through her performance of standard boleros. I am interested in how Rodríguez portrays different musical personas with her voice and how bolero and ultimately bachata serve as ideal vehicles for her to do so.

Bolero and Bachata

Defining bachata as a musical genre and pinpointing the time of its emergence has proven difficult for practitioners, fans, and academics alike. Part of the problem is etymological since the word bachata has assumed different meanings at times in the Dominican Republic. According to Deborah Pacini Hernandez, up until the 1970s "bachata" most often signified a type of party associated with the rural lower class (1995, 8–9). These parties often incorporated music but not of any particular type. Since the makeup of musicians and instruments varied, many styles of dance music like merengue, *mangulina, carabiné, and priprí* were performed with instruments like accordion, tambora (double-headed drum), and marimbula (a kind of thumb bass). If there were guitars, in addition to being able to play merengue they could be used to perform genres like son, guaracha, or bolero (9). Eventually, bolero became one of the primary genres performed

and consumed by country folk moving into the Dominican Republic's urban centers in the 1950s and '60s. Through such parties within the communities of rural migrants a distinct musical genre began developing into what is now called bachata. But to begin to understand some of the reasons for bachata's gradual emergence, it is important to place bolero within Latin American history.

Bolero has been likened by León García Corona to a "catchall term akin to 'classical music'" within Latin America (2019, 141). García Corona goes on to acknowledge that bolero as a practice has many musical, cultural, and professional connections that complicate giving it a generic label (141). However, a difficult problem to untangle for bolero is like bachata it somewhat muddled past full of speculation about its history. One issue that arises is that there are two distinct genres that share the name "bolero," Spanish bolero and Cuban bolero. Bolero in Spain was a dance music popular in the 18th and 19th centuries but has little more in common with the Cuban bolero than the name (Kahl & Katz 2001). Cuban bolero originally was a kind of song often sung by two voices and accompanied by guitar (Pineda Franco 1996). Over the years, attempts to draw a common musical thread between Spanish and Cuban boleros failed to provide more than tenuous connections. As for the shared name, historical accounts guess that bolero refers metaphorically to "spinning" of Spanish bolero's dance that is imitated in the elaborate guitar figurations of Cuban bolero (Pineda Franco 1996). Despite having little musical similarity, one way in which the two boleros correspond as song forms is that they are romantic poetic traditions. The romantic song accompanied by guitar has a long history in Spain and its colonial empire. In Latin America the most ubiquitous form in the 20th century was that of the Cuban bolero.

At its roots, Cuban bolero is usually associated anecdotally with *trovadores* (troubadours) who wandered eastern Cuba's countryside in the 19th century performing music on guitars and singing romantic songs (Garcia Corona 2019). This musical tradition of *trova* spread throughout the Caribbean in the late 19th and early 20th century, out of which bolero emerged as a genre. Andrew Wood argues that bolero evolved in part from danzón, which is in turn a derivative of *contradanza* and *habanera* (2014, 14). Themes of love, nostalgia, and sentimentalism were central to early bolero as part of colonial culture (Garcia Corona 2019, 142). Sentimentalism in Cuban bolero is a theme tied at least partially to the genre's romantic roots. Like other genres in Latin America that have a strong streak of traditional ideals of romance and gender, bolero speaks to Spain's lasting cultural legacy, at least topically. Meanwhile, musical influences from African traditions, like the use of tresillo and cinquillo rhythms, which figured prominently in *trova*, continued to shape bolero as both a vocal and later a prominent dance form (Kahl & Katz 2001; Garcia Corona 2019).

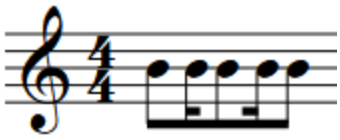
An important facet of bolero's history is its influence on and interaction with Mexican music. George Torres writes about Cuban bolero developing into a new Mexican style of bolero by its merging with the *canción mexicana* (2002, 154–56). Most likely this commingling of bolero styles began with trova musicians in the Yucatán Peninsula who migrated from Cuba (Garcia Corona 2019, 142–43). In Mexico, bolero would eventually take hold as a mainstream genre fitting in with other genres such as *ranchera*, *vals*, *corrido*, and *canción* (Wood 2014, 14–16). The growth within Mexico ultimately reshaped bolero's trajectory into a pan-Latin sensation through the spread of popular culture via cinema and a flourishing recording industry. As a means of international cultural exchange, film and recorded music became a vital part of the emergence of bachata in the 1960s (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 60).

In the 1930s, Mexican cinema began to flourish. In part this was due to increasing production quality by actors who had been involved with Hollywood and the indirect effects of the U.S.'s Good Neighbor policy. Through cinema, bolero was able to establish itself as a mainstream genre, but cinema also displays some of the cultural forces at play in the age of modernism. Jacqueline Avila argues that the intricate interchange of culture and aesthetics in cinema in the U.S. and Mexico is an outcropping of an ongoing cultural hybridization that started with *revistas* (revues), a Mexican theater form popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (2019, 31–32). Central to *revistas* was political and social commentary that related to working class, urban audiences (33). Aesthetically, the *revistas* brought together many different popular traditions of theater, music, and dance of local and European origins (32). Because of its inherent malleability through cultural hybridization, Avila argues that *revistas* influenced the Mexican (and U.S.) film industry. This offers an important perspective in the development of bolero. As in *revistas,* during the é*poca de oro* (the golden age of cinema) popular music genres were featured prominently and many films incorporated boleros in musical numbers. Romantic bolero became a staple of Mexican cinema through the work of well-known musical artists like Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, and Agustín Lara.

Bolero's evolution from guitars, maracas, and voice to full-blown *orquesta* (big band) parallels trends in 20th-century global popular music. Jazz and Tin Pan Alley had remarkably similar trajectories in the early 20th century and ultimately intermingled with bolero; part of what John Storm Roberts describes as ongoing stylistic cross-fertilization (1999, 23). Precisely because bolero and its practitioners did not try to stay the same was it able to mold itself anew. Malleability in boleros by Agustín Lara offers a distinct understanding of ways in which artists looked beyond their spheres, whether cultural or international, to craft new modes of expression.

Lara (1897–1970) started his career as a pianist performing in brothels and cabarets before landing as probably the foremost composer of popular music used in film during his lifetime. Though he specialized in bolero, Lara also incorporated a variety of musical styles both of Mexican and pan-Latin origin into his compositions (Contreras Soto 2001). Lara's fame as a composer was not limited to film, as many musicians across Latin America performed versions of his songs throughout the bolero craze lasting into the 1960s. Many of Lara's boleros are romantic in nature that fall in line with the romantic song tradition at the core of Cuban bolero. But others are oriented more toward a commentary—and perhaps in Lara's case a personal one—on the realities of living in an urbanizing society. An imaginary of a social and cultural space where expressions of tradition and modernity can interact.

Lara composed hundreds of songs throughout his career, many of which became standards of the bolero repertoire. In addition to his prolific output, Lara brought about some fundamental musical changes to bolero that would further influence the genre. Some of the most lasting impacts come in Lara's treatment of poetry and meter (Pineda Franco 1996). Lara diverged from the 2/4 meter that was characteristic of Cuban bolero, instead composing most of his songs in 4/4 time and using the cinquillo rhythm less (Torres 2002, 158). Breaking from bolero's traditional rhythmic and metrical standards in part exhibits Lara's pragmatic response to urbanity; writing in a wide variety of popular styles and genres assisted his rise to prominence. Lyrically, his music also began to express an aesthetic that not only accepted but celebrated some of the perceived unsavoriness that mainstream society assigned to part of urban life: in particular, Lara's songs frequently focus on prostitutes and the idea of the "fallen woman." While I will discuss the potential influence Lara's prostitute songs may have had on Mélida Rodríguez in later chapters, romantic boleros in Larian style are also significant to the development of bachata.



Example 2.1. Cinquillo rhythm

Though Agustín Lara was part of the adaptation of bolero from its rural origins into the mainstream, during the 1940s and ’50s a new trend began to take off. Guitar trio groups, often performing intricate instrumental parts and singing in three-part harmony, became some of the most sought-after recording artists in Latin America (Wood 2014, 157–58). On one hand these groups performed bolero that was closer to the original by instrumentation and singing in harmony, but they also were pushing bolero further down the path that Lara had set for it stylistically. Of these groups, probably the most famous was Trío Los Panchos, a group formed in New York by Mexican singers Chucho Navarro, Alfredo Gil, and Puerto Rican Hernando Avilés. Los Panchos collaborated with Lara prominently through performances in film and recorded many of his songs making a lasting impression on Mexican music, but they also reached audiences in Latin America and especially the Caribbean (Wood 2014, 158). A notable stylistic contribution to come from trios like Los Panchos was the use of virtuosic guitar playing on the requinto (a small guitar tuned up a fourth), which also appeared to a lesser extent in bolero ranchero. In the 1960s, among the boleristas to follow in the footsteps of the trios were international artists like Ecuadorian Julio Jaramillo and Puerto Ricans Daniel Santos (specifically some of his recordings with guitars like on his album *¿Y Linda? Daniel Santos con Guitarras* from 1965) and Odilio González “el Jibarito de Lares.” These artists performing bolero with guitar became the model for many early bachateros (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 84). But the

continued influence of bolero as a cosmopolitan genre also had a significant part to play in the emergence of bachata.

Frío en el Alma

Vocal and musical differences between the mainstream bolero of the "golden era" and the songs of Mélida Rodríguez are complex. Using an analysis of her performance of a standard bolero in comparison to renditions by other singers, I will begin to identify some of the ways that Rodríguez mixed styles through her voice and recomposition. "Frío en el Alma" by Miguel Ángel Valladares was recorded by many prominent singers during the height of bolero's fame. One popular version was by the Mexican-American singer Eva Garza first recorded in the 1940s. About thirty years later Rodríguez recorded a version on her album *El Traicionero* (1972). By comparing Garza's version with Rodríguez's, I find some commonalities but also ways in which they do not align. Foremost are the differences in vocal timbre between the two versions that help demarcate vocal characteristics idiomatic to Rodríguez's voice and more generally in bachata. In this performance, Rodríguez references the vocal style of earlier decades while inflecting her own personal style. By keeping her ear to the ground, Rodríguez straddles stylistically between what might attract her audience on different fronts: the favorability of well-known boleros and a more vernacular expression of her and her audience's social setting.

Practically speaking, performing popular standards of the bolero repertoire was a common practice among early bachata performers to appeal to their audiences (Sellers 2014, 51). Many male singers modeled their vocal style on that of famous singers like Julio Jaramillo and Pedro Infante (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 84). Popular female boleristas in the Dominican Republic included the Mexican Maria Luisa Landín and the Puerto Rican Blanca Iris Villafañe. But these artists were ones whose fame stretched far outside the barrios where bachata was beginning to

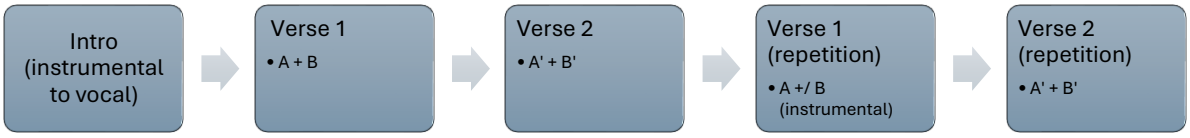
develop. Villafañe, who performed almost exclusively with a conjunto (combo) of guitars in the more traditional style, spent much of her career based out of New York and had relative success in many Caribbean countries and diasporic communities (López Ortiz 2020). Landín began her career as part of a duet with her sister Avelina in Mexico but also lived briefly in Santo Domingo, performing mainly in the cosmopolitan style. The decision of early bachata artists to perform versions of famous boleros was likely commercial. But reconfiguring the songs to meet the needs of bachata's audience also displays the inherent malleability of bolero in urban settings.

Acaso fue castigo de Dios que te fueras así, para nunca volver. Frío en el alma desde que tú te fuiste, sombras y angustia sobre mi corazón. Qué loco empeño de revivir las cosas de un pasado ya muerto del fantasma de ayer. Frío en el alma porque no estás conmigo, pena que llevo como una maldición. Le he pedido a la Virgen que tú vuelvas, porque si tú no vuelves me matará el dolor.	Perhaps it was God's punishment that you went away like that to never return. Cold in the soul ever since you left, shadows and anguish over my heart. What a crazy effort to revive things of an already-dead past of yesterday's ghost. Cold in the soul because you are not with me shame that I carry like a curse. I have asked the Virgin [Mary] that you come back, because if you don't return the pain will kill me.

Example 2.2. "Frío en el Alma" (Cold in the Soul)

"Frío en el Alma" (Cold in the Soul) was composed by Miguel Ángel Valladares approximately in the late 1940s. In later decades it became a classic recorded by many artists

throughout Latin America. It was recorded by the well-known Mexican-American actress and singer Eva Garza around 1950 on a Seeco 78. This recording comes from important point in Garza's career at the height of her popularity particularly in Mexico and Cuba, but also in New York and the Caribbean (Vargas 2012, 126–8). The song depicts a narrative common to bolero, the thoughts of a lover as they try to come to terms with being abandoned. Despite being sung by a female singer, the lyrics do not explicitly indicate that the song is told from a female point of view. As with many boleros, the lyrics do not account for gender because the address is in the familiar second person (Zavala 2000; see also Pacini Hernandez 1995, 161, on bachata). Furthermore, the song only makes generalized observations of the song narrator's identity and the addressee. This highlights two features of bolero worth noting here. First, because of their romantic nature, many boleros have an implied duality based on gender roles. Second, within that duality, there is a primacy of the male's position. The latter is what Frances Aparicio identifies as the "absence" of women in bolero and an inherent possibility of "discursive regendering" through it, especially for male-composed songs sung by women (Aparicio 2002, 138–41).



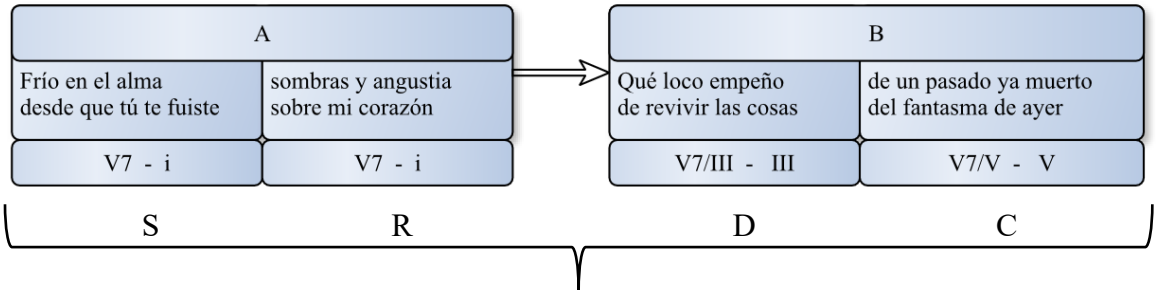
Example 2.3. Typical formal layout of "Frío en el Alma"

For now, I will skip discussing the music of the introduction as it is treated differently between recordings. The first stanza set in the introduction establishes the mostly hexasyllabic

structure of the lyrics. It also sets the scene for the rest of the song in a sort of cause-and-effect narrative format by using mood. In typical fashion for boleros of the 1940s, the body of the song is in a repeating binary form with a characteristic melodic format that links the different verses (Kahl & Katz 2001). The overall formal layout presented in Example 2.3 shows a common framework for boleros of this period but interestingly also resembles ABAC form frequently found in the songs of Tin Pan Alley and the Great American Songbook (Forte 2001). This intersection of genres and forms is no coincidence, though tracing a path to where it first began would be difficult. Instead, I interpret the connection of form as telling of the ongoing cycling of musical influence in the Americas, however occluded by history and the perceived preeminence of U.S. popular music. As previously noted, John Storm Roberts writes about an ongoing intermingling of styles and genres during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in his book *Latin Tinge* (1999); specifically, he notes how Latin music influenced popular music in the U.S. This has opened a conversation about the intricate exchange of influences that the following discussion of bolero necessarily falls into, however inscrutable the connections are. In my following discussion of form, I have opted to analyze the bolero in generic formal terms, but it is also possible to fit the song into a formal layout such as Walter Everett's **srdc** (statement–restatement–departure–conclusion) (1999, 2009).

The first verse sets the second and third couplets as shown in Example 2.4 over the span of eight measures in common time. Indicated at the bottom of each couplet is the harmonic progression. Both halves of the A section are straightforward repetitions harmonically and melodically. The B section initially tonicizes the relative major using similar melodic material to the A section, but the melody rises suddenly in a bit of text painting on the word "revivir (revive)." By the end of the second half of the B section the harmony ends on a half cadence,

which sets up a return to the A section material in the second cycle. Alternatively, this could be considered sentential creating an antecedent phrase from a nested **srdc** cycle shown at the bottom of the figure.



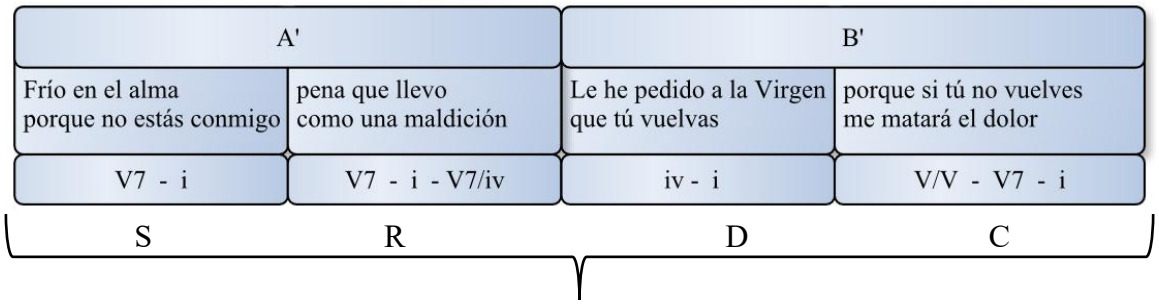
16-bar Antecedent Phrase

Example 2.4. "Frío en el Alma," Verse 1

Lyrically, this section is an explanation of the feelings after abandonment: it implies that "God's punishment" referenced in the introductory stanza is the "cold in the soul" and the "shadows and anguish" of this verse. The second half of the verse is more active, with the song persona contemplating the futility of trying to rekindle something long ago past.

In the second verse, the fourth and fifth stanzas are set in a similar format to the first verse, but with modifications. Where the first verse separates the two sections, the second verse links the two harmonically and melodically. This section can also be interpreted formally as a consequent phrase as part of a sentence. The transition between the two sections is the song's musical climax, with the voice reaching $\hat{5}$ on the word "maldición" (curse) an octave above the register of most of the song. This is supported by a harmonic link, using a secondary dominant to move to the subdominant at the start of the B section. Like in the first verse, the second half assumes an active stance by the song's persona that suggests what will happen. The last stanza

reestablishes subjunctive mood in response to “le he pedido a la Virgen” (I have asked the Virgin) with “porque si tú no vuelves, me matará el dolor” (because if you do not return, the pain will kill me). The reference to the Virgin Mary reiterates the notion set out in the introduction that God is punishing the song’s persona (for what, the listener never finds out).



16-bar Consequent Phrase

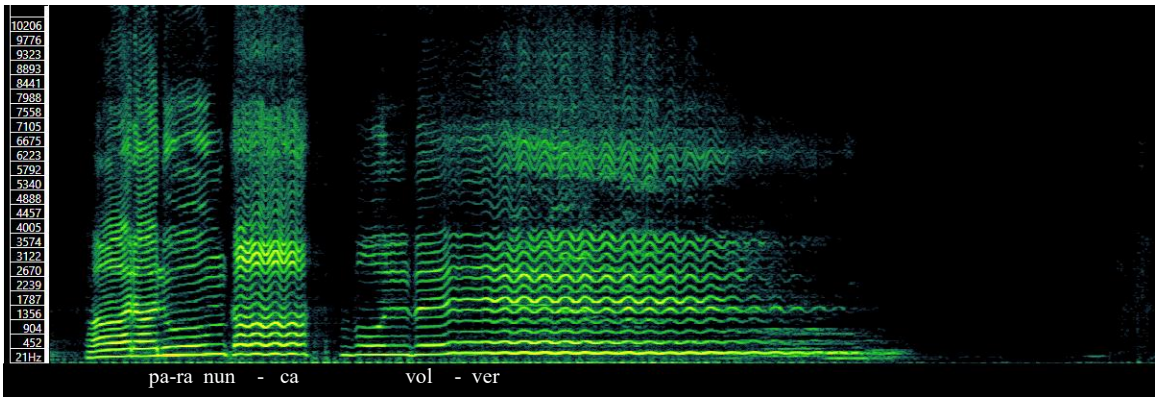
Example 2.5. “Frío en el Alma,” Verse 2

Most recordings, including Garza’s, begin with an instrumental and vocal introduction that do not repeat. A key feature of bolero’s form is the instrumental interlude that occurs after the second rotation of the verse (which is also a common occurrence in Tin Pan Alley songs). The instrumentation for Garza’s version falls in line with the cosmopolitan style: an *orquesta* of brass instruments, strings, piano, and woodwinds in addition to bass, maracas, and bongos. There are other versions (e.g. Avelina Landín in 1968 and María de Lourdes in 1975) that adapt some elements of rock and roll by using organ and electric piano, which document changes that were occurring in the late 1960s and early ’70s toward the emergence of balada (Party 2013).

The vocal style of many boleristas in the “golden age” of bolero fell in line with the *bel canto* style of singing associated with the *cancion mexicana* (Torres 2002, 154–55) and more

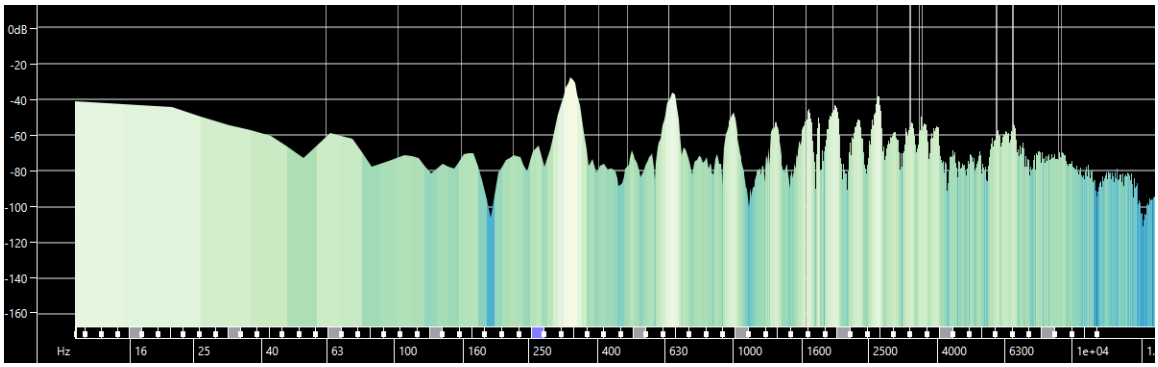
generally European-influenced romantic song styles throughout former Spanish colonies (Pineda Franco 1996). While not precisely operatic, this vocal style does carry some traits of European operatic traditions, especially in resonance and vibrato. This is also the case in Garza's performance of "Frío en el Alma." Frequent use of wide vibrato and a tendency to lower the larynx into a "sob" are some of the hallmarks of the style in Garza's performance, but her vocal range is also an important component. Notably, this style is similar to what one might hear in jazz, as vibrato is a prominent feature stemming from blues (Shapiro 2016, 9–10). This is likely no coincidence, as Deborah Vargas has linked Garza's musical nascence with jazz-influenced Chicana music of San Antonio in the 1930s through the '50s (2012, 116–18), something Vargas posits is a result of hybridization of Mexican and American culture in the borderlands (124–26). Similar to jazz vocalists, low voices like Garza's were not uncommon in the cosmopolitan international style of bolero, particularly among women (Zavala 2000; Strongman 2007). Some of the most well-known women boleristas of the mid-20th century were known for their low voices: Ruth Fernández, Toña la Negra, Elena Burke, being some notable examples. How Garza navigates the shift in register in the second iteration of the verse when the melody intensifies reveals a constancy in the vocal delivery in her performance. Even in intense moments, Garza keeps the quasi-operatic (or jazz-infused) style of vibrato while still utilizing chest voice.

By analyzing the spectrogram of Garza's voice, we can visualize her vocal delivery in this performance. Example 2.6 displays the isolated vocals on last line of the introduction section with the lyrics "para nunca volver" (to never return). As happens throughout the performance, here we see a rich spectrum of overtones above the fundamental with thick bands.



Example 2.6. Spectrogram of chest voice in Garza's recording (0:24)

This is the characteristic chest voice that alto and contralto boleristas utilize often, and which imparts a kind of "luxuriousness," to paraphrase Kate Heidemann's (2016) description of chest voice. A closer look at the second syllable in the word "volver" shows a key factor of the vocal style Garza is singing in, a style described by Zavala as "mujer de pelo en pecho" ([a] woman with hair on her chest) (2000, 24). As we see in the spectrum plot in Example 2.7, the fundamental is strongest, and the overtones taper off in the higher frequencies.



Example 2.7. Spectrum plot of E4 on "volver" (0:27)

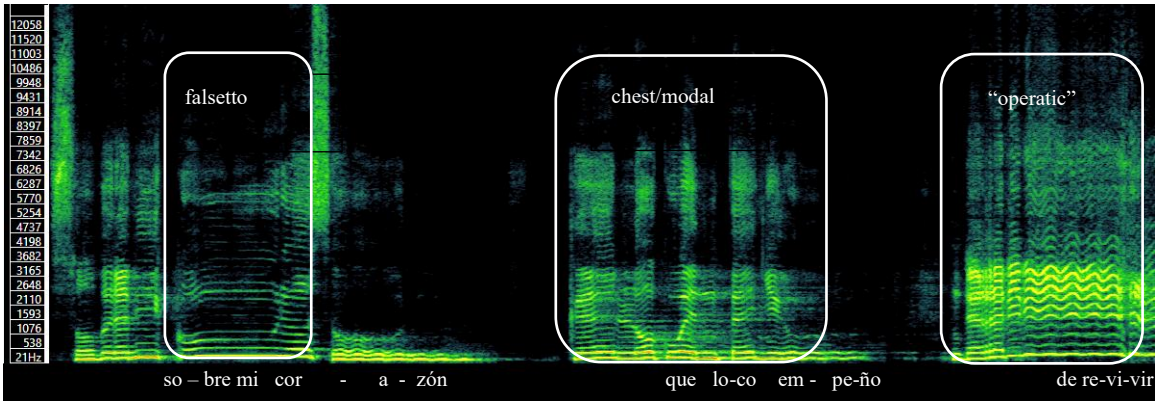
At the song's climax Garza's voice intensifies in volume she employs some twang, though she returns rapidly to her non-twangy chest voice. Garza's use of twang makes sense

from both a practical and expressive standpoint, since she needs to come out of the thickened texture (and the instrumental texture thickens to highlight the climax). The intensity of this section, though marked in comparison between verses, is not especially striking precisely because Garza does not fully break away from her chest voice. The way Garza's voice is seemingly stuck in chest voice in this song supports observations by Zavala (2000) and Aparicio (2002) about bolero's patriarchal tendencies toward women's bodies. Garza and many other boleristas who had skilled low-range voices certainly could have sung in different registers but often stayed in chest voice. Moreover, the metaphor of the body (and lack thereof) in relation to the text also supports Zavala's and Aparicio's idea of the masculine perspective. In terms of lyrics, the song does not refer directly to the physical body: for example, the heart is metaphorical, and physicality is expressed only through movement and a perception of distance. The abstract feelings conveyed in the lyrics become attached to the female body through the voice, reinforcing Aparicio's idea that "her body is always already the text for the male, as much as the song becomes the discursive space in which woman's body is inscribed" (2002, 127).

Male boleristas use their voices somewhat differently, often singing in high registers; "voz casi de castrati" (a voice almost of castrati) as Zavala puts it (2000, 23). Vicente Fernández's version from his album *Todo una Época con Vicente Fernández* (1973) shows a great amount of variety between operatic vocal delivery, head voice, and falsetto. The use of head voice and falsetto by male singers in bolero is not unusual on its own (e.g. Los Panchos, Bola de Nieve) but the integration of so many different vocal qualities points toward changing social and musical factors. Zavala argues that the high male voice is in fact an attribute of androgyny in bolero that she juxtaposes with the low female voice (2000, 23–24). Fernández's rendition of "Frío en el Alma" problematizes this interpretation of the male voice. This version is

a ranchera-style bolero, which carries with it a certain level of bravado in performance and hypermasculine connotations. It is still notable that Fernández employs different vocal techniques throughout. Example 2.8 shows a spectrogram of a passage where Fernández uses falsetto, chest or "modal" voice, and finally an operatic style. The first example in the figure shows a thinning of overtones on the "cor" of "corazón," following a section sung in chest voice on the words "sobre mi." This is on note D4, which is not a particularly high note for falsetto. The next line "que loco empeño" is sung in modal or chest voice, displaying a strong fundamental with plenty of overtones in the spectrogram even though it is not intense. Finally, on "revivir" Fernández uses an intense operatic voice, showing prominent vibrato and a concentration of intensity in the so-called singer's formant (around 3000 Hz).

Fernández's career was shaped by his ability to mesh into different popular genres: in part because of his embodying a distinct persona, the charro, and how that persona fit into Mexican identity at the time. I argue that it is also in part because of the command of his voice. His ability to access many vocal techniques in "Frío en el Alma" can be seen stylistically from his place within popular music. If we choose to follow Zavala's reasoning that androgyny perforates both genders through the voice in bolero, how does Fernández fit into this model? To answer that question, I return to the idea of bolero as a medium characterized by malleability and a reaction to modernity and urbanity. In the voice and compositions of Mélida Rodríguez, we find another instance of musical and social malleability facilitated by bolero.



Example 2.8. Spectrogram of Vicente Fernández recording (0:48)

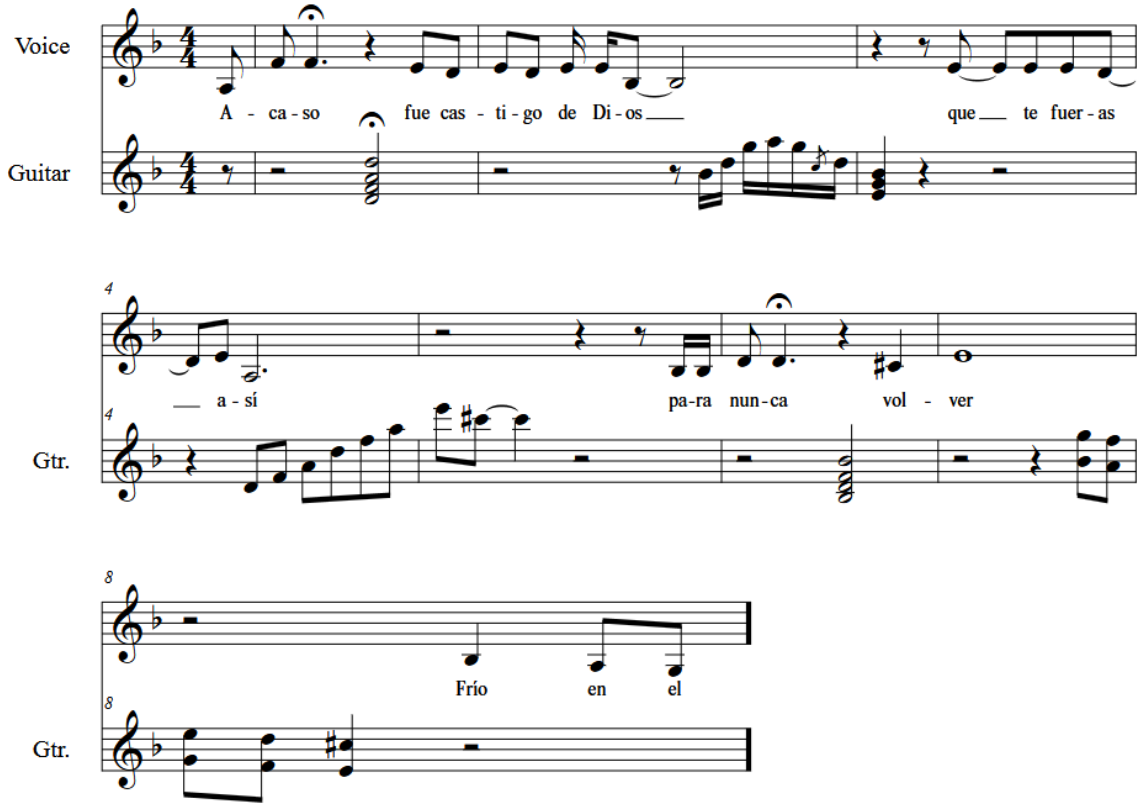
Mélida Rodríguez and Reinterpretation

El Traicionero (re-released in Venezuela as *Que Torpe Fui*) is Mélida Rodríguez's final full album, produced in 1972. Of Rodríguez's three LPs that she produced in her career, *El Traicionero* has the most songs written by other artists as well as the greatest variety of genres. In total, of the album's twelve tracks, only four were credited to Rodríguez (her other album *La Sufrida* from 1967 has only two tracks by composers other than Rodríguez and *Esta es Mélida* ca. 1969 has four). "Frío en el Alma" (Valladares), "El Corazón no miente" (derechos reservados), "Dos Almas" (Bienvenido Fabián), "Incredulidad" (derechos reservados), "Las Leyes del Amor" (derechos reservados), "Que Torpe Fui" (Gloria Menéndez), and "El Traicionero" (Luz Celenia Tirado) are all boleros composed by other artists. The last two are noteworthy as songs by women, and of particular significance is Tirado whose music intersects with Rodríguez's the basis of gender and representation. For now, I look at Rodríguez's version of "Frío en el Alma" which I have already noted was and is a well-known bolero from the *época de oro*.

Right away Rodríguez's version differs from most others by beginning with only the voice. The lush instrumental introduction of Garza's and Fernández's recordings stands in stark contrast to this recitative-like passage with only guitar accompaniment in the original recording (the most readily available version is a reproduction with keyboard). This has a dramatic effect as well as a musical one. The instrumental introduction in *orquesta* versions sets up a musical backdrop in front of which the voice and song's persona emerges singing the first lines "acaso fue castigo de Dios/que te fueras así/para nunca volver." In Rodríguez's version the voice and song's persona is the first thing a listener hears, immediately drawing them into the story. The voice and what happens/happened to the voice is explicitly telling the story rather than as part of a greater musical scene and backdrop. The song persona also positions herself as central to the story by leading (rather than responding to) the accompaniment and occupying the sonic space's center. In Allan Moore's model of proxemic zones (2012, 184–88), this opening falls in the intimate or borders on the personal zone. But the proximity of the voice as it plays out in different accompanimental settings, and the intimacy expressed through the voice itself are not mutually exclusive.

Moore also suggests that accompaniment can function as an environmental signifier (2012, 188–90) through five positions of the accompaniment: inert, quiescent, active, interventionist, and oppositional (191). Of course, accompaniment offers information to a song's listener, helping at times to identify meter, harmony, rhythm, and genre but it also informs the narrative. Rodríguez's treatment of the opening lines engages the accompaniment in the interventionist position. As we see in the transcription in Example 2.9 the guitar supports the voice harmonically with chords but also interpolates improvisatory material that enhances the dramatic effect of the recitative. With each sung passage, the guitar answers as if responding in

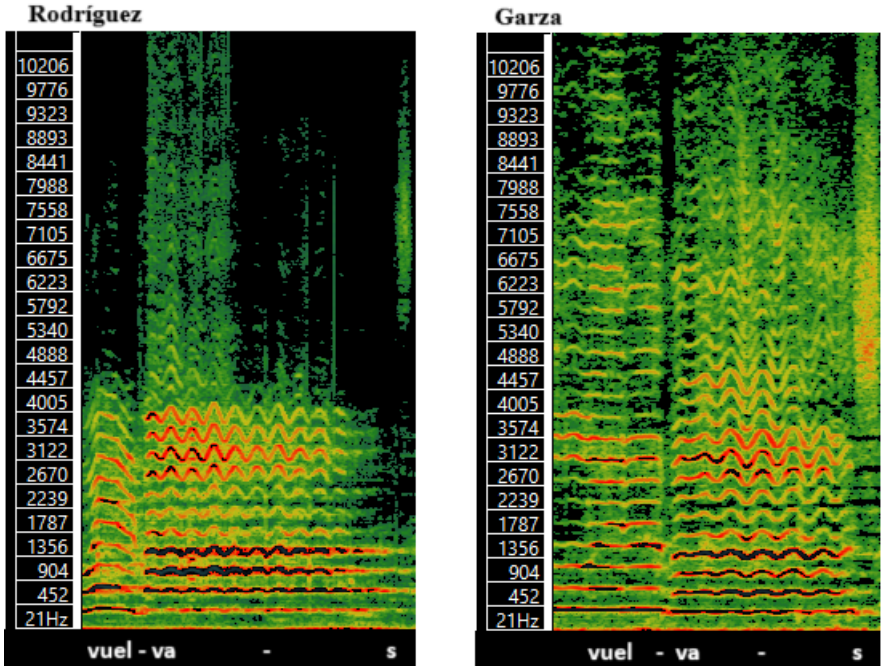
conversation with the voice, highlighting the intimacy of this section and narrative function of the accompaniment.



Example 2.9. Transcription of introduction in "Frío en el Alma" by Mélida Rodríguez

This brings us to the question of what scene is being portrayed in the introduction as part of a narrative. For Garza and Fernández (and many other versions of this song that fall in bolero's international style), the accompaniment sets a sonic soundscape of the stage: a singer in a nightclub surrounded by a big band. In the intimacy of a voice and sparse guitar a different scene is set perhaps one that better suits the urban spaces, such as bars and brothels, that early bachata was beginning to occupy in the '70s.

Rodríguez's rendition of this song retains some of the vocal features of romantic bolero that I mentioned earlier. Vibrato is used throughout the song, but far more sparingly and with less variance in width than the quasi-operatic style by Garza and Fernández. Nevertheless, Rodríguez sometimes directly taps into the sound of the cosmopolitan bolero. Example 2.10 shows a side-by-side comparison of spectrograms from an excerpt of Rodríguez's and Garza's renditions where their use of vibrato is very similar.



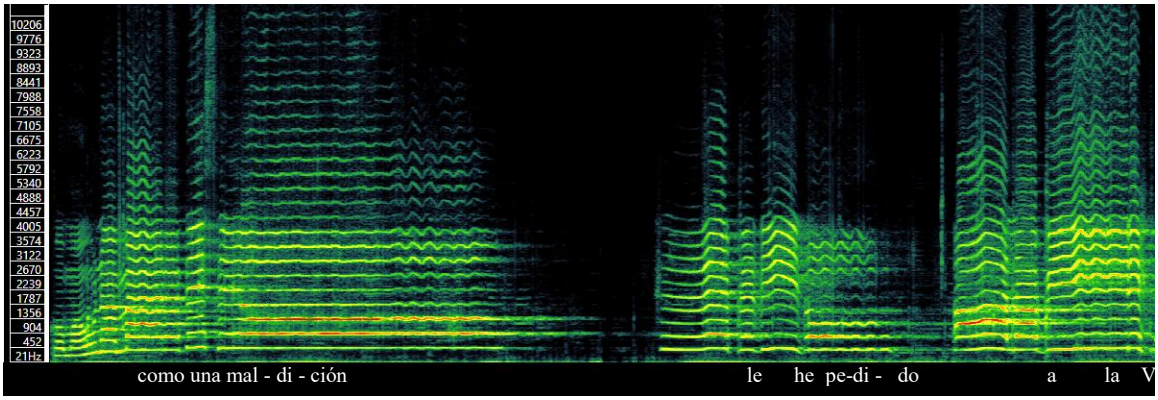
Example 2.10. Comparison of vibrato

The use of vibrato in cosmopolitan-style bolero was a regular expressive feature of many boleristas. Aside from this genre-specific significance, vibrato has been associated in popular music at large with a variety of emotions and affects. Victoria Malawey, for instance, compares various recordings of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" (2020, 39–40), noting that in addition to providing different expressive qualities, vibrato can also allow the voice to project over loud accompaniment. There is certainly evidence in Garza's version that vibrato aids in getting her

voice through the thick accompaniment of strings, trumpets, saxophones, congas, maracas, bongos (played with sticks), and piano. Rodríguez, on the other hand, is accompanied by a much smaller ensemble of one or two guitars, bass, one alto saxophone, maracas, and bongos. Furthermore, when Rodríguez uses an intense vibrato, it is often only over the guitar, bass, and percussion. With the reduced need to pierce through such a thick texture, Rodríguez's vocality is interesting because she chooses to sing with substantial power. In the next section I will discuss how vocal timbre necessarily contributes to the expressivity of Rodríguez's performance and her musical palette.

Returning to the introduction, Rodríguez uses prominent breathy phonation, which is generally considered a timbral signifier of intimacy (Malawey 2020, 109–10). As a vocal technique, breathiness shows up in several songs recorded by Rodríguez in places that usually express inward thoughts ("El Mintió" [He Lied to Me] and "¿Por Qué Te Fuiste?" [Why did you Leave]), intimacy ("Dos Almas" [Two Souls]), and as a reaction to betrayal ("Cobardía" [Cowardice]). In "Frío en el Alma" Rodríguez's phonation can signal either an inward thought or an intimate direct address to the "tú." But this shows the potential for dissonance between Rodríguez's performance and the meaning of the lyrics. The introductory stanza establishes a relationship between the song's persona and the "tú" to whom she speaks. But if she is in close proximity to the "tú" as her delivery suggests, the line "que te fueras así" (that you went away like that) does not make much sense. On the other hand, if the "tú" is interpreted as the listener, the same close-far problem arises. While it is possible to then assume by default that it has to be some sort of inward thought, the ambiguity of this section fosters expressive meaning however it is interpreted. In any case, I hear the breathiness as an intimate expression of inquietude that sets up the mood of the rest of the song.

A striking timbral feature that Rodríguez uses in this performance (and throughout her recordings) is the use of a strong mixed voice or belt in the upper register of her vocal range. While the lower limit of her vocal range would be considered that of a contralto—as low as D3 in "¿Por Qué Te Fuiste?"—Rodríguez often sings within a mezzo-soprano tessitura, in which she is able to shift between chest voice, mixed voice, and belting comfortably. Rodríguez uses the most variation in her voice around the climactic parts of each verse, with the most prominent belting occurring in the second verse. Example 2.11 shows a spectrogram from the second verse starting with the words "como una maldición" (like a curse).

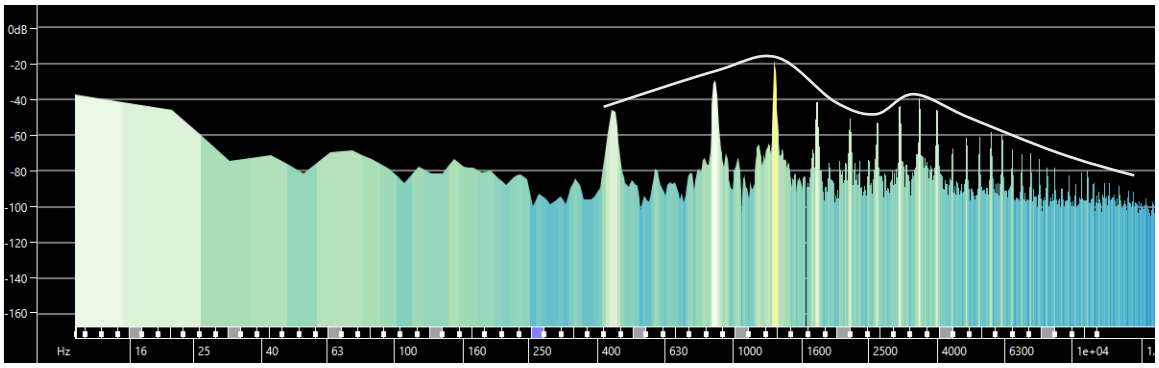


Example 2.11. Mélida Rodríguez "Frío en el Alma," Verse 2 excerpt (1:22)

The first word in this excerpt "como" is sung in chest/modal voice, almost in a speech-song delivery. Beginning on "una" there is greater intensity in Rodríguez's voice, which shows on the spectrogram as clear lines in the 1500–4000 Hz range. I hear this as Rodríguez transitioning into the belt that she uses starting on "maldición." Notably, she belts without any vibrato at first but adds a narrow vibrato toward the end of the note.

One issue exposed by looking at the spectrogram is the obvious mediation exhibited by the sheer cutoff of overtones around 4000 Hz. Though pinpointing the exact cause is impossible,

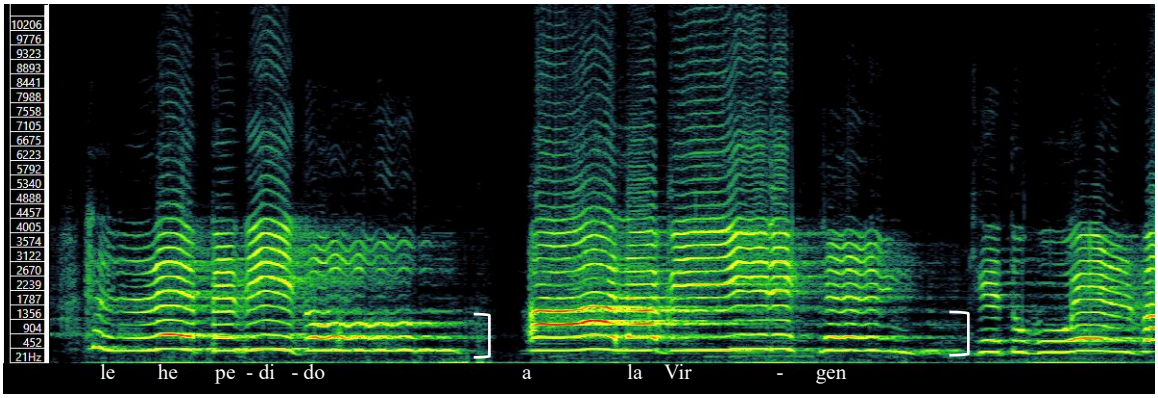
it is plausible that this album was recorded by one of the Dominican AM radio stations marketing bachata and their recording equipment was optimized for radio broadcast (i.e., to emphasize the speaker's formant). Another alternative is that the master for this recording (the Venezuelan release on the album *Que Torpe Fui*) was made from a recording produced for radio. Nevertheless, Rodríguez's voice registers on the spectrogram above 4000 Hz primarily when she belts, even though it sounds and appears mediated. In the following spectrum graph, the belted A4 on the syllable "ción" shows an intense peak at the second and third partials. Above the 4000 Hz range, however, partials are noticeably weaker. This mediation accounts for what I experience as a "hollow" sound to the recording, especially on belted notes.



Example 2.12. Spectrum graph of belt at (1:25)

Another expressive form of motility that Rodríguez uses is a sudden lowering of the larynx to create a "sob" quality with an enlarged pharynx (Heidemann 2016). I will discuss this technique in other examples in this thesis, but for now I will point out that it occurs in "Frío en el Alma" only in the second verse and its repetition on the words "pedido" (asked), "vuelves" (you return – subjunctive mood), and "Virgen" (Virgin). These are all important words narratively in the song as expressions of uncertainty and hope. Timbrally speaking, these shifts sound to me almost like crying or weeping, especially when they are sung with vibrato. Though it is a subtle

change, this shows in a spectrograph as a weaker third overtone, occurring usually at the end of an extended syllable (marked in brackets in Example 2.13).



Example 2.13. Mélida Rodríguez "sob" quality (2:26)

At this point it will help to describe the formal layout of Rodríguez's version as there are some notable changes in the latter parts of the song. Following the introduction, the song follows the binary form of most other versions of the song including an instrumental repetition of only the B section from the first verse. This abbreviated instrumental interlude (both Garza's and Fernández's versions include complete first verse repetitions) alters the proportions of the form, setting up what happens at the end of the second verse repetition: the last two lines repeat recomposed in a high register around A4 in a reiteration of the climactic moment on "maldicíon" in the second verse. Ending the song emphatically (Rodríguez also belts the last note and there is some noticeable roughness) adds a layer of narrative complexity to this version. The song's layout in Rodríguez's version follows a trajectory from the inward and intimate introduction to an intense cry of emotional turmoil.

In summary, Rodríguez's version reinterprets this classic bolero in a style distinct from but relatable to the versions by Garza and Fernández. With her use of a variety of timbres and

modes of delivery, Rodríguez differs from Garza and falls more in line with Fernández. Many of the vocal effects that Rodríguez uses are made possible by a strong command over the full range of her voice as she shifts between registers with ease. Nevertheless, Rodriguez does not fully diverge from the cosmopolitan bolero vocal style: for example, she sometimes uses a similar vibrato to Garza. Because her version is for a small ensemble, Rodríguez can project intimacy that fits her audience's social setting better (e.g., those who might be hearing it on a jukebox in a bar in the barrios instead of at an urban night club).

However quintessentially sentimental this song is—and that quality alone is nothing unusual for romantic boleros—the ways that Rodríguez reimagines this standard of the repertoire says something about what was happening both to bolero and bachata in the Dominican Republic. For bolero in the late 1960s and early '70s, there were signs it had peaked and a gradual decline in popularity began leading into the 1980s as the bolero offshoot balada began taking hold as its natural successor in Latin America (Madrid 2013, 55). Bachata too was an outgrowth of the bolero craze and served in some ways as a means of building national identity like what has been traced through bolero in Mexico (Alvarado 2007; Sellers 2014). In conclusion, Rodríguez's awareness of domestic and international music and her artistic choice to interweave different musical styles and aesthetics are important hallmarks of her musical output.

CHAPTER THREE

LA SUFRIDA

The cover of the second edition of Mélida Rodríguez's album *La Sufrida* (1967) features a row of three images set against a black background. Each picture presents a sunny outdoor scene. In two of the scenes a woman in a tight, orange dress with matching high heels leans against the trunk of a palm tree, a cigarette raised to her mouth. The middle image shows the same woman seated alone at a table topped with two liquor bottles; she looks to be taking a drink from a glass. The perspective emphasizes the setting since they are taken from a distance, but they also make the woman the focal point. Her surroundings appear urban but not overtly modern: the ground is mostly bare dirt and rocks, the buildings in the background are modest, there are powerlines and a radio tower. A logical setting for these scenes is a barrio, where infrastructural improvements were often minimal, which were frequently near more modernized parts of the city.

Taken as set in the barrio, which can serve as a liminal space between urban and rural societies, the woman assumes a more definite position. There are seemingly contradictory details about the woman and her setting. Her dress is what one might expect to see worn in a nightclub in a city, yet she is placed in a scene portraying a barrio. She poses seductively reclining against the palm tree, yet she is distant, almost unidentifiable to the viewer: are we to assume that this woman is Rodríguez herself, or someone else? In the center image she sits alone at a table with two empty seats; she is drinking in the open and without company. These images and contradictions make a clear reference to the setting of the barrio where bars, drinking, and *mujeres de vida alegre* (prostitutes) made up important parts of the social fabric. How ever staged the scenes are, they are made to appeal to something very real: day-to-day experiences of

Dominican urban life in the lower-class sectors of cities. Yet the images invite the viewer (and listener) to ask, “who is she?”

The images on the album cover tie directly to one of Rodríguez’s musical personas on this album. There are several tracks on the album that in some way situate the songs’ persona in the barrio and that she drinks freely or is sexually free. The title track, “La Sufrida” (The Suffering Woman), is an unapologetic challenge to what it means to be bad and good (the song’s persona resolves to be bad); “Bebiendo y Llorando” (Drinking and Crying) is sung from the point of view of a woman who lives her life drinking in a bar, and who is empowered to do so by means of her own money; “La Trasnochadora” (The Night Owl) implies that the singer is a prostitute living and earning from “a world of pleasures” even though she stops just short of admitting her profession (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 181). Rodríguez’s use of personas that are at odds with the expectations of mainstream Dominican society speaks to the resonance of those themes in barrio culture, even as both parts of society were changing in the 1960s and ’70s.

Barrios where rural migrants settled were at the margins of modern(izing) Dominican urban life. Industrialization and the prospect of well-paying work was originally one of the reasons for rural migration into cities (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 74–75). But the reality was that work was difficult to find as changing policies ultimately reinforced the hegemony of the upper classes. This led to the gradual creation of an informal economic system in the margins. The economy in the barrios became a point of contact between internal and external influences and served to build community and culture (Kleinkathoefer 1986). Throughout the album, *La Sufrida* offers examples of how music developed to reflect the social environment and how a singer engages with it through the voice and musical persona.

Example 3.1. Album cover of *La Sufrida* (1967)

Informal Sector, Economy, and Work

There has been a substantial informal economy in the Dominican Republic since the middle of the 20th century, particularly in barrios and other low-income neighborhoods of the cities (Bosch 1968). In modern times, some of the most public activities include selling products like cellphone chargers to drivers stuck in traffic, serving as ad hoc parking attendants on congested streets, or vending fruit and other kinds of food to passing motorists. Outside the cities, in tourist destinations scattered along the country's coasts, there is a thriving sex tourism trade (Padilla 2007, 4–5). Prostitution has been a critical part of the Dominican informal economic sector for many decades and was part of the development of the social structure of the barrios in which bachata emerged (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 12–13). Despite its stigma within Dominican society presently and historically, prostitution in a way reimagines power structure so that the sex worker reclaims agency through subversion.

Mark Padilla explains (2007, 37–40) that gay sex workers in the Dominican sex tourism industry reclaim agency through their *cuento* (story). Padilla writes:

> Sex workers and sex tourists are engaged in a mutual project of image construction…. For sex workers, this entails the art of the *cuento* (story), a narrative, not necessarily based in fact, that serves to explicate a rationale for one's involvement in sex work, construct oneself as a unique exception to the world of prostitution, or present a tragic drama as a prelude to a request for financial assistance. (38)

As Padilla notes, these stories may not be entirely true, but they serve as a marketability tool for the sex worker; a means "to express their creative agency in the course of sex work" (39). The practical nature of using narrative to justify sex work highlights the power that such stories give to those affected by social or economic injustice and inequality. Padilla, referencing James C. Scott (1985), describes the use of the *cuento* as a "weapon of the weak" (Padilla 2007, 40). The subversive nature of the sex worker's *cuento* lies in the juxtaposition of the claimed agency with the rationalization of an outwardly taboo activity like prostitution.

The social setting of what Padilla describes and where bachata emerged is familiar. Modern-day sex tourism is a part of the informal economy much in the way that brothels, cabarets, and bars facilitated similar activities starting in the 1960s in Dominican cities. Unsurprisingly, music can serve as a vehicle of social commentary and can access and interact with narrative spaces otherwise off limits. Song in the form of bachata becomes like the *cuento* and can speak both for the individual voice and a collective one. The *cuento* simultaneously acknowledges societal expectations and justifies defying these expectations through narrative expression. Bachata similarly can be a vehicle to comment on broader social circumstances and most importantly participates in the weaving of cultural expression as a form of community building.

As a principally vocal genre, bachata relies heavily on lyrics to express the views of its practitioners and its audience. As Pacini Hernandez notes (1995, 22), "the most successful bachateros are those who best command a Dominican urban street language that offers a rich variety of words, phrases, and proverbs for expressing their thoughts and feelings, … in bachata as in U.S. rap, language, spoken or sung, empowers a speaker: through the control of words, a speaker can construct alternative realities." This is a commonality with the idea of narrative in the *cuento*. Lyrics in bachata are often more intricate than stories about romance or betrayal (as were common in bolero) because they include a sort of insider-only script, however thinly veiled. In this way the persona of the prostitute or barfly that Mélida Rodríguez assumes in some of her songs speaks to her and her audience's social landscape.

Changing Politics and Economies

In Chapter 2, I compared bachata to bolero as its musical and social relative on different levels. The influence of bolero on early bachata was so great that many have observed that it was nearly indistinguishable from contemporary bolero (Pacini Hernandez 1995; Sellers 2014). Musical differences in Mélida Rodríguez's performance of the classic bolero "Frío en el Alma" by Miguel Ángel Valladares point to a nascent divergence, but more important is the fact that those differences can be very subtle. Nevertheless, along with changing musical qualities lyrics began to as well. Pacini Hernandez (1995, 159) observes a shift in bachata's lyrics from the romantic ideals of bolero during the 1960s toward more complex expressions of its social setting, particularly in terms of traditional relationships. These changes meant that lyrics began

expressing complex aspects of urban life like sex, drinking, deception by a woman, which in the eyes of the Dominican upper classes was considered crass and vulgar.

What precipitated the change in lyrics was a combination of political, economic, and social factors in flux during the post-Trujillo period. The first change to affect society that had long-term influence was the election and short-lived presidency of Juan Bosch. Bosch was the Dominican Republic's first democratically elected president, winning the 1962 election by a landslide. His populist political position, favored by the working class and the lower-class rural migrants who had relocated to the cities, intended to rebalance power equitably. One of Bosch's first tasks was creating a new constitution, which notably put basic human rights (*poderes públicos* [powers of the public]), the right to work, and "tend[ing] to the elimination of obstacles of economic and social orders that limit equality" in its first articles. Due to the socialist undertones of Bosch's reforms, a coup d'etat in 1964 organized by his opponents, namely the wealthy elite, brought a quick end to his presidency.

Bosch's vision of economic and social equitability in the Dominican Republic (that naturally led to even more rural-to-urban migration) withered with Joaquín Balaguer's ascent to power. Categorically opposed to Bosch's pro-union ideology, Balaguer was elected president in 1966 and quickly reconstituted economic power in the upper classes through liberal industrialization policies. The Dominican economy grew during Balaguer's regime but at the expense of the quality of life for the working and lower classes. Balaguer also took control of Dominican politics by eliminating any sort of political opposition, often through violence. For the recently transplanted migrants in Dominican cities, the effects of Balaguer influenced much of their daily lives. Most prominently was the effect of stratification that occurred with the

renewed hegemony of the rich, which ultimately led to the establishment of the informal economy of the poor neighborhoods (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 105–6).

Beginning in the 1970s further influx of migrants fueled an increased interest in bachata, despite having as Pacini Hernandez puts it "an apparent disadvantage in competing with the other musics contending for hegemony in the Dominican musical arena" (1995, 111). As conditions became more perilous for those living in the margins, bachata continued to grow in popularity alongside merengue típico, the traditional rural style of merengue. Bachata's popularity in turn created a budding recording and radio industry that further helped its evolution. Radhames Aracena, one of the most influential and enterprising producers of bachata at the time, used bachata to promote commerce and a tool to try to engage the poor with the national economy beyond the borders of the barrios (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 92–97; see also Brea 1975). Aracena's desire to use music and mass media to engage with the lower classes was at its heart capitalist. Nevertheless, he appeared to realize that he needed to appeal to his audience through their cultural and social circumstances by programming merengue típico and guitar music (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 91–92).

Bachata under those commercial conditions began participating in community building in the domain of the urban poor. While commercial music and radio production ultimately are tools of modernity, when they are used to engage with those in the margins it creates an interesting contact point for hybridity. In rural settings, bachata was music heard mainly at parties and had only loose musical and stylistic characteristics before it began taking hold in urban centers. With recordings, the style began to turn into something very similar to cosmopolitan guitar-based bolero (i.e., in the style of guitar trios). If the involvement of the recording and radio industry was a crucial first step toward modernization and commercialization of the genre, the social

effect of recordings was to reify the tastes of bachata's audience. The social significance of bachata was in its ability to express its setting and its needs (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 12–13 & 22) and recordings only made it easier for music to help shape its community.

La Sufrida the Album

On the back cover of *La Sufrida*, a publicity statement by Edmundo Regata explains why Rodríguez is known as "La Sufrida:"

> Un gran sector de la humanidad acostumbra a llamar a determinadas personas con algún nombre, el cual encierra una cualidad o una representación. Lo que más circunda al humano, entre las muchas cosas que se le presentan en la vida, es el sufrimiento y precisamente una joven cantante Dominicana ha sido bautizada por sus oyentes con el nombre de "La Sufrida," ya que la mayoría de su repertorio tiene canciones populares que reflejan el desengaño y el dolor de quien se arrastra por una pasión o es víctima de una traición dentro del ámbito del amor.
>
> (A large part of humanity is used to calling certain people by some name, which encloses a quality or representation. That which most encompasses the human, among the many things that life presents them, is suffering and precisely a young Dominican singer has been baptized by her listeners with the name "La Sufrida [the suffering woman]," already the majority of her repertoire has popular songs that reflect the disillusion and pain dragged by a tryst or is victim of betrayal in the scope of love.)

Along with promoting Rodríguez, Regata gauges what he believes is the interest of her audience. The sentiments of disillusionment and betrayal are universal expressions of suffering for Regata, and Rodríguez's nickname is proof that her listeners agree. Being recorded on an LP in the Dominican Republic was itself an achievement for early bachateros, and this second issue distributed by an American company brought Rodríguez to the United States. With the international taste for bolero and balada at the time, Regata's description sensibly shows a sympathetic view toward sentimentality in Rodríguez's songs.

Indeed, the album in both the original 1967 and 1969 versions lists all its tracks as boleros. To an international audience *La Sufrida* would probably fit in with many other bolero

albums of the 1960s. The style throughout the album is the more traditional bolero with guitars, though there are tracks that include saxophone. Guitar trios of the 1940s and ’50s had revitalized the use of guitar in bolero and many artists, for instance Blanca Iris Villafañe, adapted guitar-inclusive conjuntos (combos) to accompany a solo voice. Rodríguez’s album was neither an outlier nor mainstream: her more traditional style was popular (along with other early bachateros like Jose Manuel Calderón and Rafael Encarnación) among the Dominican lower class, but also at least potentially palatable to international audiences, similar to Villafañe. Furthermore, Rodríguez’s songs that refer to drinking followed in Villafañe’s footsteps, which figured heavily into their musical personas. I find it interesting that Regata’s description does not acknowledge Rodríguez’s persona as “La Sufrida” in the context suggested by the provocative imagery on the front cover.

The representation of women as prostitutes in bolero had some precedents, most famously in Mexican cinema. Two popular genres of film in the 1930s through the ’50s were the prostitute melodrama and later the *cabaretera*. In those dramas, the protagonist is often a young woman forced into prostitution or working as a cabaret dancer. Jacqueline Avila argues that the prostitute character assumes an important role marking the effects of modernization and urbanity. She also explains that “[the prostitute protagonist] was a tragic figure that received empathy while also viewed as morally corrupt and socially tainted” (Avila 2019, 23). Music (including genres like tango and crucially the Afro-Cuban genres rumba and guaguancó) also played a vital part in formulating the film genre and typifying the prostitute/rumbera character, which Avila argues is a form of exoticism in modernizing Mexico (50–52). Over the years, boleros for film that featured the prostitute were composed or adapted by stars like Agustín Lara and Trío Los Panchos: for example, Lara’s “Aventurera” (1929) and Los Panchos’ “Perdida” were both

featured as the title songs of two 1950 films. Generally, these songs and theatrical portrayals of prostitutes were produced from a middle class–oriented and male-centered perspective.

Considering subjectivity and gender, authorship and performance of songs obviously matters. Women bolero composers were unusual, but not unheard of and composers like María Grever, Consuelo Velázquez, and Sylvia Rexach were important in the development of bolero. Rexach (1922–1961) serves as a valuable case to compare with Rodríguez. As a composer of boleros, Rexach wrote songs that express a variety of emotions from mainstream romantic to expressions of social issues like sexuality, gender, and class (Vázquez González 2016). Though she was born into an upper-middle-class family in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Rexach embraced both a bohemian lifestyle and social-political causes that subverted class and gender norms. Her songs question societal structures of gender equality and the promote the ability of women to express sexuality (Vázquez González 2016, 291–92). As we saw with bolero in Mexico, the interface of music and urbanity often produces new expressive possibilities as part of a process of modernization. With Rexach and later with Rodríguez, bolero and then bachata could offer the same access to such expressions of subjectivity and agency.

This brings me back to the description of *La Sufrida* and Rodríguez by Regata. In appealing to a mainstream audience, Regata seems to ignore the subtext of the album as a testimony of social setting. The persona of the prostitute and the setting of the barrio portrayed on the front cover are not easily reconciled with Regata's description and societal norms. In Mexico, film and some boleros had at least nominally rationalized sex workers and arguably satisfied the taste for exoticism of the middle class through them. But in the Dominican Republic the main consumers of music like Rodríguez's were lower class and would be exposed to the reality of sex work as a part of daily life in the barrio. For those listeners, the sentiments of

disillusionment and emotional pain that Regata describes take on significance through the persona and an implied familiar setting. Indeed, as I will examine in the following analyses, the ability of bachata, the voice, and musical narrative coalesce and aid in community building: I argue that bachata's roots—like bolero before it—formed out of the complex interworking of cultural, societal, and musical factors, and Rodríguez's music specifically highlights such.

For the analysis of *La Sufrida*, I will turn to recent studies on vocal authority, address, and timbre in popular music. Lori Burns has written about agency and vocal authority in several studies of U.S. and European pop (2010, 2023). Burns adapts narrative authority to include vocal music, positing that "the music analyst can interpret the ideologies values and authority of *multiple agents* within the narrative structure" (2010, 156, emphasis mine). The idea that there are multiple agents in the narrative structure is especially important for bachata, as its emergence relied on the individual artists, the record producers, the listeners, and simply the people living in shared spaces (barrios). Burns is also concerned with the way that the female voice encodes unique narrative meaning in song. In the case of bachata, the dominance of male singers throughout its history makes Rodríguez's music even more indicative of the social turbulence of the time and the tendency for bachata to reflect it.

Poetic voice and address in popular song is a critical part of communicating meaning and creating significance for the listener. To put it simply, a song usually needs to establish some form of narrative connection between the voice and the lyrics to which a listener can relate. Matt BaileyShea observes that songs may not offer enough information to answer the question of who is addressing whom but suggests that whatever information exists should be considered to better understand the song's narrative relationships (2021, 126–27). Taking a zoomed-in approach, BaileyShea also notes that address in popular songs can imply narrative intimacy, especially

when that changes within a song (2014). Bachata's lyrics evolved with changing social values over the course of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Pacini Hernandez explains: "bachata songs began to address a wider range of possible relationships between men and women, suggesting that extended romantic courtship and a lifetime of cohabitation were no longer expected or desired" (1995, 158). The broader shift in lyrics is also reflected in song-level changes in persona, as I will demonstrate in the songs of Rodríguez.

Along with the lyrical content, Rodríguez's voice also imparts meaning within songs and more broadly within the genre and its social milieu. Drew Nobile (2022) argues that vocal delivery and timbre can have narrative significance within and beyond an individual song as markers of persona. He writes of Alanis Morissette's album *Jagged Little Pill*, "The album's lyrics, though, represent only half of the information we use to get to know Morissette's album persona. The other half comes from the recorded sound of her voice" ([2.4]). Nobile analyzes how Morrisette adds complexity to the story of her songs (and album) through a variety of distinct timbral identities, which become "fundamentally structural" in their interaction with the songs' form ([5.1]). This is a helpful methodology to understand several things at play in Rodríguez's music on *La Sufrida*. Since Rodríguez's voice is already marked because of her gender, she can express certain personas and sentiments that are off limits to male singers. *La Sufrida* could potentially appeal to women listeners directly as a representation of subverted gender roles, which was particularly meaningful as women increasingly entered the work force, often becoming the familial breadwinners (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 156). In the social setting where the traditional rural lifestyle was rubbing up against the effects of modernity and urbanization, Rodríguez's portrayal of life in the barrio as a woman is a bold statement.

La Trasnochadora

Dicen que soy trasnochadora	They say I'm a night owl
Porque vivo tomando de bar en bar	Because I live drinking from bar to bar
Lo que busco son migajas de cariño	I'm looking for crumbs of affection
Dinero que me pueda remediar	money that can resolve my ills
Vivo en un mundo de placeres	I live in a world of pleasures
Perdida en esta oscuridad	Lost in this darkness
Pero siempre pido al infinito	But I always ask the infinite
Que me guíe por la claridad	To guide me to the light
Yo no sé lo que me pasa a mí	I don't know what's happening to me
Que la suerte yo la tengo así	That I have such (bad) luck
Yo le pido al señor que me acompañe	I ask the lord to stay with me
Y me quite este mal de mis pesares	And take away this burden of my sorrows

Example 3.2. "La Trasnochadora" (The Night Owl)

"La Trasnochadora" tells a story about urban life from the perspective of a character who is totally enmeshed in the barrio lifestyle. The lyrics imply the character lives in a place with many bars and a substantial nightlife; in this case, we can presume someplace urban and more specifically a place where urbanites satisfy their vices. In the song's context, the word *trasnochadora* could be interpreted implicitly as a euphemism like "lady of the night" in English, in addition to the more explicit description of a woman who stays up all night (in this case, drinking). The song's second and third lines offer a common theme in Rodríguez's songs: the narrator's desire for love and the reality of what she does to earn money and to survive. The next quatrain further establishes the setting and the narrator's position within it and her desire to find a way out. She acknowledges that she has to continue living in "a world of pleasures" even as she pleads to be removed from it. In the final stanza, the narrator makes a more definitive statement of hope, this time asking God to help her. However, the line "yo le pido al señor que me acompañe" (I ask the lord to stay with me) can take on another meaning, depending on

whether we interpret “señor” to mean “God” or just “a man”: in the latter interpretation, the narrator asks a man to accompany her and thus implies that his money can heal her.

The use of wordplay and double meaning among bachateros and those living in lower-class neighborhoods was an important social practice that projected street smarts, which became particularly valuable as the informal economy started growing (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 22–23). Narratively, the use of double meaning may problematize how a listener interprets a song’s lyrics by offering conflicting accounts of who is speaking. Part of the information is blurred by the duality of the meaning and how the narrator sends mixed messages through poetic shifts of tone. Each of the stanzas in “La Trasnochadora” includes an opposition of sentiments that say something about the narrator’s experience. In the first stanza, she describes her negative image in society as a person who frequents bars, but indifferently she also sees money as an emotional salve. Then in the second stanza she describes herself as lost in the darkness of “un mundo de placeres” (a world of pleasures) and asks the universe to guide her toward the light. Between both stanzas we see different sides of the same character. On one side, the narrator simultaneously acknowledges the stigma associated with her lifestyle and offers a justification for why she has to keep living it. On the other, she reveals that her world is desolate and dark, and she is looking for a way out.

Pacini Hernandez asserts the setting of the bar is “a symbol of urban alienation” in Rodriguez’s songs (1995, 180), and here it is a seemingly inescapable place for the narrator. The theme of alienation manifests in different ways, most obviously in the lyrics and narrative. For example, with the first line, “dicen” (they say) emphasizes that it is a non-specific group judging the narrator. They are not the people who are themselves at the bar but rather external to the bar and the social situation, likely representing mainstream Dominican society writ large.

Throughout the song the only references the narrator makes to anyone other than herself are the people of society and to either God or a client. Another more discrete symbol of alienation here is money, which for the narrator can only be obtained by participating in the lifestyle she appears to regret. In other words, the story presents a catch-22 for the narrator, who seems forced to continue reliving a cycle. The inference of the barrio through the bar that is also a brothel further establishes the notion that what goes on there is socially frowned upon by mainstream society.

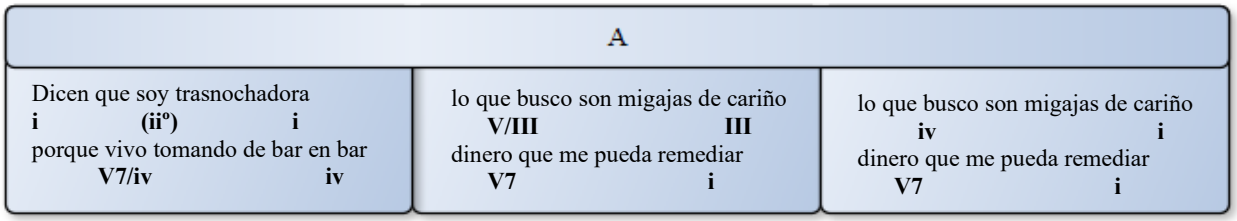
Rodríguez's performance brings up a question about the authenticity of her character and the way her persona engenders meaning. In barrios in this period and beyond, it was uncommon for women to drink in public spaces; those who did were often those with the ability to be in bars and brothels (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 162 & 180–82). To portray such a character appeals directly to an audience that understands the social setting. It also allows Rodríguez and her audience to participate in a kind of communal authenticity relating the realities of life in the barrio through song. Rodríguez's personal belonging within bachata's community exemplifies what Allan Moore (2002; 2012) calls "authenticity of expression," which he explains as the means to "authenticate the performer and can articulate on their behalf 'what it is to be me'" (2012, 269). This kind of authenticity speaks to Rodríguez's personal belonging within bachata's community: even if she were not actually a prostitute working in a bar, her story is an authentic expression of the broader social setting.

Rodríguez also participates as part of her audience's group identity. Her song character and persona cannot be separated as a symbol of exoticism or source of sympathy like happens in Mexican *cabaretera* and prostitute melodrama films. Because Rodríguez is invoking the bar setting and the prostitute character to an audience that at least understands it as real, the story and her persona project authenticity. Moore calls this "authenticity of experience," a type that

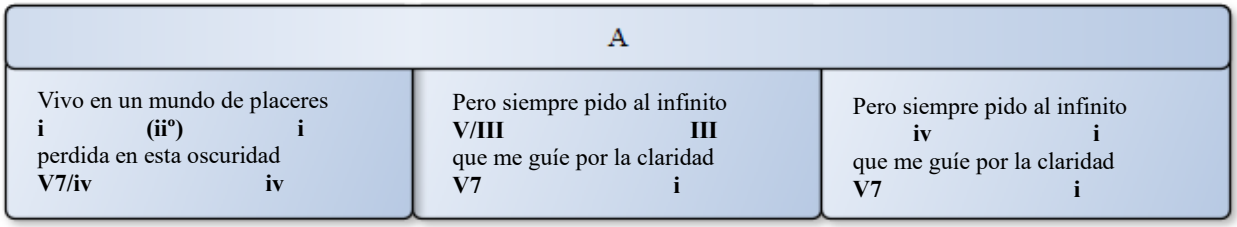
articulates something shared between the singer and the audience by "[articulating] on behalf of the audience 'this is what it is like to be you'" and "'this is what it means to be us'" (269). By expressing the isolation that urban life creates in this song, Rodríguez is also engaging her audience within the scope of Dominican social structure at large.

The music reflects the story of alienation and the reciprocal nature of the narrative through harmony and form. The diagram of the first two verses shown in Example 3.3 indicates the two harmonic areas of emphasis: minor and its relative major. As noted above, the stanzas take on a two-part structure lyrically and are supported harmonically by the two harmonic areas. The first two lines of each verse establish the character in her setting and are centered around the tonic in F minor. Both couplets imply negativity toward the setting, first by the stigmatized connotation of the night owl label and then the character's view of the setting's hopelessness. In the second part of each verse the character expresses an aspiration or plea and temporarily tonicizes A♭, the relative major. The second couplet of each stanza takes on a more positive and hopeful tone, though the repetition notably does not tonicize major. I hear the brief move to major in the first iteration of the second couplet and its later denial in the repetition as serving an important function in the narrative: the character's hope is always checked by the reality of her situation.

Verse 1



Verse 2



Example 3.3. "La Trasnochadora," Verses 1 & 2

The third verse begins differently from the first two, now tonicizing major in the first four bars. While each of the previous tonicizations of major coincided with an expression of hope, the character now questions how she got to that point in a decidedly negative tone. In the second part of the verse, she again makes a plea for salvation, though now supported by minor harmony. Whether the listener interprets this final section as addressed to God or to a client, the switch to minor helps to reconfigure the hopeful message into one of sobering reality: the character will keep hoping for something unattainable or she will accept the reality of doing what she has to for money, the one thing she admits will heal her. In the latter case, it should be noted that much of what she conveys in the first two verses could be her *cuento* that she uses to justify herself.

A'		
Yo no sé lo que me pasa a mí **V7/III** **III** Que la suerte yo la tengo así **V7/III** **III**	Yo le pido al señor que me acompañe **iv** **i** Y me quite este mal de mis pesares **V7** **i**	Yo le pido al señor que me acompañe **iv** **i** Y me quite este mal de mis pesares **V7** **i**

Example 3.4. "La Trasnochadora," Verse 3

Formally, "La Trasnochadora" is mostly strophic with an altered third verse creating an AAA' form. The third verse's accompaniment is used as both an instrumental introduction and interlude. By nature, strophic form with its repeating material is cyclic and in pop does not usually follow a large-scale harmonic trajectory (Nobile 2020, 134–35). Here that is mostly true, with the exception that the third verse starts in major. Nevertheless, the moves to major have some larger structural importance since they serve as the introduction and interlude between the third verse and repetition. Example 3.5 is a chart showing the form and the overall harmonic trajectory that results. The duality of major and minor harmonies in this song articulates the duality of its narrative.

Intro		A			A			A'		Interlude		A'	
Instrumental Verse 3 material		Verse 1			Verse 2			Verse 3		Instrumental Verse 3 material		Verse 3 End of melody altered Florid guitar accomp.	
Major	minor	minor	Major	minor	minor	Major	minor	Major	minor	Major	minor	Major	minor

Example 3.5. "La Trasnochadora" formal layout

Earlier, I alluded to how the song links the author and audience through the narrator's voice. Indeed, the song's story communicates a possible day-to-day scenario, but what about the voice communicates Rodríguez's authority to express that? Using Burns's schema of narrative voice (2010), the relationship between singer, narrator, and listener becomes clearer. The first

aspect to evaluate is how the implied author (i.e., Rodríguez as bachatera) conveys ideologies in common with her listener, what Burns calls "narrative agency" (160–61). Though it is likely that Rodríguez was exposed to daily life in the barrios and marginalized communities, more important is that Rodríguez as implied author appears to have knowledge of what goes on in the barrios. Here the implied author expresses the values of "proper" mainstream society and those of her comparatively "lowbrow" audience and milieu. This is an important distinction because her audience (narratively, the implied reader) in most cases would also have intimate knowledge of the same social setting. In other words, even though Rodríguez is expressing a personal account (though not autobiographical) as narrator, she still offers a sort of authoritative voice about life in the barrios.

Burns suggests that another aspect of narrative voice is "listener engagement," which attends to the way a narrator appeals directly to a listener. Two of Burns's qualities of listener engagement are sincerity and proximity. In essence, sincerity is an assessment the listener makes about the relationship between narrator and the character: the more sincere the relationship is, the more convincing the narrator's agency. Proximity is how close the narrator and the character are narratively (165). In Rodríguez's case, her appeal to her audience is made stronger by the sincerity of her character's story. She presents the character with authenticity as if she lives her life going bar to bar. The proximity of the narrator and the character is also supported narratively. If the lyrics were written so the narrator was describing "la trasnochadora" in third person, for example, the narrative agents would be more distant. Together these qualities make Rodríguez's performance and character connected to her audience more directly.

It should be noted that important stylistic features of the accompaniment in this song make it distinctly bachata aside from its lyrical content. The often clipped and punchy

articulation of the lead guitar is very different from the more resonant playing of guitar trios; requinto players in trios might perform elaborate and virtuosic parts, but generally their playing style was softer, perhaps to complement the singing style. Indeed, with time the sound of bachata guitars came to be a characteristically clipped sound (for example, with many recordings of Ramón Cordero, Leonardo Paniagua, and Marino Pérez). In the third verse starting at 1:15 there is another stylistic marker that eventually became a common section in bachata. Often called *majao* (mashed up), these sections have accents in the accompaniment on every quarter note usually punctuated by the percussion. While both these qualities would become more reified in the late 1970s and '80s, it is already starting to appear in "La Trasnochadora."

La Solitaria

There exists little biographical information about Mélida Rodríguez, but her obituary gives an important detail about her early life. She was born in a rural village in the province of Hato Mayor before moving to the nearby port city of San Pedro de Macorís and eventually the capital Santo Domingo. Throughout her career, most of Rodríguez's songs in some way engage with aspects of the daily life and culture of her audience. They only rarely reference parts of her real biographical story. The song "La Solitaria" is an exception, as it includes a description of migration from rural to urban that is true of both Rodríguez's life and that of much of her audience. Unlike "La Trasnochadora," where the narrative is situated in one locale, this song encompasses several interactions between different characters and settings. The bar is still a central part of the narrative, but we also learn something about the rural community where the narrator (and perhaps Rodríguez) came from. Additionally, it has commentary about gender expectations, suggesting that norms were in a state of transition in the urban setting.

Yo no te quiero	I don't love you
Tú bien lo sabes	You know it well
No quiero un hombre	I don't want a man
Que me haga sufrir	Who makes me suffer
Me voy de tu lado	I'm leaving you
Me voy para siempre	I'm leaving forever
Quizás un día	Maybe one day
Nos volvamos a ver	We'll see each other again
Oye, mi amiga	Listen, my friend
Que oigas un consejo	Listen to this advice
Tú que no sabes	You don't know
Lo que me ha pasado a mí	What has happened to me
Míreme los ojos	Look at my eyes
Que ya no tienen lágrimas	They have no more tears
Que por los hombres	For men
No se debe sufrir	One shouldn't suffer
No tengo madre	I have no mother
No tengo padre	I have no father
Ni un hermanito	Or a little brother
Que me venga a acompañar	To come and keep me company
Yo vivo triste	I live in sadness
Vivo solitaria	I live in solitude
En mi barquito	In my little boat
Yo me voy a navegar	I'm going to sail off
Dejé a un pueblito / muy solitario	I left a very solitary little village
Entré a una barra	I went into a bar
Y me puse a tomar	And started to drink
Ey, cantinero	Hey, bartender
Sírvame otra copa	Serve me another cup
Porque mis penas	Because I've come here
Aquí las vengo a ahogar	To drown my sorrows

Example 3.6. "La Solitaria" (The Solitary One)

"La Solitaria" is another strophic song in C minor, with the only musical alteration coming in the setting of the second stanza creating a AA'AA formal layout. Each stanza presents a different part of a narrative that goes from nebulous to concrete subjects, which is supported by

shifts in address. First the narrator addresses the informal second person "tú," revealing that she is talking to a soon-to-be-ex-lover. As in many boleros and contemporary bachatas, the themes of romantic disillusionment and emotional turmoil expressed in the first stanza are common; even the notion of the narrator deciding to leave is not particularly unusual. Even so, the final lines "quizás un día nos volvamos a ver" (maybe one day we'll see each other again) do come across as sarcastic or not genuine when she so adamantly announced her intention to leave. In the second stanza, the narrator is now in conversation with a woman giving her the advice to not suffer because of men. When the narrator says "[los ojos] que ya no tienen lágrimas" (my eyes have no more tears) it is implied that she has suffered but will no longer tolerate the pain men cause her. But as is revealed in the last two stanzas, the sadness of the narrator actually seems to come more from the sense of loneliness that being in the city brings.

The narrator explains that she is totally without family and her life is one of solitude and sadness. Now her attitude toward both the man and the woman starts to make more sense: she has been crying about the much more troubling fate of being somewhere without any sort of family or means of emotional support. Her reaction is to turn to drinking, which she expresses metaphorically at first as "navegar" (to sail). In Rodríguez's songs, Pacini Hernandez notes that she "openly embraces drinking (which even today [1995] women seldom do publicly) not only as a panacea for emotional pain but as a way to have fun" (1995, 180). The final stanza is set in a bar where the narrator goes to drown her sorrows with alcohol. She recounts how she got there from her hometown in a secluded rural village only to find herself in the bar drinking to try to cope with the hardships of life.

How the song moves between addresses creates uncertainty in how a listener engages with the narrative. Logically, the "tú" in the first stanza (the man) cannot be the same character

as the one in the second stanza (the female friend), nor does it make sense that a listener would interpose themselves on both versions. In the last two stanzas, the introspective turn is only briefly interrupted with an interjected call to the bartender. This schema inverts what many pop songs do when they change address, which is a shift from distant addresser/addressee relationship (usually third and first person) to intimate (second person), what Matt BaileyShea calls the "distant → intimate" template (2014, 2021). BaileyShea notes that exceptions exist where narrative shifts do the opposite but are rare (2014, [44]). Similarly, in early bachata the second person was a very common and consistent narrative address, making a song like "La Solitaria" with its many address changes unusual (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 161). One potential reason why the song follows this layout is apparent in the title. The narrator, though never calling herself "la solitaria," implies that she has accepted her isolation and who she has become in urban life. Though she found a lover who might have filled the void left by her family, his treatment of her was untenable. Eventually, as the song shifts to being about the narrator's past, she becomes more distant to the other characters and to the listener.

One musical way that Rodríguez calls attention to the difference in lyrical address is timbrally. In the first half of the first verse addressing "tú," she stays within a range of a minor sixth (B3–G4) and is singing in modal voice with breathy phonation; this is the intimate address made to the protagonist's lover delivered in similar timbral fashion to "Frío en el Alma." Kate Heidemann notes that breathy phonation can "communicate a more relaxed, quiet kind of body engagement" (2016, [3.27]), which I believe makes obvious the active tone of the second half of the verse. As the second part of the verse unfolds, the protagonist tells the lover that she is leaving for good and Rodríguez's voice switches into using twang, despite only expanding the melodic range slightly higher to A♭4. One way of interpreting the shift in vocal timbre follows

the transitional nature of the narrative: the protagonist is becoming more distant from the lover by separating the direct address from the consequent action (i.e., what the lover did and what the protagonist is going to do) timbrally.

The second verse is musically distinct, as the harmonic progression and melodic line are different. For comparison, Example 3.7 shows the first two verses with corresponding harmonic progressions.

Verse 1 (0:15–0:32)

A	
Yo no te quiero / Tú bien lo sabes i No quiero un hombre / Que me haga sufrir i vii°	Me voy de tu lado / Me voy para siempre vii° iv i Quizás un dia / Nos volvamos a ver V7 i

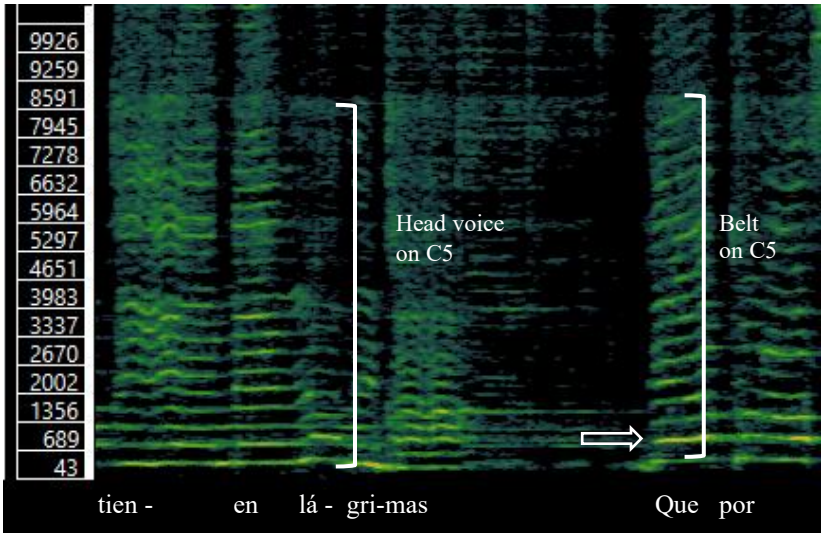
Verse 2 (0:32–0:49)

A'	
Oye, mi amiga / Que oigas un consejo i Tú que no sabes / Lo que me ha pasado a mi (i) V/iv iv	Mireme los ojos / Que ya no tienen lágrimas iv i Que por los hombres / No se debe sufrir V7 i

Example 3.7. "La Solitaria," Verses 1 & 2

Arriving on iv at the end of the second couplet supports the vocal line's sudden rise to a higher register (as high as C5). This is a part of Rodríguez's range in which she often belts as was shown in "Frío en el Alma," and here she alternates between head voice and belting rather rapidly. Using a spectrogram, the difference is visible on the first syllable of "lágrimas" and "que por" a few seconds later, both sung on C5. The relatively sparse overtones on "lá" and the rich array of them on "que" (as well as a strong first harmonic) illustrate Rodríguez's ability to move

freely between forms of delivery. These features and harmony demarcate the second verse and call attention to it. Within the song's narrative, the second verse is significant as a continuation of the suffering the narrator endures because of the man (or men more generally) in the first stanza. But it might also serve as an appeal to Rodríguez's female listeners, whose gender roles were changing. Rodríguez suggests that men are not worth suffering for emotionally but could also be suggesting that women do not need to think of themselves as only homemakers anymore. Indeed, beginning in the 1970s women in the barrios were becoming the breadwinners and heads of their households (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 155–57).



Example 3.8. Spectrogram of head voice vs. belt

In "La Solitaria," the persona portrayed by Rodríguez is one that fits into the social setting on several bases. As a person, Rodríguez came from the same situation as the majority of those who moved to the cities, so she had intimate knowledge of what her listeners might resonate with. The character of "la solitaria" articulates both the reality of social detachment in urban life and that romantic stability is neither common nor necessary. Finally, drinking and

being in the bar were activities that soothed the effects of urban isolation, and in turn stood as symbols of alienation.

Bebiendo y Llorando

Déjenme beber hasta que muera	Let me drink until I die
No se metan en mi vida por favor	Please don't meddle in my life
El licor puede desbarrar las penas	Liquor can unravel the sorrows
Que está sufriendo mi pobre corazón	That my poor heart is suffering
En la cantina me paso noche y día	I spend all day and night at the tavern
Tomando por un falso querer	Drinking because of a false love
Después que dijo que a nadie más quería	After saying he did not love anyone else
Lo ví con otra entregándole su amor	I saw him giving his love to another woman
Ya, para mí no hay alegría	Now for me there is no happiness
Vivo en un mundo de tristeza	I live in a world of sadness
Cuando me falta el valor	When I lack courage
Aclamo a la cerveza	I reach for beer
Si tomo es con mi dinero	If I drink it is with my money
Y si es que invito, pago yo	And if I invite [them], I pay
Porque son amigos míos y bohemios	Because they're my friends and bohemians
Y a la larga pagan ellos y bebo yo	And later on they'll pay and I'll drink
(Aquí tomando y Ustedes pagando)	(I'm here drinking and you all are paying)

Example 3.9. "Bebiendo y Llorando" (Drinking and Crying)

Not all of Rodríguez's songs depict the bar as a place of isolation. Instead, it can be a place of acceptance and community. "Bebiendo y Llorando" presents a slightly different perspective about drinking compared to the last example. Where drinking was a necessary part of the prostitute identity in "La Trasnochadora" and a panacea in "La Solitaria," here it is presented as both emotional salve and means to have fun with friends. Many of the same themes in other songs from the album appear here too, like disillusionment, rejection, betrayal, and money. But

the song's comical presentation of the act of drinking with friends illustrates how the bar has a dual social function. Musically, the song also offers a starkly different sonic representation of this scene and the narrative. By utilizing major tonality and a unique vocal timbre, "Bebiendo y Llorando" displays the potential for drinking to assume a more lighthearted significance.

The first stanza reads as a dark preface to the rest of the song even if it does not sound like one. The narrator asks society to leave her alone so she can drink herself to death. Alcohol here is something that will soothe her suffering. In the second stanza the narrator reveals the reason for her mood and drinking: she was cheated on. In another statement of sorrow, the third stanza's lines "ya, para mí no hay alegría / vivo en un mundo de tristeza" (now for me there is no happiness / I live in a world of sadness) are juxtaposed by the comedy of "cuando me falta el valor / aclamo a la cerveza" (when I lack courage / I reach for beer). The final stanza addresses the theme of money its use as a symbol of power and agency for the narrator. She drinks only because of her money and even pays for her friends to drink sometimes, both of which are statements about her ability to make money. How, exactly, is left up to the imagination of the listener, but one might assume that it is through sex work if she spends her days and nights at the bar (mainly off limits to women other than prostitutes). Finally, the narrator talks about the community she is part of at the bar: a group of friends and bohemians that sometimes pay for her drinks too.

"Bebiendo y Llorando" is the only song on *La Sufrida* composed entirely in a major key. Though tonality is not absolute in different kinds of bachatas (e.g. romantic vs. comedic), within the context of the many minor-key songs of embitterment on the album this song's cheer stands out. Within the song, the lyrics—at least at first—suggest a heavy and dour tale while the music suggests something more lighthearted. But the key is not the only factor signaling the comedic

effect of the song. Rodríguez alters her voice in an unusual way that I argue highlights the humor. The first obvious change in her voice is the use of twang (constricted pharynx), which is prominent throughout the first stanza, for example on the words “por favor,” “corazón,” and “día.” As a fundamentally vocal genre, bachata has a lot of variety in vocal style based on expressive intent.

Pacini Hernandez notes:

> one of bachata’s defining features is its highly emotional, sometimes almost sobbing, singing style. The vocal quality of bachata singers varies to the degree that the singer wishes to emphasize the emotion being expressed: pleading, exhorting, and despairing are expressed with a tightening of the voice, giving a tremulous quality to much of the singing. (1995, 20)

Here the “tightening” of Rodríguez’s voice produces twang that enhances the melodrama of the first stanzas, meanwhile adding to the humor of the later stanzas. The dual functionality of twang in this song suggests to me one other narrative interpretation that could account for all its seemingly disparate qualities: Rodríguez is impersonating being drunk. In that interpretation, she places herself within a scene and situation that many listeners might play out in their daily lives. Unabashedly, she admits and celebrates the fact that drinking helps cope with life’s hardships and can be a source of camaraderie and community.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked the question “who is she” about the woman pictured on the front of Rodríguez’s album *La Sufrida*. By understanding the persona that Rodríguez created through narrative and performance, it becomes clear that the woman is not just a character but indexical of the reality of life in marginality. In “La Trasnochadora” Rodríguez sings about what it might be like to be a prostitute, but she is also singing about the disillusionment that many in

the margins suffered as economic hope faded to impoverishment in the city. Along the same lines, the story of "La Solitaria" followed a narrative that probably resonated with many of Rodríguez's audience, as well as her own story: leaving behind their homes in rural communities only to find themselves isolated and alienated in the city. Drinking became a prominent expression of alienation but also as a potential salve for emotional pain as well as a form of recreation. Rodríguez captures drinking's dual function in "Bebiendo y Llorando," but also reflects the socioeconomic changes occurring within the margins as women began working and gaining power often through money. As a way of expressing the intricate social dynamics of barrio life, bachata began to take on new meanings; like the *cuento*, music could relate with reality and more crucially its audience even when told as fictional stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

BACHATA'S FIRST TÍGUERA

During his 31-year rule first as president and then as *generalissimo* of the Dominican Republic (1930–1961), Rafael Leonidas Trujillo consolidated political power and amassed enormous wealth for himself and his family. His influence touched nearly every part of Dominican life, from official state matters to the daily life of Dominicans across society. He had enormous and lasting impact on Dominican society. Probably the most lasting was the consolidation of economic power in the upper class and the use of nationalism to concretize the upper class's dominance. Economically, his policies grew the hegemony of the upper class (and to an extent the small middle class) in the 1950s, resulting in rural Dominicans migrating into urban centers in search of better economic opportunities. Even after Trujillo's assassination in 1961, his impact continued to steer the nation's course. The wealthy class and its benefactors (mainly foreign powers) successfully undercut any attempts to redistribute their wealth. Such an attempt was made most prominently by the first democratically elected president Juan Bosch, who led the nation for less than a year in 1963. This also perpetuated the elite cultural hegemony that had accompanied Trujillo's reign, whereby the class in control dictated what was culturally acceptable.

In marginalized urban communities, transplanted rural Dominicans' cultural traditions served as important expressions of their communal identity but also displayed the effects of migration. As these communities became more urbanized, influences from outside the sphere of traditional rural music began to alter these genres. The cosmopolitan bolero naturally had significance in the musical tastes of Dominican middle and upper classes during its heyday as a symbol of modernity. To the middle and upper class, the guitar-based bolero and traditional

merengue típico that the lower class was producing were uncouth and unrefined in comparison to the polished international-style bolero and especially orquesta merengue (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 12 & 134–35). Even with the pronounced divide among classes on economic and hegemonic grounds, musically, there was less dividing them: the upper classes were listening to bolero and merengue and so were the lower classes.

The social setting in which bachata emerged, if taken as intensely interconnected, does not need to be at odds with the process of modernization that was shaping it. Put simply, bachata and more generally music have the unique property of crisscrossing across borders whether real, imagined, or imposed. Some of these borders I have mentioned already, but they can also include gender, race, traditional vs. modern ideology, not to mention the many compounded or derived borders. By evaluating Rodríguez's ability to portray a common Dominican cultural identity, I arrive at a slightly different angle in analyzing bachata with particular interest in gender. Building off scholarship on Latin American cultural theory in music, I am interested in how social factors play out and form the cultural fabric of which music is a part. Specifically, Rodríguez transcends cultural norms through the persona of the *tíguera* (a strong-willed, street-savvy woman), reclaiming power.

Merengue and Bachata

The predominant musical genre in Dominican society from around the late 1930s until the 1990s was merengue. If bachata grew somewhat organically into a popular music genre out of its cultural surroundings in the margins, merengue was made popular foremost by an act of political engineering. Trujillo reconfigured merengue from a rural musical genre of the poor and working class into a symbol of modernized national cultural identity (Austerlitz 1997, 53–54). One of the major figures in the transformation was the composer and band leader Luis Alberti. Alberti was

instrumental in creating a polished and international sound and style with his jazz-inspired big bands (Austerlitz 1997, 55). As Trujillo continued to consolidate political and economic power for himself and the upper echelons of Dominican society, merengue eventually became known as the music for the elite ruling class and thereby hegemonically as the de facto Dominican music. Creating an image of a modern, outward-looking society was also a major factor in the development of merengue. An obvious issue with merengue's politically driven transformation is that its emergence as a mainstream cultural symbol supported ongoing neocolonial power structures. In the wake of Trujillo's assassination, merengue gradually became less a symbol of the elite and more of a representative style for most Dominicans. Though it no longer needed to serve an explicitly political and elitist purpose, merengue continued the "creative incorporation of outside elements served to domesticate transnational popular culture at home" (Austerlitz 1997, 92).

For three decades, bachata lived in the shadow of the modernized merengue. Still, even as bachata emerged in Dominican society's margins, it took part in weaving the musical and cultural fabric in post-Trujillo society. From the 1930s to present, merengue did not remain strictly local as it spread out first via Dominican diaspora and commercial recordings throughout the Caribbean and United States. While bachata eventually followed its own move toward globalization in the 1990s and beyond, early on it occupied a space apart from mainstream society. Bachata was the "black sheep of the music business," affiliated with marginalized Dominicans whose tastes and business were not lucrative to most radio companies (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 226). Merengue was able to attract both domestic and international audiences while bachata was popular almost exclusively in the local lower classes. But in ways, bachata

could express more about its audience without significant outside influence and commercialization. The same was true of merengue típico.

As Dominican marginalized communities found their social needs changing, bachata served as a medium to articulate their new way of life while holding onto cultural traditions. As a music of the rural poor, bachata first grew out of a nonmodern tradition, was forced to contend with modernity in urban settings, and ultimately became a popular music that spoke to more than its original audience. Popular music in the Dominican Republic was dictated first by political powers like Trujillo who saw the potential for music to consolidate power to the ruling class. The intricate relationship between bachata, merengue típico, and mainstream popular music begs the question "popular to/by/for whom?" It is ironic that in the reconfiguring and modernizing of a traditional genre like merengue típico, mainstream music like orquesta merengue led to the emergence of a necessary Other like bachata. Despite all the forces set against (and with) it, like merengue, bachata ultimately became a symbol of Dominican identity.

Tigueraje and Gender

One of the most famous merengue típico musicians in the Dominican Republic is Fefita la Grande. Known for her virtuosic playing of the accordion and distinctive voice, Fefita has crafted a persona that blends hypersexual symbols of both femininity and masculinity. This is most obvious in her appearance with her colorful outfits, abundant jewelry, low-cut shirts, tight pants, and elaborately painted nails. Musically, her raspiness and predominant use of chest voice signify confidence and masculinity. Combining both feminine and masculine characteristics may seem to point toward a transgressive process of queering from one pole in a binary system. However, gender queering in Dominican society has long been a two-way street when it comes to *tígueres* (tigers) and *tígueras* (female tigers), who can access different modalities of gender.

Sidney Hutchinson discusses the difference between *tígueres* and the *hombre serio*, with the former being "a tough guy or a hustler, the king of the streets" and the latter a "person who is hard-working, responsible, morally upstanding" (2016, 32–33).

Both masculine identities refer to the machismo culture of the Dominican Republic that tends to dominate different levels of society, lower and upper class alike (Hutchinson 2016, 35). Hutchinson goes on to argue that "a single individual can perform both roles at different points in life" (35). The transmutability of roles among individuals also applies to women, with the *mujer seria* (serious woman) and the *tíguera* (42–43). The *mujer seria* is exemplified by an adherence to traditional gender norms and marianismo; she "gain[s] respect by acting in a docile manner, but [she] may also do it by fighting for that respect" (56). In her analyses of these masculinities and femininities, Hutchinson stresses the domain of *tígueres* and *tígueras*: the "liminal, dangerous space of *la calle* [the street]" (33). How do these two binaries interact in a common space? Do identities overlap or are they inherently separated because of Dominican society's heterosexual norms? For Hutchinson, at least part of that question can be answered through music and its practitioners.

Merengue típico and Fefita la Grande's music not only represent *tigueraje* as individual expressions of identity, but they also serve as a stage for the continued discourse of *tigueraje* as a transgression of gender norms. Writing about Fefita's successful career, Hutchinson notes, "[Fefita] presents herself as a woman not constrained by traditional gender roles: she realizes that she performs some typically masculine behaviors, yet there is no question she is feminine" (102). Fefita also presents feminine behavior and an androgynous hypersexuality, which Hutchinson points out is true of other Dominican musicians like Rita Indiana (234). But to say that what Fefita performs can be simplified into one or two categories of identity misses the bigger point of

tigueraje and its gender-ambiguous nature: that gender can be extremely fluid in how it pushes against coloniality. In undermining colonial gender norms by performing masculinity and femininity flexibly, *tígueras* (and for that matter *tígueres*) begin to form a similarly flexible decolonial identity.

Performing *Tigueraje*

If Fefita's fame is at least in part due to her embodied performance of *tigueraje* in merengue típico, then the relatively minor success of Mélida Rodríguez—as a bachatera who also incorporated *tigueraje* in her music—also reveals the mottled nature music and gender in postcolonial Dominican society had. Both genres migrated with the low- and working-class country folk into urban centers in the 1950s and 1960s. In this setting they further developed alongside each other within the margins of society. While merengue típico embraced the *tíguere/a* as an acceptable identity through artists like Tatico Henríquez and Fefita, bachata in its early decades was primarily a romantic vocal genre in which *tigueraje* played only a minor role. Considering bachata's reinforcement of traditional gender norms and men's dominant representation in the genre, Rodríguez's performances of the *tíguera* stand out. Even though bachata began shifting toward expressing more misogynistic themes in a period during the late 1970s and through the '80s, some of Rodríguez's songs displaying *tigueraje* predate the *amargue* period.

Rodríguez is considered the first bachatera to have commercial success, despite having a short recording career. Even among later bachateras, the fact that Rodríguez wrote many of her own songs was highly unusual. She produced three LPs all released on a small record label called Gemini Records: the first and best-known is *La Sufrida* (1967), followed by *Esta Es Mélida* (ca. 1969), and *El Traicionero* (1972, rereleased as *Que Torpe Fui* later that year). The

majority of her songs, like those of her male counterparts, were in the cosmopolitan bolero style. Bachateros in the 1960s tended to sing in a romantic style both lyrically and in terms of vocal quality: often commenting on topics of courtly love and romantic situations. Rodríguez sang many different types of songs including genres other than bachata or bolero. But the most striking of which are the songs that she sings from a narrative perspective of being in exclusionary locales for women like bars or presents characters that participate in urban night life like prostitutes (see Chapter 3). In addition, some songs actively contrast the gendered norms of the *mujer seria* by celebrating "being bad," as in the title track of *La Sufrida*.

Pacini Hernandez analyzes the transgressive nature of Rodríguez's songs as subjective accounts of "her experiences of social and economic dislocation… suffused with solitude and suffering" (1995, 179). Some, such as "Bebiendo y Llorando," portray an almost farcical take on drinking oneself to death. Others, such as "La Trasnochadora," depict a woman not totally comfortable with the lifestyle she has to live. I should note that many of Rodríguez's songs are romantic in theme, not unlike what many early bachateros or boleristas were singing in the 1960s. Rodríguez clearly had a finger on the pulse of her audience and the shared social consciousness of rural migrants in their new urban setting. I argue, though, that Rodríguez's songs are not limited to her subjective experiences and that by invoking *tigueraje* in her songs she participates in a uniquely active form of authenticity given the social setting.

Authenticity is a problematic concept as it applies to music and even more so when considering the voice because of its multiple subjectivities. A singer relates to their physical voice, to the voice of the character, to their voice as part of a community, to the voice as medium to interact with the audience, and so on. On the other side of the equation, a listener relates in similar ways to the voice and the singer. In that way, authenticity cannot be definite but is an

always-shifting feature of popular song. As far as Western pop is concerned, scholars like Simon Frith (1996) suggest that the pop voice is "personally expressive" unlike the voice in classical music (186). It is the concept of personal expression that proves most problematic when it comes to figuring out authenticity. LJ Müller (2022) questions the validity of the idea of the real voice and its expression of authenticity, arguing that both concepts are constructed from a male-centric perspective (101–2). Müller argues that both are the product of a sexist, colonial structure that systematically strips away meaning under the guise of seeking out the truth in the voice. This problem is only further complicated in music like bachata that was on the one hand localized and on the other emerging in a modernizing society. Rodríguez's songs may express authenticity as personally expressive, but also communally as an expression of *tigueraje*. Through such a lens, the differences in persona expressed vocally and through her lyrics can be authentic and fantastic while remaining connected to her audience.

Licia Fiol-Matta (2017) offers an alternative that complements authenticity: the thinking voice. Using the Puerto Rican pop star Lucecita as an example, Fiol-Matta proposes that voices in pop deserve to be considered as individual and capable of "expression of thought in voice [that] reaches beyond the recording, concert hall, or TV screen into the very psychic structure of a collective" (2017, 14). The thinking voice is naturally connected to the singer's identity and life, though it has to be capable of resonating strongly with an audience beyond the subjective expression of the individual. Rodríguez's popularity in the Dominican Republic was significant but never mainstream because of bachata's second-rate and low-class status. Her career was also cut short by her untimely death at the age of 42. Nevertheless, Rodríguez expresses some of the same ability to invoke the thinking voice through her songs in two different ways: first as a singer capable of performing different styles (including boleros in the pan-Latin international

style), and second as having access to social and cultural expressions belonging to bachata's milieu like performing the identity of the *tíguera*.

The Original Guaraguao

There is an urban legend in the Dominican Republic about what happened during the assassination of Trujillo on May 30, 1961. The story goes that one of the assassins shot Trujillo (at that point either alive or already dead) and said "este guaraguao no comerá más pollito" (this chickenhawk will not eat any more little chickens). Trujillo, whose regime was filled with racial and political violence, had long portrayed himself as a strongman; in a way he was an opportunistic *tíguere* (turned *caudillo*) in *la calle* that was the Caribbean in the 1930s till the '60s. Indeed, as Sydney Hutchinson observes (2016, 35), Trujillo's rise from low-class roots to the pinnacle of power in the Dominican Republic—and all the unscrupulous methods he used to get there—go hand in hand with the identity of the *tíguere*. Referring to Trujillo as a *guaraguao* (chickenhawk) that preys on *pollitos* (little chickens) mirrors the cut-throat opportunism that a *tíguere* sometimes performs. In the following analyses, I look at a set of four bachatas that deal with the *tíguere/a* persona in distinct ways and examine the fluidity of gender it elicits. The original track "La Mujer Guaraguao" (The Chickenhawk Woman) by Lino Bonilla elicited responses from Marino Pérez and Mélida Rodríguez, both of which are called "Contestación a Mujer Guaraguao" (Response to Chickenhawk Woman). The final song is a response by Bonilla to Rodríguez's song. The songs all interact with *tigueraje* in one or more ways. Such an exchange of musical and cultural expression offers a glimpse into how members of marginalized communities used music as a vehicle for social praxis.

La Mujer Guaraguao

Creíste que ibas a hallar	You thought you came to find
Una gran felicidad	Great happiness
|:Y la suerte de hoy en día	But luck these days
Se halla de casualidad :|	One finds by chance
Las mujeres están demás	Women are extra
Y los hombres a la moda	And the men are in fashion
Tu madre es la que te apoya	Your mother has spoiled you
[Y yo lo que degustante]	And I'm just the taster
Por gozar otros amantes	Because you enjoy other loves
Te quedaste como joya	You stayed like a jewel
Ofrécele una promesa	Offer a promise
A un santo de gran potencia	To a saint of great power
|:Pa' (para) que te aparte del mundo	To put you apart from the world
Y te haga coger vergüenza :|	So that you carry your shame
Porque ya tu no respetas	Because you don't respect
Lo(s) grande(s) ni lo(s) de chiquito(s)	Neither the big nor the small
Ni lo(s) feos ni lo(s) bonito(s)	The ugly nor the beautiful
Todito lo has repasado	You've checked it all
Tu eres como un guaraguao	You're like the chickenhawk
Que no respeta pollito(s)	That doesn't respect little chickens
Si tu fueras señorita	If you were a maiden
Cualquiera se casara	Anyone would marry you
Pero la vergüenza tuya	But your shame
La tienes pintada en la cara	You have painted on your face
Cállate y no digas nada	Be quiet and don't say anything
No te quiero descubrir	I don't want to go looking for you
Que no quiero que por mí	Because I don't want you to lose someone
Tú vayas a perder con otro	because of me
Procura casarte pronto	Better get married quick
Con el más tonto de aquí	With the stupidest one around

Example 4.1. "La Mujer Guaraguao" (The Chickenhawk Woman) by Lino Bonilla (ca. 1975)

The original track by Lino Bonilla follows a strophic form, one of the standard song forms for bolero and bachata in the 1960s and '70s. Poetically, the verses are either quatrains that

repeat the last two lines (creating six-line stanzas) or sextuplets. This creates a structure that appears like a ten-line form, but in performance becomes twelve, probably to better match the musical form. The form is suggestive of *décima* but does not adhere strictly to it. For the first two stanzas, the rhyme scheme is *abebbccddc*, which does not completely follow the typical *abbaaccddc* scheme of the *décima espinela*, the most common verse structure of *décima*. While the rhyme scheme is loose, the song follows the rules of the octosyllabic line structure of the *espinela*. Example 4.2 shows a syllable count of the first three verses showing regular emphasis on the second or third and seventh syllables. I should mention that the *décima* is a long-standing poetic form that came from 16th-century Spain and influenced many Latin genres including bachata (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 10). As a poetic form, it was very versatile for precomposed and improvised music. It could be used for romantic and serious themes as well as humorous ones, like in the case of Cuban *controversias guajiras* (Hope 2019, 197).

Though Bonilla uses clever wordplay throughout, "La Mujer Guaraguao" takes a critical stance toward women who take advantage of men or otherwise do irreputable things. The narrator in the song is primarily an observer rather than an active participant in the story. It is important that even though the singer is addressing the second person familiar "tú," he is not participatory in his own account of what the woman does or did. Where many early romantic bachatas involve the narrator directly engaged in the story, here the narrator is distanced from the addressee more like in bachatas from the later *amargue* period that express *desprecio* (disparagement). With his observation comes a prejudice that appears directed at a type of woman: in this case the *tíguera*. When Bonilla sings "Si tu fueras señorita, cualquiera se casará. Pero la vergüenza tuya la tienes pintada en la cara" (if you were a maiden, anyone would marry

you. But your shame you have painted on your face), the implication is that the woman he is addressing lives a life of sexual impropriety or is a prostitute.

Verse 1

Creís-	te	que	i-	bas	a	ha	**llar**			a
1	2	3	-	4	5	-	6			
U-	na	**gran**	fe-	li-	ci-	**dad**				b
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Y	**la**	suer-	te	hoy	en	**día**				e
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
Se	ha-	**lla**	de	ca-	sua-	li-	**dad**			b
1	-	2	3	4	5	6	7			

Verse 2

Las	**mu-**	je-	res	es-	tán	de-	**más**			b
1	2	3	4	-	5	6	7			
Y	los	**hom-**	bres	a	la	**mo-**	da			c
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
Tu	**mad-**	re	es	la	que	te	a-	**po-**	ya	c
1	2	3	-	4	5	6	-	7	8	
Y	yo	**lo**	que	de-	gus-	**tan-**	te			d
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
Por	**go-**	zar	o-	tros	a-	**man-**	tes			d
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
Te	que-	**das-**	te	co-	mo	**jo-**	ya			c
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			

Verse 3

O	**fré-**	ce-	le	u-	na	pro-	**me-**	sa		f
1	2	3	4	-	5	6	7	8		
A	un	**san-**	to	de	gran	po-	**ten-**	cia		g
1	-	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Pa'	**que**	te	a-	par-	te	del	**mun-**	do		h
1	2	3	-	4	5	6	7	8		
Y	**te**	ha-	ga	co-	ger	ver-	**güen-**	za		g
1	2	-	3	4	5	6	7	8		

Example 4.2. Verses 1–3 syllable count and rhyme scheme

The narrator finally acknowledges himself as part of the story in the final stanza. He reveals that not only does he despise the woman, but he does not want to even give the impression that he is interested in her. Much of the commentary the narrator makes is compliant with the machismo of both bachata and Dominican culture (Hutchinson 2016, 190). It also implies a preference for marianismo, the expectation that women need to model themselves after the Virgin Mary (Hutchinson 2016, 34; Sellers 2014, 16). As a result, the lyrics are a scathing assessment of the life some women were living in the margins of Dominican society where sex work was not uncommon. Whether or not Lino Bonilla intended for his song to cause a reaction, the following two examples show that other musicians were listening to the critiques he made.

Contestación a Mujer Guaraguao – Marino Pérez

Marino Pérez's response is even more varied in poetic form and structure than Bonilla's. In Pérez's version, the ten-line *décima* structure is not adhered to. Instead, it is made up of eight-line stanzas constructed with repeating couplets that still follow an octosyllabic line structure. Also gone is any sense of the rhyme scheme of the *décima*. The rhyme of the quatrains is rather irregular: verses 1 and 5 follow *abcb*, verse 2 is *aaba*, and verse 6 *abab*. The sextuplets in verses 3 and 4 are more structured following the scheme *aabaca*. I interpret the lax poetic structure in this version as telling of the narrative nature of these controversial songs; the point being to one up the other rather than try to imitate them. Topically, many of the lines refer to Bonilla's song, such as the phrase "quedar como joya" (to stay like a jewel) and references to *guaraguao*.

Example 4.3. "Contestación a Mujer Guaraguao" (Response to Chickenhawk Woman) by Marino Pérez

	[Spoken]
Marino Pérez: ¿Qué te pasa muchacha?	*Marino Pérez: What's going on girl?*
Woman: Este maldito hombre se puso a hablar mal de mi	*Woman: This bad man was saying awful things about me*
Marino Pérez: No te apures, que yo te defiendo en todo lo que yo pueda.	*Marino Pérez: Don't worry, I will defend you in any way I can*
|:Si tu fueras cómo dicen	If you were like they say
Que eres un hombre tan decente :|	That you are a decent man,
|:No dijeras tantas cosas	You wouldn't say so many things
De una muchacha inocente :|	To an innocent girl
|:Con las muchachas del barrio	The girls of the barrio
No vales ni un centavo :|	Don't value you even a cent,
|:Y eso te lo ganaste	And that's what you get
Por estar difamando :|	For spreading rumors
|:Ya no digas tantas cosas	Don't say so many things
Anda cállate la boca :|	Go ahead and shut your mouth
Como lo hiciste con ella	What you did to her
Ya puedes hacerlo con otra	You could do with another
Yo creo que tú mismo fuiste	I believe you were the one
el que quedaste como joya	Who stayed like a jewel
|:Si tu te quieres callar	If you want to be quiet
Cállate y no digas nada :|	Shut up and don't say anything
Me atrevo a perder la vida	I would risk losing my life
Defendiendo a esa muchacha	Defending that girl
Porque esa muchacha es buena	Because she's a good girl
Y no tiene cola pisada	And doesn't have a bad rap
|;Si ella fuera hermana mía	If she was my sister
Ya nos hubiésemos matado :|	We'd have already killed each other
|:Para que en verdad	So you'll know for sure
Te saliera un verdadero guaraguao :|	When the real chickenhawk comes out
|:Apuesto mucho a poquito	I bet big and small
Fue que tú la enamoraste :|	That it was you who fell in love with her
|:Y porque ella no te quiso	And because she didn't want you
Fue que hablaste lo que hablaste :|	You said what you said

One interesting addition to the narrative is the short, dramatized conversation between a crying woman and the narrator at the start. The format to include a conversation at the start of a bachata was common by the 1970s—for instance other songs by Pérez—but shows the importance of narrative inside and outside song (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 21). By including this, the narrator emphasizes the woman's hurt feelings and provides an impetus to be hypercritical of the character in the original song in an act of defense. Instead of the woman being affirmed as a *tíguera*, she is portrayed by the narrator as respectable and innocent. I interpret the way that the narrator is describing the woman as more in line with the role of the *mujer seria*. His willingness to defend the woman exhibits *tigueraje*, since he portrays himself as tough and ready to fight. On the other hand, he displays some traits of the *hombre serio* in this song, as he defends the woman's honor. Hutchinson suggests this sort of ambivalence between the two types of masculinities is not uncommon (53).

The narrator's role in this version is much more involved than Bonilla's. He makes personal attacks and belittles the first song's persona, ironically spending more time insulting the other man than defending the woman. The woman in this song takes a somewhat background position in the narrative. However, it is noteworthy that the narrator in Pérez's version only briefly acknowledges the notion that the woman is capable of being a *tíguera*: "Si ella fuera hermana mía ya nos hubiésemos matado. Para que en verdad te saliera un verdadero guaraguao." (If she were my sister, we'd already have killed each other. So you'll know for sure when the real chickenhawk comes out). He implies that the character in the first song should watch out, since the woman might really be the *verdadero guaraguao* (the true chickenhawk)! Ironically, in the next response to Bonilla, Mélida Rodríguez (a close friend of Marino Pérez) projects just that kind of *tigueraje* throughout her song, both lyrically and musically.

Contestación a Mujer Guaraguao – Mélida Rodríguez

Like in the original and Pérez's version, the Rodríguez version is strophic but contains a mostly regular rhyming pattern. Also like Pérez's version, it is made up mostly of quatrains with each couplet repeated to make eight-bar phrases following an *abcb* format. In the song's lyrics Rodríguez presents the *tíguera* persona both as a part of her character and herself personally. There is no question about her involvement in the ongoing narrative that "Mujer Guaraguao" created; she heard what Bonilla was saying about women and needed to make a rebuttal. From the perspective of Rodríguez's "La Sufrida" persona, she positions herself as a woman that does not need to apologize or modify her way of being. For instance, when she states "pero yo tengo mi orgullo que tu no me has puesto el pico" (but I have my pride that you haven't put your beak on me), she emphasizes that she would never let the man even kiss her, let alone take him as a partner.

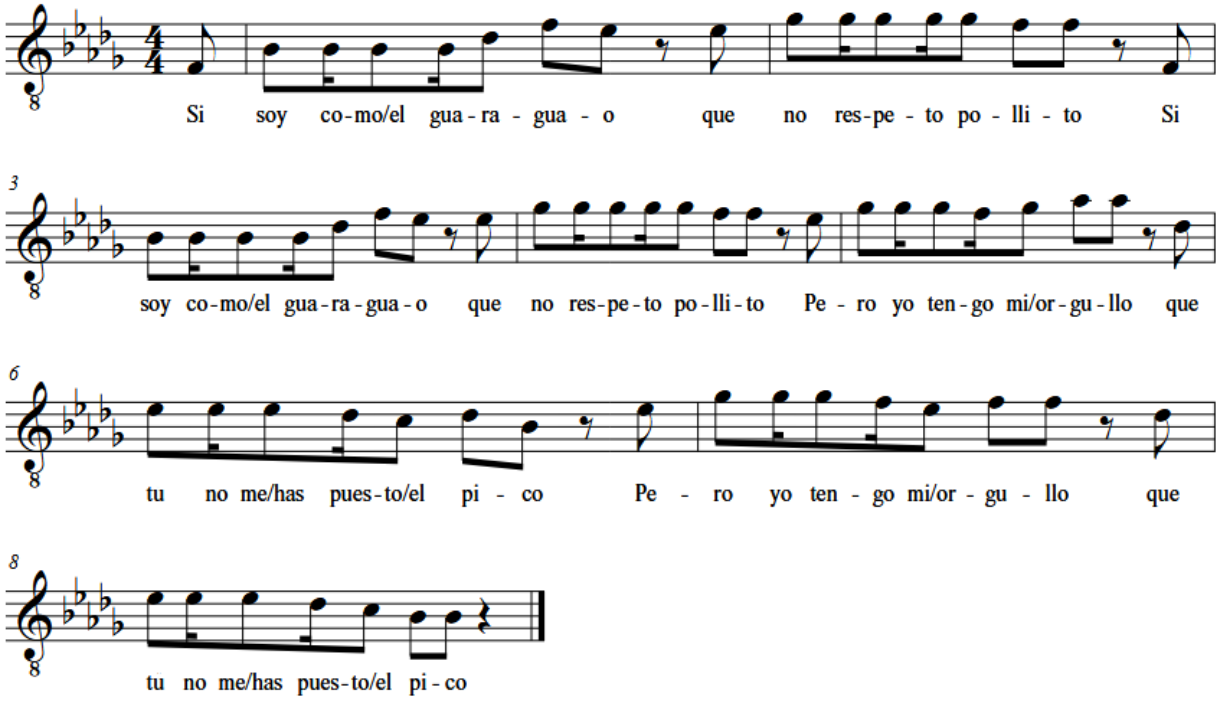
This brings up an important aspect about the *tíguera* that allows the song's persona to choose among sexual partners. One might imagine that the persona Rodríguez is portraying could be a sex worker or a "loose woman" who is forced into a kind of economy of servitude toward men. But practicing *tigueraje* means an inherent desire to do what is most advantageous for the self, allowing a *tíguera* to make decisions such as with whom she has sexual relations. Within Rodríguez's performance she also speaks for a collective voice: that of women of the barrio who have power, whether socially or economically.

Example 4.4. "Contestación a Mujer Guaraguao" (Response to Chickenhawk Woman) by Mélida Rodríguez

|:Si soy como el guaraguao	So I'm like the chickenhawk
Que no respeto pollito :|	I don't respect little chickens
|:Pero yo tengo mi orgullo	But I have my pride
Que tu no me has puesto el pico :|	That you haven't put your beak on me
|:Si yo quedé como joya	If I stayed like a jewel
Tú estás bien interesa-o (ado) :|	You're well interested.
|:Por eso tengo mi orgullo	For that I have my pride
Que tu no me has repasa-o (ado) :|	That you haven't checked me
|:Tú sabes que eres un hombre	You know you're a man
De baja reputación :|	Of low reputation
|:Porque no tienes vergüenzas	Because you don't have shame
Y enfermo del corazón :|	and sick in the heart
|:No puedes seguir viviendo	You can't go on living
Como tú siempre has vivido :|	Like you've always lived
|:Limosneros como tu	Bums like you
No cruzan en mi camino :|	Don't cross my path
|:Pero ya tu no 'ta' (estás) en na' (nada)	But you're already nothing
Eres un estropajo viejo :|	You're an old rag.
|:Pareces un ratón de iglesia	You seem like a church mouse
En puertas del cementerio :|	In the gate of the cemetery
|:Tu dizque que "no respetas	Supposedly "you don't respect
Ni grandes ni a los chiquitos" :|	Neither the big nor the small"
|:Pero estas lleno de envidia	But you're full of envy
Porque no me ha puesto el pico :|	Because you haven't put your beak on me
|:Tu dizque andas defendiendo	You supposedly go on defending
El honor de las mujeres :|	The honor of women
|:Pero tu vives amarga-o (ado)	But you live embittered
Porque a ti nadie te quiere :|	Because no one loves you
|:Pues ya déjame tranquila	Then leave me in peace already
No vengas a molestar :|	Don't come to bother
Mejor nárrale a la luna	Better that you talk to the moon
Y a mí no me vas a lograr	And don't come
Puedes coger tu rosario	You can take your rosary
Y ponerte a rezar	And say a prayer

Musically, Rodríguez's version is distinct because of her near constant use of the cinquillo rhythm followed by four eighth notes (sometimes referred to as *danzón clave*). Both Bonilla and Pérez use a wider rhythmic variety that results in some elaborate stress patterns. I interpret the difference as telling of the metanarrative and of *tigueraje*: Pérez is trying to one up Bonilla with an equal level of lyrical virtuosity while Rodríguez is unaffected. Something else striking about this performance is the way that Rodríguez uses her voice to evoke confidence and indignance. Though performed a half step higher than the original and Pérez's version, Rodríguez sings both lower and higher (F3 to A♭5) than either of her male counterparts, but still comfortably within her vocal range. Since it is a comfortable part of her voice, the timbre is fundamentally different as well. Whereas Bonilla and Pérez utilize twang and are singing in a high register—something common among bachateros at the time particularly those singing in the romantic style—Rodríguez is utilizing a resonant chest voice almost exclusively throughout. I interpret this as Rodríguez embodying the *tíguera* persona through the ease and power of her voice. In that sense, modifying her voice to match the male singers (i.e., by using head voice and more twang) would be to capitulate. By projecting prowess with her voice, Rodríguez sets herself apart and offers resistance to Bonilla's claims against women.

The marginalized communities that migrated into urban centers in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s witnessed a foundational shift in the economic role of gender. Women changed from being primarily homemakers in rural settings to being the breadwinners in the cities taking on jobs as maids for the middle and upper classes. The rapid change for men from having a major stake in their personal and familial economy to being the dependent coincides with a shift in bachata's themes.



Example 4.5. Transcription of verse 1 (0:18)

Verse 1

Si	**soy**	co-	mo	el	gua-	ra-	**gua-**	o	
1	2	3	4	-	5	6	7	8	
Que	**no**	res-	pe-	to	po-	**lli-**	to		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Pe-	**ro**	yo	ten-	go	mi	or-	**gu-**	llo	
1	2	3	4	5	6	-	7	8	
Que	**tu**	no	me	has	pues-	to	el	**pi-**	co
1	2	3	4	-	5	6	-	7	8

Verse 2

Si	**yo**	que-	dé	co-	mo	**jo-**	ya		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Tú	es-	**tás**	bien	in-	te-	re-	**sa'o**		
1	-	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Por	**es-**	o	ten-	go	mi	or-	**gu-**	llo	
1	2	3	4	5	6	-	7	8	
Que	**tu**	no	me	has	re-	pa-	**sa'o**		
1	2	3	4	-	5	6	7		

Example 4.6. First and second verse syllable count

Men began singing about women in a way that disparaged them for acts of betrayal or other ways of disrupting the gender norms that had been in place before (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 157–58).

The marginalized communities that migrated into urban centers in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s witnessed a foundational shift in the economic role of gender. Women changed from being primarily homemakers in rural settings to being the breadwinners in the cities taking on jobs as maids for the middle and upper classes. The rapid change for men from having a major stake in their personal and familial economy to being the dependent coincides with a shift in bachata's themes. Men began singing about women in a way that disparaged them for acts of betrayal or other ways of disrupting the gender norms that had been in place before (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 157–58). Of note, the shift in lyrics from romantic topics to ones highlighting a male-centered perception of victimhood was also part of bolero's and salsa's evolution. Aparicio writes.

> While the affective and emotional language of the bolero allows men to communicate and express themselves in the affective domain, becoming a liberatory value in the context of social boundaries, the construction of the male as woman's victim dangerously positions women as the object of male aggression, revenge, or violence, converging, in fact, with the more overtly misogynist discourse of salsa and other forms of popular music. (2010, 137)

The tendency for Latin popular music to reinforce traits of coloniality obviously tracks with the move toward modernity happening in the 20th century. But it also opens the door for alterations and configurations of identity. Particularly regarding gender in the Dominican Republic, the expression of victimhood by men reflects the way that gender norms were changing and how at times that change was resisted.

As time went on, bachata's lyrics became more oriented toward a man-as-victim point of view. Rodríguez's response to the victim's story of Bonilla's "Mujer Guaraguao" reflects on the social structure of bachata's community. In the margins, women could coopt the street-savvy nature of the *tíguere* and claim an amount of power within that space, but it did not go unnoticed by men.

Lechucita en Cueva

The final bachata in this set is Lino Bonilla's response to Rodríguez. Though subtle, there are several ways that the performance exhibits the effects of Bonilla listening to Rodríguez's version. Performed a whole step lower than the original, Bonilla's voice is noticeably less twangy in this recording and more in line with the way that Rodríguez sings. Lyrically the form is simplified to just quatrains with repeated lines like how Rodríguez structured her version. But the most important difference is the address. No longer can Bonilla make a claim against the non-specific woman or women collectively: instead, he responds directly to Rodríguez by name.

Though the lyrics are mainly personal insults, there are also some traits of social commentary, especially in the implied use of force to push her into submission ("tu no sales cosa buena ni que te maten a palo" [you don't turn out to be good even if you're beaten to death with a stick]). It may be that Bonilla is conceitedly "putting her in her place" with these lyrics, but it also brings to question if he is responding more to Rodríguez's personification of *tigueraje*. In such an interpretation, Rodríguez displays a tenacity and strength ready to stand up to any man, and Bonilla's response is the proverbial coming to blows.

Example 4.7. "Lechucita en Cueva" (Little Owl in the Cave) by Lino Bonilla

Mélida caquito de humo	Mélida little head full of smoke
Cachetes de berenjena	Eggplant cheeks
Tu no sales cosa buena	You don't turn out to be good
Ni que te maten a palo	Even if you're beaten to death with a stick
La cascara guarda al palo	The shell protects the stick
Y el palo a la juventud	And the stick, the youth.
Una lechucita en cueva	A little owl in a cave
Aparenta más que tú	Looks better than you
Pero te voy a hacer ver	But I'm going to make you see
Que yo me pongo pantalones	That I wear the pants here
Mélida caquito de humo	Mélida head full of smoke
Cachete de berenjena	Eggplant cheeks
Tu no sales cosa buena	You don't turn out to be good
Ni que te maten a palo	Even if you're beaten to death with a stick
La cascara guarda al palo	The shell protects the stick
Y el palo a la juventud	And the stick the youth
Una lechucita en cueva	A little owl in a cave
Aparenta más que tú	Looks better than you
Te dicen el guaraguao	People call you chickenhawk
En este te digo mala	This time I call you evil
Para que veas que para mi	So you can see that to me
Tu nunca has valido nada	You've never had any worth
Las cosas que tu me hiciste	The things you did to me
¿Por qué tu me despreciaba?	Why did you disdain me?
Tu eres pobre, vieja y fea	You are poor, old and ugly
Y ya estás muy estrujada	And you're already wrung out

Conclusion

Interpreting the intricate social structure of the Dominican Republic in the post-Trujillo era offers many paths to finding answers, but they are ultimately incomplete ones. Broadly, popular music of that time could trace its developments along the same path of the nation's progression toward modernity. Contrary to such a macro view, as the nation adapted to an ostensibly more equitable

version of post-coloniality following Trujillo, it was still culturally dictated by the hegemony of the elite. For bachata, within its social setting it had to participate in modernizing society but remained apart from the mainstream until its eventual acceptance decades later. Popular music such as bachata grew out of close connections to traditions and new modes of expression in urban centers. It was neither a tradition that somehow survived unchanged as it cohabitated the urban landscape with its musical cousin merengue típico, nor was bachata completely attached to the effects of globalization and modernity. The many influences and agents surrounding bachata's emergence weave together to create a never quite complete tapestry. Instead, bachata and its social surroundings in its early decades offered constant reconfiguration among its practitioners, its listeners, and for the people it spoke for; not least of these was women whose roles became more level with men.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

> "Ya no me importa que digan que soy mala. En esta vida yo me siento muy feliz."
> (I don't care anymore that they say I'm bad. In this life I feel very happy)
>
> – excerpt from "La Sufrida"

> "No me importa que me digan si soy mala o soy buena. Si yo vivo a mi manera y yo quiero a quién me quiera."
> (I don't care that they tell me I'm bad or good. If I live my own way and love someone who loves me)
>
> – excerpt from "¿Por Qué Te Fuiste?"

In the fifteen or so years between when Mélida Rodríguez's career began and her death in 1982, the Dominican Republic's musical landscape changed significantly. Stylistic features of cosmopolitan bolero, which had defined early bachata, were becoming less prominent. Bachata groups were starting to evolve from the small conjuntos of acoustic guitars into bands with electro-acoustic guitars and electric bass. Bachateros were starting to move the genre toward a new identity as dance music, often incorporating elements of merengue and other popular dance genres (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 26–27). The tempo became faster and the characteristic clipped guitar sound became ubiquitous. Thematically, bachata had become almost synonymous with the expression of *amargura* (bitterness) and *desprecio* (disparagement) leading to more misogynistic undertones. Mainstream tastes outside bachata's sphere had also become more global, as balada and salsa crazes swept through Latin America in the 1970s and early '80s. Bachateros singing in the old romantic style were becoming scarce as, more than ever, the effects of inequality and impoverishment influenced modes of expression in the marginalized urban sectors (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 114–15). By the time bachata became a mainstream genre at the beginning of the 1990s, it was also being produced by some of the most popular Dominican artists. For example, Juan Luis Guerra 4.40's ultra-cosmopolitan *Bachata Rosa* (1991) was bachata's first international sensation, though its polished production and use of synthesizers was a very

different aesthetic in comparison to the bachata that had come before (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 3; Sellers 2014, 64).

Rodríguez recorded only a handful of singles after her album *El Traicionero* (1972), but her musical style also showed signs of change. For example, she began covering songs by international balada and canción melódica artists like Karool ("Por Qué Te Fuiste"), Diego Verdaguer & Amanda Miguel ("Él Me Mintió"), and Aldo Monges ("Te Quiero Tanto" which is a cover of "No Trates De Evitarlo Si Me Quieres"). Though her covers were primarily bachatas/boleros, Rodríguez appeared to be interested in exploring new styles, with an obvious turn toward mainstream romantic song. I can only speculate that the reason Rodríguez steered away from producing bachatas like those on her first three albums had something to do with the shift toward misogyny and continued male domination of bachata. Incidentally, two other bachateras, Aridia Ventura and Carmen Francisco, emerged in the 1970s, but their careers were mediated by pressures imposed by men. For Ventura, record producer Radhames Aracena managed most of her career including choosing songs for her to record. Meanwhile, Francisco's songs "sometimes echoed the male voice in bachata, condemning women for being treacherous creatures that disturb the social order" (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 183–84).

Rodríguez, as one of the early bachata artists, perhaps could not see a way to continue producing music that challenged gender norms when men so openly blamed their feelings of "betrayal, alienation, and hopelessness" on women (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 184). Though she was still performing, after her first three albums she apparently stepped back from or was pushed out of the ranks of bachata's foremost artists. Probably because she was not recording often, many believed Rodríguez died much younger than she did. Some thought she died as early as the late 1960s or around 1975 (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 179; Sellers 2014, 110), but in fact she

continued to sing in clubs and occasionally record after she moved back to San Pedro de Macorís. Rodríguez's performance of "¿Por Qué Te Fuiste?" on the television show Fiesta was sometime between 1980 and her death in 1982 and might be one of very few video performances. Being on a national show would have been a big deal for any musician let alone a bachatera during the height of mainstream anti-bachata sentiment. Even though her performance was an adaptation of balada, the accompaniment of guitars is suggestive of bachata and bolero let alone the lyrics that refer explicitly to drinking. In performing a musical hybrid, we see again that Rodríguez was resourcefully adapting to her audience's tastes while looking beyond them. Indeed, she was "living her own way" musically as she had before, subverting norms set by society, culture, and community.

This thesis explored the world of early bachata through a particular lens. By beginning to understand Rodríguez through her songs and her pioneering take on life in the margins, I have tried to create a clearer image of that world. Rodríguez's legacy as the first female bachatera has been celebrated as a unique feminist voice in bachata. Bachata allowed for Rodríguez to articulate some of the social needs and priorities of its audiences, which is particularly obvious with the personas that Rodríguez performed with. How she expressed that voice and persona was nuanced and creative but always connected to bachata's community and the reality of life in the margins. Once bachata became mainstream in the 1990s, it is telling that mainstream female artists like Vickiana looked to Rodríguez for inspiration decades after her musical challenges to machismo. As a thread of bachata's musical and cultural tapestry, Rodríguez as an artist at once stands in contrast with and within the composite image; may that thread and the many others like it continue to stand out and bind together, bright and strong.

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