Feeling Zulian through *Gaita*:
Singing Regional Identity in Maracaibo, Venezuela

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Abstract

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This dissertation shows how *gaita* music articulates regional identity in Maracaibo, in the state of Zulia in Venezuela, based on analysis of lyrics and recordings, interviews, archival work, and participant observation at performance events. Since the 1960s, *gaita* has become a commercialized folk music that is popular throughout Venezuela during the Christmas holiday season, but in Zulia, where *gaita* originated, the music serves as a medium through which regional identity is defined, promoted, negotiated, celebrated, and even marketed. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2000–01, 2003, and 2007 among musicians, composers, academics, and *gaita* fans, this study is structured around five broad vectors of *gaita*'s expression of *zulianidad*: sound, history, geography, religion and politics. The mere sound of *gaita*—with its unique beat—is recognized as distinctly Zulian genre, and this distinctiveness contributes to its power in indexing regional identity. *Gaita*'s instruments are seen as Zulian and perceived as

representative of the European, African, and indigenous elements of Venezuela's racial mixture and the ideology of racial democracy. *Gaita*, which originated as orally improvised party music in the nineteenth century, is a prominent feature of local cultural history. Since the early twentieth century, and especially after the advent of recording and the professionalization of *gaita* groups in the 1960s, skilled composers have crafted song lyrics that chronicle local history. By singing of places and issues of geographical significance, *gaiteros* produce place in the regional imaginary, help to create a sense of a unified Zulian region, and negotiate issues of regional and national identity. In Maracaibo, religious practice is dominated by devotion to the regional patron saint, La Chinita, and songs dedicated to her promote a particularly regional version of Catholicism and connect religious identity with local sociopolitical regionalism. Political regional identity dates to the years of the Venezuelan independence movement, and protest *gaitas* continue to articulate Zulians frustrations with centralized governmental control. While *gaita* serves as holiday season party music, it also functions as an important expression of regional cultural identity in Maracaibo, Zulia.

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Ethnomusicology, by definition, involves interaction with people. Acknowledging the nearly infinite number of people to whom one owes a debt for help in research is nearly impossible. Despite the fact that I will undoubtedly leave someone out, I will try here to give thanks to those who have helped me in this project. Please forgive the length.

I have noticed in most academic works that the last in the list of acknowledgements is the spouse of the researcher. I would like to invert this and begin by thanking my wife Anne Marie Saldajeno for all her help, support, faith, patience, and love through my graduate career, and especially during a difficult year of separation while I was in Venezuela. Without her tolerance of this very difficult situation, her assuming financial and other responsibilities of our household, her assistance with hundreds of little business details to help me from afar, and her undying belief in my ability and my work, I never could have accomplished this research. Further, a few years ago when I considered giving up on finishing this dissertation, she pushed me to keep going.

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In Venezuela, I benefitted from a nation of kindness. First of all, thanks to the Aparicio family in Caracas who took me in without a second thought and became my family for several months. Eomar Aparicio was also my first real teacher of *gaita* rhythms, and Miriam and Eumir offered insights into *gaita* history to prepare me for future studies.

Also in Caracas, I wish to thank the many music scholars who helped guide me during the early phases of my research. The staff at FUNDEF, the national folklore institute, including Carlos Blas, Mercedes Blanco, and Israel Girón, pointed me in the right direction. My first real academic mentor in Venezuela was Emilio Mendoza, who shared his vast knowledge of Venezuelan music faster than I could absorb it—if only I had his energy. Also, Carlos García urged me to focus on *gaita* for my dissertation and suggested several research approaches.

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In Maracaibo, there are too many people to mention them all, but I will try, roughly in chronological order. My first word of thanks goes to the Kugler family who generously took me in for a month when I had no place else to go. Ann helped me a lot in acclimating to life in Maracaibo, Alex offered me insight into the history of Venezuela and Zulia, and their son Carlos taught me about local youth culture. Stephen Hill, a Texan studying anthropology at the University of Zulia, was a wonderful friend and an insightful colleague from the first day I met him. His wife Isabel and her family welcomed me into their house for many social occasions, and there, I once had the honor of jamming a little with Alexi Cárdenas and Huáscar Barradas, two brilliant musicians who are innovating Zulian music at the concert hall level.

In November 2000, the *gaiteros* of the house band at El Enlosa'o made me feel right at home and offered an incredible musical education.

During my longest stay in Maracaibo in 2000–2001, no one helped me more than radio/TV personality Oscar García. Oscar first brought me to the neighborhood of El Empedra'o in Santa Lucia, and he and his brother Alberto introduced me to hundreds of *gaiteros* and fans there. I enjoyed many hours of discussing *gaita* history with them, and we even tried to create a documentary video about *gaita* for North America. Through them, I got to know their father Oscar García G., el Ventarrón, the TV show host who first got a *gaita* group on TV in 1962. The entire García family welcomed me and never tired of answering my questions about local music history.

Among the many *gaita* scholars who helped me in Maracaibo, Miguel Ordoñez was the gentle genius who offered me so much wisdom about the music, and his biography of singer Ricardo Aguirre is one of my most important sources. Humberto "Mamaota" Rodríguez and his wife Dora invited me to spend countless afternoons in their apartment

studying Mamaota's collection of newspaper clippings and other information about *gaita* history. Professor Ricardo Romero introduced me to the members of Barrio Obrero in Cabimas. Retired law and psychology professor Víctor Hugo Márquez, the greatest living *gaita* improvisor, taught me the importance of *gaita*'s history as an oral tradition.

In 2001, I had the pleasure and privilege of sharing a house with the great *gaita* composer Rafael Rodríguez and his then girlfriend Olga Flores and her son Luis. I cannot thank them enough for their hospitality. Moreover, as I will discuss in several chapters, every conversation with Rafael deepened my understanding of *gaita* culture, and playing music with him was mind blowing.

There is no way for me to remember all of the wonderful *gaiteros*, *gaiteras*, and *gaita* fans who welcomed me to El Empedra'o and spent hours discussing Zulian culture with me, but I must recognize José Morrero, Jack Pérez, Milton Molina, José "Cheo" Romero, "El Ayayero" Nelson Romero, Ricardo Cepeda, Rixio Aguirre, Luis Angel Aguirre, Dennis Daguín, Moises Martínez, Nerio Ríos, and Wolfgang Romero. The local bar owners Diego, Hugo, and Luis made me feel welcome in an unfamiliar place.

It was pure serendipity when *furreros* Douglas Soto and his son Angel opened Entre Gaiteros, a bar right in the middle of El Empedra'o dedicated to *gaita* music and history, just as I was getting introduced to the neighborhood. There I would get to meet many of the famous *gaiteros* whose pictures got hung on the centuries-old walls. Douglas and Angel were incredibly kind to me and supportive of my work. May Douglas rest in peace knowing that this gringo recognized his *salsa picante* as the best in Venezuela.

In 2003, I met *gaita* singer, TV show host, and community college teacher Gerardo Ardín, and soon got welcomed into his generous family, as we became good friends. Gerardo was the ultimate tour guide, host, and teacher about every aspect of Venezuelan culture. Our discussions revealed his nuanced insights about politics and music, and my work improved immensely thanks to him. I cannot thank his family enough for their hospitality, especially his mother Nelly. It gives me great pleasure that Gerardo and I refer to each other as brothers now.

I made many other great friends in Maracaibo—too many to mention them all—but all of them helped me in one way or another. Ronald Sarcos was especially helpful when I tried to make a documentary video about *gaita.* Among the other great friends, I thank Rubén and Daniel for helping me learn my way around, geographically and figuratively.

I regret that there a so many *gaiteros* and fans who I haven't mentioned here but who helped me so much. Thank you all. *¡Qué siga la gaita zuliana!*

CHAPTER I: INTORODUCTION

PROLOGUE: PARTICIPATING IN A MUSICAL TRADITION

In the wee hours of November 18th, 2003, I found myself joining in the revelry with old and new friends at a nightclub on the outskirts of the city of Maracaibo, Zulia state, Venezuela. We were enjoying the annual *amanacer*, literally "partying until dawn," drinking and dancing in celebration of the feast day of the regional patron saint, La Chinita (La Virgen de Chiquinquirá)—a seemingly most unholy way of recognizing the most important day of the local religious calendar. (The most dedicated revelers would not stop with the drinking and dancing, but rather follow the night with breakfast and then a trip to the bullfights and finally watching the Aguilas baseball game.) The *amanacer* is the culmination of the Feria de la Chinita, a week of parades, concerts and other festivities leading up to the saint's feast day. Earlier in the evening, we'd gone to the Basilica in the heart of the old part of the city, where the saint's image is kept, both to offer a prayer and to listen to the *gaita* music groups on the stage in the large concrete plaza in front of the nineteenth-century Basilica. By midnight or so, we'd found our way to Afrodiziakus, a nice outdoor nightclub on the outskirts of the city with a view of the Rafael Urdaneta Bridge (beautifully lit in a rainbow of shifting colors), which connects Maracaibo to the rest of Venezuela across the mouth of Lake Maracaibo. By the time we arrived at the club, the party was already well underway with multiple *gaita* and other music groups taking turns on the small stage with its deafening sound system. We had mostly come there to follow one group, La Grey Zuliana, because I had befriended one of their singers, Gerardo Ardín. By two o'clock in the morning, our table had already shared at least one bottle of rum and maybe a bottle of scotch. (For this reason, I've had to rely

on help from friends to verify the facts of this field report.) After playing some of their new tunes of the year, La Grey Zuliana announced that they'd play some classic *gaitas*. The crowd became even more enthusiastic, and soon, my group was near the stage singing along with all the tunes we knew.

At some point, Gerardo noticed that I was singing along with the group, and he pointed me out to one of the group's leaders. Much to my embarrassment, I was then introduced to the audience as a *gaita* fan who had come all the way from Seattle, Washington, just to enjoy their traditional music culture on the feast day of their *patrona*. I was invited to the stage and given the opportunity to sing lead on one of the most popular *gaitas* of all time, a hit from 1972, "Sentir Zuliano," which means "Feeling Zulian" (written by Norberto Pirela and José Rodríguez). The lyrics are below.

Coro:	Chorus:
Cuando voy a Maracaibo Y empiezo a pasar el Puente Siento un emoción tan grande Que se me nubla la mente Siento un nudo en la garganta Y el corazón se me salta Sin darme cuenta tiemblo Y sin querer estoy llorando—¡O!	When I go to Maracaibo And I begin to cross the bridge I feel an emotion so immense That it clouds up my mind I feel a lump in my throat And my heart starts to race Without thinking, I tremble, And without wanting to, I'm crying—Oh!
I Es la tierra del zuliano Un paraiso pequeño Donde todos son hermanos Desde el Guajiro al costeño	I It's the land of the Zulian A tiny paradise Where all are brothers From the Guajira Indian to the coastal person
II Todo zuliano que siente Su terruño en lo profundo Me parece que su gente Es la mejor de este mundo	II All Zulians feel the sense of Their homeland deep down It seems to me that its people Are the best in the world

III La Chinita y Papa Dios Andan por el Saladillo Paseando bajo su sol Que les da todo su brillo	III The Chinita and God the Father Take a walk through Saladillo Strolling under its hot sun That shines on everything
IV Yo no soy regionalista Pero a mi Zulia yo quiero Porque se que es el primero De Venezuela en la lista	IV I'm not a regionalist But I love my Zulia Because I know it's the first Of Venezuela in the list

While I can't guarantee that I sang all four verses, I certainly intended to, since I'd become accustomed to singing the song with my *gaita* group in Seattle, and because my *gaita* loving friends had taught me how important their song lyrics are. Like many *gaitas*, the lyrics and music, especially of the chorus, dramatically express feelings of regional identity—a sentimental, poetic description of what it means to "feel Zulian." I tried to animate my performance by gesturing to the bridge, my throat (which certainly was choking up at times, both from emotion and from exhaustion), heaven, and my heart, as I'd seen so many *gaiteros* do in jams and concerts. I was spurred on by the fact that the band behind me contained some of the best musicians of the region, and their powerful drums and percussion couldn't help but affect a listener physically. The feeling of performing in that setting, on that date, was at once humbling and humorous—what business did I have singing on that stage?—while also an honest expression of my deep love for this music and the people that make it. Above all, I felt the thrill of being a stranger from far away who was welcomed into a musical community.

I left the stage receiving congratulations from the band, my friends, and other audience members, many of whom were a bit stunned by the novelty of this blond, blue-eyed, fair-skinned, red-faced (from sunburn and alcohol consumption) *norteamericano*

who could sing one of their most popular local songs. (Some others in the crowd were too busy partying to have noticed the incident at all.) Though we didn't need it, my performance earned my table a bottle of scotch, compliments of the management. We then continued to sing and dance for several more hours until the sun rose over the bridge. In those hours just before sunrise, we were so exhausted that the entire experience was a blurry, psychedelic mess at times. Somehow the drunken exhaustion contributed to the emotional import of the event—we were partying all night in honor of La Chinita, the patron saint, as odd as that might sound.

Layers Of Regional Meaning In Gaita Performance

On the one hand, this performance was just another in a series of examples of how my *gaita* loving friends enjoyed showing off my performing ability as a novel party trick, but it can be read more deeply, too. *Gaiteros* and *gaita* aficionados always seemed genuinely grateful and impressed—even flattered—by my interest and devotion to their music and history. To hear me perform the music that is most closely associated with their region was undoubtedly a source of pride to them. Beyond that, by performing this song of regional pride, by playing the role of *gaitero* on stage, I was performing and embodying regional identity. For me, a white United Statesian foreigner, to perform as a *gaitero* is to identify deeply with what people of Zulia see as uniquely theirs. Some *gaita* aficionados in attendance might have considered the levels of meaning in that particular song's content and history, and, at least in my attempt to give a solid, honest performance, I was expressing my knowledge and reverence for the musical tradition and repertoire. In singing the song, I was invoking numerous layers of the sense of local

popular musical tradition: I was imitating (inadequately, I'm sure) the vocal phrasing of the singer Ricardo Cepeda, whose career took off in the early 1970s with many hit songs, leading to his nickname *El Colosal*, the colossal *gaita* singer; his own singing style, at least in part, referenced the powerful baritone of Ricardo Aguirre, who had died only a few years earlier at the peak of his career when he was known as *El Monumental de la gaita*; many would know that Cepeda replaced Aguirre as one of the main soloists of the group Cardenales del Éxito and understand the connection between them; further, the band that I was singing with was named La Grey Zuliana (the Zulian flock) after one of Aguirre's most famous songs, and this current group is lead by Renato Aguirre, Ricardo's brother, with Renato's son (Ricardo's nephew), Luis Angel Aguirre as a vocal soloist. Thus, my performance was laden with numerous references to the modern history of *gaita* musical tradition and the genealogy of its heroes.

Also, the song itself is a model of *gaita* composition. Its lyrics touch on nearly every significant theme of *gaitas*, infusing the music with regional sentiment. The bridge mentioned in the chorus signifies not only a geographical landmark and highway, but also as a symbol of the commercial might of the city and region. Coincidentally, the bridge was built in the mid-1960s, just as *gaita* was developing into a commercial popular music, and both the bridge and the music signify Zulian pride in the popular imaginary. Each verse of the *gaita*, which conforms to the most traditional poetic scheme of four octosyllabic lines in an A-B-B-A rhyme scheme, touches on important themes of Zulian culture, as popularly fantasized. The first refers to Zulia as a little paradise of racial harmony (which is, at the very least, debatable). The second refers to Zulian pride in their homeland. The third establishes the religious aspect of Zulianity (*zulianidad*) with the

image of the regional patron saint leading God on a tour of the heart of the old part of Maracaibo under the hot sun—both the neighborhood of Saladillo as the nostalgic center of town and the blazing sun are symbols of Zulian pride. The apophasis of the final verse—"I'm not a regionalist, but…"—alludes to a recurring theme of political regionalism in Zulian history: the question of whether Zulia state would be better off if it were to secede from Venezuela—a treasonous notion that, though prohibited, is often the subject of conversations among people in Maracaibo. All these themes flow together in a sentimental song about crossing a bridge to get home. But perhaps more important than any of the verses is the expression of tear-jerking emotion in the chorus, which nearly every *maracaibero* (and many non-Zulians throughout Venezuela) could sing from memory, even adding harmony to the emotional cry of "Oh!" at the end. "Sentir Zuliano" is a classic in a repertoire of hit songs that every *gaitero* would know how to play and most Zulians would be able to sing from memory.

As a visitor to this region and an adopted novice in its regional music tradition, I felt all these things on that breezy early morning as I sang. I felt proud both to even have had the chance to participate in a musical performance with such talented players and of the fact that after spending some time there and learning this history, I, too, could relate to this sense of regionalism, *zulianidad*. And as a researcher, I recognized that in performing in this traditional way, indexing so much of what identifies this region, I was subjecting myself to the experiment of forced acculturation. Although a few days later I would return to Seattle and my "real" life as a North American graduate student/musician/ethnomusicologist, this performance event, along with many similar experiences, changed my own identity, so that, at least in some ways, I felt Zulian.

LOCAL IDENTITY AND TRADITION IN POPULAR MUSIC

Cuando se está tocando una gaita, simple se siente como maracucho, más nada. Yo soy maracucho. Yo soy el Zulia. Se siente todo.

When you're playing gaita, you feel like a *maracucho*, that's all there is to it. I am *maracucho*. I am Zulia. You feel all that.

—Nerio Rios, *gaitero* (videotaped interview, May 2001)

In Maracaibo in the state of Zulia, Venezuela, *gaita* music expresses a profound sense of regional sentiment, pride, and identity. This thesis is a study of how *gaita*, despite five decades of continuous commercialization and nationwide geographical diffusion, remains a powerful expression of local identity and tradition for Zulians, especially, "*maracaiberos*" or "*maracuchos*," and how I, a North American musician/ethnomusicologist was invited to join the party and try to understand the tradition among *gaiteros*. *Gaita* is immensely popular throughout Venezuela as the music of the Christmas holiday season—an extended holiday season that begins as early as September when *gaita* groups release their new songs of the year; but in Maracaibo and other towns in Zulia state, *gaita* is more than just holiday party music. Lyrically and rhythmically, *gaita* is used as an expression of *zulianidad*—Zulian-ness or Zulianity. Zulians frequently cite *gaita* lyrics when they want to express their sense of local identity, and every year, *gaita* lyricists churn out hundreds of new *gaitas* that speak of local history, humor, religion, and political viewpoints. *Maracaiberos* by the thousands sing *gaitas* at public events such as the performances outside the Basilica where the patron saint's image is housed. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people gather every weekend at certain small, grungy bars around Maracaibo in hope that *gaiteros* will start a

jam. Such public gatherings reinforce the feeling that this particular rhythm is a unifying force of the region—that there are places and times where *maracaiberos* can meet to experience their musical tradition. Even for those who do not attend such events, having knowledge of them and being able to imagine them is an essential element of local identity.

Gaita is considered "traditional" music in Maracaibo both because of its performance practice and because of its lyrical content. In terms of traditional practice, people sing it and listen to it in places that are linked to history, such as in the old neighborhood of Santa Lucía or outside the Basilica, which was once the Saladillo neighborhood; and they sing at expected times, such as weekend jams or during the Feria de la Chinita. In this way, *gaita*'s usage organizes and identifies space and time for the people of Maracaibo, embedding the music geographically, calendrically, and historically. Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I will show how *gaita* performance contexts allow people to imagine themselves as a community.

Gaita song lyrics frequently articulate a regional or local—sometimes anti-national—point of view in matters of traditional importance, such as history, politics, religion, and geography. Lyrics even address the sound of the music itself, creating a sung discourse about music. Thus *gaita* maintains its "traditional" status in Maracaibo because of its constant association with markers of regional cultural identity. As is common in musical styles that people view as "traditional," there is perpetual debate between those who want to innovate and popularize the music and those who prefer a more conservative approach. Participation in the discourse over "tradition" is, in a sense, an essential element of membership in the regional community of *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans.

Maracaibo: the Second City of Venezuela

With a population of over two million in its sprawling metropolitan area, Maracaibo is the second largest city of Venezuela after the capital Caracas (pop. five million). Caracas is located near the Caribbean coast in the central part of the country, and Maracaibo lies near the border of Colombia on the western coast of Lake Maracaibo, nearly 500 miles west of Caracas. As I will discuss extensively in subsequent chapters, Maracaibo's geographical and political history contributes to the distinctiveness of its culture. Until the 1960s when the Urdaneta Bridge was built across the mouth of Lake Maracaibo, the city could only be reached by ferry from the eastern lakeshore, and for centuries, travel to Caracas involved several days on a boat that stopped at the Dutch Antilles on the way to the capital. Because of this stop on Aruba, there was a joke in Caracas that you needed a passport to go to Maracaibo, but the joke implied that Maracaibo was like a whole other country culturally. Geographic separation and a history of resisting centrally imposed national authority engendered an independent spirit as part of Maracaibo's regional identity. There is still a sense of resentment between the cities, with *caraqueños* considering themselves more urbane and cultured than the rude, rustic *maracuchos*, who, in turn, consider residents of the capital pompous and arrogant and lacking in any real local culture of their own. Compared to the crowded high-rise architecture of Caracas, *maracaiberos* take pride in the fact that at least some of their historic neighborhoods, like Santa Lucía where I spent most of my time, still maintain a vibrant street culture.

For centuries, Maracaibo served as a major seaport connecting eastern Colombia with Venezuela and beyond, but the city did not truly grow to its present stature until early in the twentieth century when enormous oil deposits were discovered under Lake Maracaibo. The oil industry transformed the city into an enormous industrial port for importing extraction equipment and exporting crude oil, and over the course of the twentieth century, the city grew and spread out immensely. Oil became the driving force of the entire Venezuelan economy, but with political control from Caracas, people of Zulia state came to resent the fact that oil wealth seemed to leave their state to support Caracas while the industry slowly devastated the local ecosystem, which for centuries had relied on Lake Maracaibo for fishing and commerce.

Presently, most Venezuelans consider themselves *criollo*, which in this context means mixed-race or *mestizo*. A central trope of Venezuelan national identity is that racism doesn't exist because most people are of mixed European, African and indigenous decent, but this ideology obscures the fact that socioeconomic difference is closely correlated with one's skin color. In cities like Caracas and Maracaibo, those with whiter skin dominate the small upper classes. Small populations of Afro-Venezuelans live in various coastal communities where cacao plantations once drove the economy. There are marginalized pockets of indigenous peoples in various wilderness areas of Venezuela, but very few in Caracas or other cities. The Wayú (Guajira) Indians live in the borderlands between Colombia and Venezuela, and their presence in Maracaibo makes it the only city in Venezuela with a noticeable indigenous minority.

In Maracaibo, *gaita* seems to appeal to a majority of the population, especially during the last three or four months of the year that have become an extended holiday

season—*la temporada gaitera*. The few people that I met who didn't like *gaita* were either Colombians who had no real cultural connection to it or elites who preferred more internationally popular musical styles. Most people would derogatorily refer to this latter group as *sifrinos*, Venezuelan slang for an urbane snob, somewhat similar to how the word "dandy" was once used in the United States. However, few people that I met seem to like to listen to *gaita* exclusively, and most listen to a wide range of Latin American musics like *salsa*, *merengue*, *cumbia*, and *vallenato*, as well as pop and rock from North America. Thus, listening to *gaita* is one option among many, though being a true fan can be viewed as an index of how "Zulian" one is. Although the term *maracucho* can be considered derogatory, most *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans that I met took pride in identifying as such. During the *gaita* season, it can be hard to avoid the music, as most radio stations mix *gaita* in with other genres, and some play nothing but *gaita*, and *gaita* groups are featured on many television programs. *Gaita* compact discs are available in most record stores and—increasingly during the 2000s—as pirated copies sold on the streets and in public markets. Many elementary and high schools have student *gaita* groups. From January through August, *gaita* is heard less often, with only a few radio stations playing it, and few groups performing. Those months are when groups are realigning their memberships, negotiating with composers for new songs, and recording new material in studios.

Although Venezuela is quite important in the international arena as an oil exporter, there has been relatively little English-language scholarship about its culture, especially its music and regional diversity, the main themes of this dissertation. This may be only the second ethnomusicological doctoral dissertation about Venezuelan music in

English. One explanation for this lack of interest in Venezuela may lie with the oil industry. As I will discuss in chapter four, the large oil companies imposed North American and European values onto Venezuelans with relatively little interest in native culture. As a result, Venezuelans adopted American baseball as their national sport and changed the architectural layout of their cities, but the cultural influence has been one-directional. Historically, Venezuelan music has not been well known outside the country—unlike Cuban *son* and Domincan *merengue*, for example. (This could be changing, as this year several Venezuelan artists including the groups Guaco and Los Amigo Invisibles have received nominations for Latin Grammy awards.) *Gaita* and *joropo* are hugely popular musics within Venezuela, each with a particular regional history. I hope that this thesis will contribute to the growing understanding of Venezuela's regional cultural diversity, and I also hope for scholars to study other important genres such as *joropo* from the plains states, Afro-Venezuelan *chimbangales* drumming from the south of Lake Maracaibo, and the curious 5/8 *merengue* rhythm that was popularized in the salons of Caracas in the nineteenth century.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF POPULAR MUSIC: PARTICIPATING AND OBSERVING BY PERFORMING

In this section, I present the theoretical underpinnings of my approach to fieldwork, situating my research in the history of ethnomusicological inquiry. My approach has as much to do with who I am as a musician, traveler, and person as it does with the scholarly training that I have received in graduate school.

> Anthropology has one strength: ethnography, the original, albeit imperfect, product of our discipline. Despite its taken-for-granted status, ethnography, rather than cultural materialism, structuralism, or any other "ism," has been and will continue to be our core contribution. It is time to appreciate ethnographers who produce works of art that become powerful vehicles of theoretical exposition. (Stoller 1989: 130)

Today, most ethnomusicologists center their research on ethnographic reporting of fieldwork. However, this was not always the case. Before the 1960s, comparative musicology and early ethnomusicology aspired to approach musics systematically, attempting to understand theoretical rules of scales and other details, largely through transcription and analysis of recordings. Over the past forty years, the various theoretical approaches of cultural anthropology have had sustained influence on ethnomusicologists' work, but, as Paul Stoller insists in the above quote from his critique of anthropological writing, the ethnographic approach itself is anthropology's most sustained contribution. But this approach has evolved dramatically over time from one of seeking to document scientistically an essentialized, unchanging nature of a group of people to one that emphasizes the reflexive relationship between researcher and subjects as the source of ethnographic knowledge.

In one of the founding texts of the discipline of ethnomusicology, *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), Alan Merriam argued that field research should be the basis of ethnomusicological inquiry, and few ethnomusicologists today would disagree; so profound has been the influence of that paradigm. Merriam advocated studying the social structures of musicians, concepts of music and musicianship, physical behavior of musicians, the training that musicians undergo, the uses and functions of music, and symbolism associated with music, all of which are topics included in this and most other

current studies. In the "Method and Technique" chapter especially, he stressed the importance of research in the field, as opposed to the older laboratory methods of comparative musicology, but nowhere in that chapter does he really address what ethnomusicologists should *do* in the field. One is left with the general impression that one should observe behavior, record music for later transcription and analysis, and interview musicians and others about music. Instead of actual methods and techniques, Merriam primarily justified field research, and his "method" emphasized the "observation" side of participant-observation research. But what should we "do" in the field, and how should we report on what we did? As Gourlay wrote in his landmark critique "Reassessing the Ethnomusicologist's Role in Research," Merriam's "approach permits discussion of what ethnomusicologists should do without including them in the doing process" (1978, 8).

A contemporary of Merriam, Mantle Hood proposed a different, but not completely incompatible paradigm in 1960. Hood's manifesto "The Challenge of Bi-Musicality" advocated for the central positioning of the practice of learning to play the music of other people and places in the course of ethnomusicological research. In the brief (and somewhat confusing) article, Hood "challenges" the readers of the journal *Ethnomusicology* to engage in the playing of non-Western music. Certainly, this article was a "challenge" to anthropologists engaged in ethnomusicological research, lest they believe they could study music without playing it, but merely by observing it. Hood complains of earlier comparative musicological methodology: "Occidentals ... have usually limited their interest in non-Western music to passive observation, working with informants and museum studies. There may well be a multiplicity of reasons why in this instance basic musicianship or the fundamentals of music have been bypassed..." (Hood

1960: 55). Hood seems to be poking fun at anthropologists and scientific musicologists who study music merely by observing and not participating, suggesting that they may not be "musical" enough to conduct research on music. Hood advocates for learning a musical tradition through "intense imitative practice" (1960: 57), which is, at some level, necessary in learning how to play any music, whether it is one's "native" tradition or an adopted one. That is, in order to study some kind of music, one must learn to play it through imitation. Hood was not calling on researchers merely to learn to play music, but to develop "an understanding of and an insight into not only music and the related arts but also language, religion, customs, history—in other words, the whole identity of the society of which music is only one, but one very important part" (Hood 1960: 58). Such multifaceted training is at the core of ethnomusicology today.

Numerous aspects of my graduate training in ethnomusicology encouraged, even forced, my personal acceptance of this challenge, and, in fact, this was, in part, the challenge I was looking for by attending graduate school. After years playing guitar and singing in many bands doing pop, jazz, American folk, and "world music," I entered graduate school in ethnomusicology looking for new challenges for my musicianship (among other things). In my first year of study at New York University, I played various string instruments in the extracurricular-but-essentially-compulsory Near Eastern music ensemble. Subsequently, at the University of Washington, I took (required) lessons (for credit) with numerous visiting artists, frequently in musical traditions that I had no real interest in. Achieving musical proficiency in these traditions was not the stated goal of the lessons; my professors explained that our experiences with visiting artists would help prepare us for fieldwork in which we would have to communicate with musicians in new

contexts and learn a new musical system through personal interaction. These lessons gave us a chance to experience the awkwardness of negotiating one's own musical identity in a new context. While I hope never to be tested on my ability to play Korean *kayagum*, Thai *jah-kay*, Tejano button accordion, or Okinawan *sanshin*, by interacting with the teachers of those traditions, I was forced to figure out how to modify my behavior—both musical and social behavior—to work productively with people from very different cultural backgrounds. Some of these studies had a more obvious impact on my academic path—my study of *cuatro* with the brothers Angel and Euclides Aparcicio would eventually lead me to my field research in Venezuela. Thus my musicianship challenges were, ultimately, thoroughly integrated with other aspects of my ethnomusicological training.

In retrospect, I see these repeated experiences of being thrown into unfamiliar musical territory as a way to grapple with and then accept our limitations as musicians and communicators. As an old aphorism would suggest, the more musics one knows, the more one understands how little one really knows about music. Despite my musical confidence in numerous genres, every time I began lessons in another tradition, I felt an odd combination of deer-in-the-headlights complete incompetence and eager-beaver curiosity. To me, this is the "challenge of bi-musicality": to recognize the vulnerable position of being a musician in a strange musical land and to be willing to subject oneself to alter one's identity through musical acculturation.

In his 1978 critique of ethnomusicology, Gourlay suggested that we examine our own "personal constraints" and their effects on our research, and the past several decades of increasingly reflexive ethnography has answered this call. The knowledge produced through fieldwork is very much contingent on the fieldworker her/himself. While I intend

to highlight aspects of my personality and personal situation throughout this thesis, I want to expand on Gourlay's suggestion a bit to include personal restraints, abilities, proclivities, as well as constraints. I must admit that one of the more dramatic constraints on my research was my incomplete command of Spanish. While I had made serious efforts to become fluent in Spanish before going to Venezuela, and while my reading and speaking ability were slow but proficient, I was frequently frustrated by my inability to comprehend much street vernacular in Maracaibo. As I will describe, there are a multitude of linguistic peculiarities in Maracaibo, and song lyrics, conversation, and especially jokes accentuate these particularities. Although I had no problem carrying an academic conversation with a university-educated folklorist, in many social gatherings in the old part of Maracaibo, I often caught only every third word in street conversation. By not giving into the frustration, I believe I turned this lack of fluency into a strength because my friends recognized and appreciated what an effort it was for me to socialize and converse. Further, when I explained that I had only begun to study Spanish in graduate school after I had heard Venezuelan music and decided to research it—and I was always asked about how I got interested in *gaita* and how I came to study it in Maracaibo—musicians and other friends were quite forgiving of my linguistic inability because they saw what effort I had put in for the sake of the their music, of which they are very proud. Nonetheless, my language disability was frustrating and I acknowledge that I probably missed something in every conversation. Much of this thesis concerns *gaita* lyrics, and without the help of friends, professors, books, CD liner notes, and websites, I could not have transcribed nor translated this poetry, and I am immensely grateful for all the help I received.

Another very real constraint on my research was that I only spent nine months in Maracaibo at the longest (2000–2001). Although I returned there for two-week trips in November 2003 and November 2007, I am still very much a visitor. While part of the reason for my limited time "in the field" concerns funding, another is the fact that my wife (and, since 2002, my children) have not accompanied me to Maracaibo, and so, while doing my research, I have also had to maintain long distance relationships, and trying to be present in two places at once no doubt had a constraining effect on my bonds with Venezuelans. But such is the situation of nearly every ethnomusicologist who chooses to conduct fieldwork in a distant land. Thanks to cellular phones and email, I have been able to maintain contact with many *maracaiberos*, and they have helped me immensely during my research and writing even when I was far away in Seattle.

Since my own musicianship was such an important part of my research identity, my own musical abilities and proclivities played a huge role in my ethnography. For the most part, I believe my talents were well suited for studying *gaita*, but a different researcher with different talents could offer a different, and equally valid, view of the genre. As with most ethnomusicologists (I suspect), my own talents and aesthetic preferences impacted what I focused on. Since my pre-teen years, I have sung and played guitar and learned, taught, and performed thousands of pop songs. Thus my approach to music has focused on lyrics, singing, song structure, harmonic content, and rhythmic feel. I understand a musical genre to be based on many qualities that one could observe analytically, but more importantly, as a repertoire of songs. Having developed some ability on the *cuatro*, and being a decent singer, after learning the basics of rhythm and song structure, I set out to develop a knowledge of the repertoire of classic *gaita* songs.

As I will describe throughout this thesis, *gaita* fans especially revere both their composers' lyrical and musical creativity and their singers' ability to convey messages with musically dramatic passion. The biggest hit songs that they have created and recorded since the 1960s comprise a *gaita* canon. Throughout this thesis, I draw on this repertoire of classic *gaitas*: songs that people told me were important, songs that are played on the radio a lot, and songs that appear on CD collections. In a sense, this is a "song-centered" ethnography. As much as my experiences in Venezuela, the lyrical and musical content of classic songs guides my presentation.

Even with my emphasis on singing and strumming, I recognize that I missed things that another researcher might have emphasized. As one example, if I were more proficient in jazz-styled chord substitution practice, I could have better interpreted the complex harmonic invention of *cuatro* players like the great composer Rafael Rodríguez, with whom I shared a house for several months. Rafael's harmonic talent is incredibly fluid. The few times that we sat down to play *cuatro* together, I was unable to follow him, even on songs that I thought I knew. He seemed to never play the same chord sequence twice; each verse and chorus was just an opportunity to reharmonize. I wish that I had had a better understanding of jazz "backcycling" at the time. In terms of my singing, better fluency in Spanish might have led to more immediate understanding of Rafael's and other composers' poetry. My general musical orientation as a singer/guitarist caused me to hear certain aspects of *gaita* more clearly than others, but even with this orientation, my limited abilities constrained my research.

If I were a percussionist, I suspect my research and my presentation would have been quite different. Gradually, over the course of several months in 2001, I acquired the

particular percussion instruments of the *gaita* ensemble and, as I will recount, learned to play them in a rudimentary way. A percussionist ethnomusicologist would likely have emphasized the increasingly complex variations on the *tambora* (drum), *furro* (friction drum), and *charrasca* (metal scraper) and how drum fills and other rhythmic variations contribute to a song's popularity and impact. Sociologically, a percussionist might have paid more attention to the social hierarchy of *gaita* musicians and how percussionists rarely get as much credit as singers. However, as a singer/*cuatrista*, my ethnography tends to emphasize the songs and the overall sounds of the classic recordings of those songs.

Numerous other personal restraints affected my participation in *gaita*, especially with regard to the music business. As one example, I avoided becoming too closely tied to any one professional *gaita* group. Part of my reason for this restraint was to spend time with a broad range of performers, especially amateurs. Additionally, I recognized that particularly business-savvy *gaiteros* could try to take advantage of me. Near the end of my time in Maracaibo, I heard rumors that some professional groups (not the most successful, mind you) were considering inviting me to join as a singer for the upcoming season. (Fortunately, the time limit on my research funding gave me a convenient excuse to avoid joining a group.) Although such an experience would have given me insight into the professional *gaita* scene and been a tremendous learning experience musically, I was uncomfortable with the obvious intent to capitalize on the novelty of having a blond foreigner in a group. With practice, I certainly could have held my own musically in such groups, but I cannot flatter myself into thinking that there weren't hundreds of singers in Maracaibo more qualified than I. Also, I had to make it clear to many *gaiteros* that I was

not involved in the music business in the U.S.A. and could not help them with promotion abroad. By distancing myself from the business side, I limited the research I could have accomplished on this important aspect of *gaita*, but I also avoided undesirable and potentially unethical dealings.

Another constraint on my research was the fear of crime that affects everyone in contemporary urban Venezuela. Robberies, carjackings, and homicides are horribly common in Caracas and Maracaibo. Nearly every Venezuelan I know has been a victim of at least one robbery, and many have been in danger of losing their lives to gun-wielding thieves. Rubén Castellano, a prominent *gaita* DJ and TV show host with whom I spent many evenings in Santa Lucía, was murdered a few years ago. As I will describe in Chapter Five, I was robbed on the street once in Maracaibo. Because of this fearful situation, I had to be very careful about where went at night in Maracaibo; and at times, because I didn't have my own car, I simply couldn't get to places to hear musicians. As a researcher with limited time in the field, idle moments can be very frustrating, but due to the fear of crime, I occasionally had to curb my activities, as do all Venezuelans.

As is the case for all ethnographers, numerous other aspects of my own personality and tastes helped determine the results of my research. Even my appreciation for drinking socially had a significant impact on my research. I didn't realize this until I was talking to an advisor in the cultural section of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas about my success in meeting musicians in the old parts of Maracaibo, and he responded that he could never do the kind of research I was doing because he doesn't drink. It is a commonplace in Maracaibo for people to observe, "*¡Gaiteros beben!*" ["Gaiteros drink (a lot)!"] While I am certain that there are *gaiteros* who don't drink, I never found them.

Most everyone I met in the *gaita* scene drank heavily in social situations and enjoyed buying me beers and pouring me scotches and rum drinks, and I enjoyed reciprocating. If a tee-totaling *gaita* scene exists in Maracaibo, I never found out about it, and it is not represented here. Throughout this thesis, I will relate numerous other ways in which my personal situation affected my research.

The Mimesis and Alterity of Ethnomusicological Fieldwork

Since Hood challenged ethnomusicologists to achieve "bimusicality," our field experience has increasingly involved an exercise in "intense imitation" of musical performance of those we study, and many ethnomusicologists have described not only the intensity of their socio-musical experiences but also their sense of their changing personal identity through performance of the "Other's" music. Among others, Steven Friedson, Timothy Rice, Michele Kisliuk, and Jeff Todd Titon have turned to more phenomenological presentations of their fieldwork. As Kisliuk puts it in the introduction to *Seize the Dance*, her ethnography of BaAka pygmy performance, "When we participate in performance … self-other boundaries are undeniably blurred. On an expressive and vulnerable level, our very being merges with the 'field' through our voices and bodies" (Kisliuk 1998: 13). I have come to understand this process through anthropologist Michael Taussig's dialectic of *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses* (1999). Taussig describes the conscious and unconscious process of mutual imitation in cross-cultural contact as *mimesis*, or the attempt "to Other," and this noun-to-verb shift offers us insights into the ethnomusicological field experience in which we so often seek to imitate the "Other" in dramatic, performative ways, perhaps even more than

other kinds of fieldworkers. In a sense, this "Othering" is an experiment in auto-acculturation, and the potential for this lies in the fact that "culture," by definition, is learned behavior, and thus is learnable. Alterity refers to "otherness" or difference. Fieldwork, for me, was, at least in part, an experiment in mimesis and alterity: I engaged in musically mimetic behavior in order to "Other" myself, to bridge the particular senses of alterity that existed between Venezuelans and myself.

Taussig's historical musings on "mimesis and alterity" in the course of colonial cultural contact provide a dialectical view of the old "insider/outsider" dichotomy. Drawing on dramatic theory and the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, Taussig reexamines the colonial encounters through the concept of "mimesis," which is Greek for "imitation." The premise, based on Benjamin, is that humans have a "mimetic faculty," an urge or a "sense" in the book's subtitle, to imitate one another. Thus, to replace the subject/object relationship of the old outsider/insider dichotomy, we have a more universalistic sense of the process involved in bridging the separation. Taussig shows how in numerous colonial encounters, those "discovered" by European explorers mimicked the behavior of the explorers, much to the amazement of the discoverers. Likewise, explorers would often mimic the "natives," such as when, upon discovering that Native Americans were using witchcraft against them, the explorers used the tools at their disposal, such as signal flares and Victrolas, as magical devices to impress the natives. Although most of these instances of imitation appeared incidental and not pre-planned, Taussig emphasizes the mutual sense of "wonder" that was experienced when the imitation was recognized. His use of the recurring phrase, "the wonder of mimesis," is one that I found most provocative for its ability to capture the experience I had during my fieldwork. I

constantly experienced a sense of wonder in observing the music making of *gaiteros* and they appeared to sense it as they observed me attempting to imitate them musically.

What I find particularly appealing is Taussig's noun-to-verb twist of the word "Other" when he claims, "The ability to mime, and mime well … is the capacity to Other" (Taussig 1993: 19). Under this rubric, we use our mimetic faculty to imitate the "Others" that we meet, to "Other" ourselves, and to, in a sense, become the "Other." Thus, mimesis is my predisposition to try to close the gap between those around me and myself. I mime in order to fit in; I imitate you in order to close the interpersonal gap that separates me from you; because of the feeling of alterity, I mime.

Given more recent research into what neurologists have labeled "mirror neurons"—parts of the brain that actually activate in sympathy with the actions of others that we observe—it is becoming clear that humans, at a biological level, have a faculty for imitation in order to sympathize and connect with one another. These mirror neurons must be firing constantly as the ethnographer makes his/her way into and through "the field" and tries to adapt to new social relationships. "By helping us recognize the actions of other people, mirror neurons also help us to recognize and understand the deepest motives behind those actions, the intentions of others" (Iacoboni 2008: 6). Living in an unfamiliar place or social situation, as many ethnomusicologists do during fieldwork, is a constant state of watching, imitating, and trying to understand local behavior, and to make it one's own.

Many ethnomusicologists in recent decades have described the transformative experience of fieldwork. For example, Timothy Rice suggests that we revise our idea of fieldwork from a place where we "test and work out theory, an experimental place in

other words," and instead, think of it as "a place to become an ethnomusicologist, an experiential place" (1997: 105). For Rice, fieldwork was truly an experience of self-transformation. Once he acquired "bagpiper's fingers" (through careful imitation of his teacher's live playing and recordings, Rice saw himself—and Bulgarians saw him—in a different light. Rice believes that he "moved to a place untheorized by the insider-outsider distinction so crucial to much ethnomusicological thinking" (1997: 110). When Rice played for his teacher, he received the confirmation of his transformation: "You are a *gaidar*" (1997: 111). Rice was not completely convinced, but he recognized the change: "Although I wasn't a Bulgarian, I could act like a Bulgarian in the production of a complicated musical form, and when I acted like a Bulgarian in this particular way, they did too; that is, if the occasion were right, they danced" (1997: 111). On one occasion at a dance, a Bulgarian asked Rice who he was, and Rice replied that he was American. The man replied, "You lie! You speak Bulgarian, and you dance Bulgarian dances. Therefore you are Bulgarian" (Rice 1997: 112). Through participation in music and dance, and learning to participate very well, Rice was transformed into a Bulgarian, of sorts. Through mimesis, he Othered himself.

Many have attempted to explain why music provides such a fertile communication medium. Although ethnomusicologists have a long history of explaining how music is *not* a "universal language" as the popular saying goes, there is no denying that participating in music can be highly communicative, even across cultural divides. While some compare music to language, I believe it is the non-linguistic communicative property of music that is so powerful. Alfred Schutz (1951) proposed that "making music together" could serve as a model of social communication in general. Schutz described

the phenomenology of social communication as a "'mutual tuning-in relationship' by which the 'I' and 'Thou' are experienced by both participants as a 'We' in vivid presence" (Schutz 1951: 79). As a model of an intense communication situation, Schutz analyzed the interaction between musicians as an experience in which individuals share in each other's perception of inner time (95). In order to play music together well, we usually must be aware of our own actions and intentions while anticipating those of the other player—creating a mutual, active sense of spontaneous simultaneity. Although it may be difficult to define "inner time" in the sense that Schutz describes, all of us who have played music have experienced this sense of being in an altered state of time, or an altered time-space. Though potentially undefinable, the fact that this sense is indeed non-clock time offers us an alternative frame in which to communicate.

Playing music with Others that we meet in the field gives us the opportunity to communicate in this alternate time-space. By imitating musicians in order to groove with them, we become "tuned in" to their stylistic expression within the alternative time-space of music. This momentary suspension of normal clock time allows for profound non-linguistic connection. I submit that this sense of mutual connection is perhaps the most powerful purpose of playing music in the field. Through this mimetic practice, we transgress alterity and momentarily erase it, even as we may bring it to the forefront. What I mean to evoke here is that experience when we and other musicians interact well (something achieved only through intense imitation and study), forming a unit, a "We," yet realizing that issues of race, class, geography, nationality, etc. are all arguing for the situation never to occur.

Kisliuk reflects extensively on how, as her level of participation in music and dance deepened, she felt a shift along the Self/Other continuum among the BaAka. She sees this as part of a theoretical trend in ethnomusicology.

> The renewed emphasis on experience is part of a continuing seachange in the humanities that is moving us toward reflexive, nonobjectivist scholarship (and, not by coincidence, distancing us from historically colonialist approaches). During our most in-depth and intimate field experiences, ethnographers and the people among whom we learn come to share the same narratives; the deeper our commitment in the field, the more our life stories intersect with our "subject's," until Self-Other boundaries are blurred. The field becomes a heightened microcosm of life. When we begin to participate in music and dance our very being merges with the "field" through our bodies and voices, and another Self-Other boundary is dissolved. (Kisliuk 1997: 23)

By imitating and participating in song and dance, her voice and body became part of the polyphonic, kinesthetic history of the BaAka. Over time, her participation in their music distinguished her from other whites like missionaries. Getting up and joining in dances was what secured her change in status: "This was different from listening or singing on the sidelines because, while moving with the circle, I became an active part of the aural kaleidoscope. I was part of the changing design inside the scope, instead of looking at it and projecting in" (Kisliuk 1997: 35). Her participation led BaAka women to address her as *beka*, a term usually reserved for close BaAka friends.

In every situation where I sang and played *gaita* in Maracaibo, I had the sense that even as my mimetic musicianship brought me into that shared musical timespace, the interactions also highlighted a heightened sense of alterity. Part of this had to do with my appearance: compared to most any Venezuelan, I am whiter and blonder, and my whiteness meant that never for a moment could I truly blend in. Based on my prior research, and jokes and other comments that I heard, I knew that, despite many claims to the contrary, racism exists in Venezuela, and this often takes the form of a racial preference for a white/blond Teutonic ideal. Thus it was not without some discomfort that I realized that the kind of welcoming access that I received might not have been extended

to me had I been African American, for example. I cannot say this for certain, and most Venezuelans that I know would undoubtedly deny the possibility of racial preference affecting their behavior toward me, but it seems likely.

My obvious Otherness in the eyes of Venezuelans played out in all sorts of unexpected ways. One example was the nickname that was bestowed on me when I started frequenting *gaiteros'* hang-outs in the old neighborhood of Santa Lucía. In friendly social gatherings, Venezuelans often prefer to call each other by nicknames, some of which are meaningless and some of which are rich with history. After a month or so in Maracaibo in late 2000, I began spending most afternoons and evenings at one or another little *cervezarías* [beer bars] in Santa Lucía; like many of the *zulianos* there, I was hoping to meet *gaiteros* and talk to *gaita* fans about the music. Soon, one of the regulars there—who everyone knew only by *his* nickname, "Electo"—gave me the nickname "Niehaus" (which they pronounced "nee-HAO"). From that point on, few called me Roberto. Every time my taxi would pull up at the bar, I would hear someone in the crowd announce my arrival: "¡Ya viene nee-HAO!" Over the course of several weeks, I learned of the layers of meaning in the joking nickname. Many years earlier, when most of the men in the crowd were children, a blond, white, foreign oil company worker named Niehaus had been kidnapped somewhere in Zulia, and for months, the local newspapers printed his picture and documented the efforts to find him. I never saw Niehaus's picture to see how much resemblance there was, but my new friends made it clear to me that he just happened to be the whitest, blondest person that they'd ever seen associated with Maracaibo when they were kids. No one seemed to remember if Niehaus or his remains had ever been found. One new friend joked that I was the reincarnation of Niehaus. Another offered that I *was* Niehaus, and that I had simply gone into hiding to learn how to play *gaita.*

The nickname highlighted the contrast of my presence among *gaiteros* in Maracaibo with the activities of thousands of foreigners who had come before me to work in the petrochemical industries. For nearly a century, North American (and English and Dutch) white foreigners had come to Zulia to manage the extraction and exportation of oil, creating a sort of economic colonialism. Historian Miguel Tinker Salas (2009) has published an entire book about the foreign oil companies' tremendous sociocultural impact on Zulia. As a port city and the oil capital of Venezuela, Maracaibo has been the temporary home of thousands of foreign oil workers since the 1920s, but for decades, the oil companies housed their employees in walled-in, self-supporting compounds. Nowadays, the few foreigners in Maracaibo live mostly in posh, secluded high-rise apartments, and though some of these are within a mile of the old part of town, such foreigners would never be found in the old neighborhoods, so my presence was quite novel. In my musical interactions, I was always a bit flattered when *gaiteros* complimented me on my "humility," but of course I seemed humble compared to the economic colonization of Standard Oil, British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell. My nickname in Santa Lucía was a subtle commentary on alterity; it was an ironic twist in the history of Zulians' interactions with white foreigners: Niehaus, the kidnapping victim had returned as a *gaitero* wanna-be. Just as my mimetic presence was welcomed with the bestowing of an odd nickname, the nickname itself offered a laughable reminder of my Other-ness.

Initially, the reason for my spending so much time at the corner bars of Santa Lucía (other than the cheap beer), was because it was a good place to meet and learn from *gaiteros*, but now I realize that it was where I was learning how to be Zulian, and a certain kind of Zulian—a *gaiterólogo*, a term used by some who write about *gaita*, like Arnoldo Hernández Oquendo (1997). Most of the direct musical instruction that I received in Maracaibo took place at one *cervezaría* or another. As I will describe in the

second chapter, it was in Santa Lucía that I got my first lessons on *furro* and *tambora* and where I was first invited to sing along on a song on local television. But hanging out in Santa Lucía waiting for a *gaita* jam to occasionally break out was more about the hanging out itself. While I was constantly listening to the *gaitas* being played on the stereos and talking to *maracaiberos* about the significance of certain songs and groups, I was also just experiencing Maracaibo as these Zulians did. Santa Lucía became a place not just for me to "do" fieldwork, but more a place to hang out, relax, and socialize—I came to understand the space as having a personal social function not altogether different from the "subjects" of my study. As I will discuss further in Chapter 3 about geography, Zulians come to Santa Lucía, also called El Empedra'o for its cobblestone streets, for the experience of hanging out in what feels like a traditional place. The architecture and narrow streets are a century or two old, and one has the feeling that people have been drinking beer there on the same streetcorners for eons (whether that's true or not). People talk about *gaitas* and *gaiteros*, but more often about politics and baseball. For those of us with a particular interest in *gaita*, the conversations usually drifted from songs and singers, to specific lyrics, and then to issues of history, politics, and religion of the region, and these became the topics of the chapters of this thesis. At the streetcorner bars in El Empedra'o, I introduced myself as a *músico* and *musicólogo* [musician and musicologist] but, in a sense, I became a *gaitero* and *gaiterólogo.* My ethnomusicology became "gaiterology" by socializing with people who like to think about and talk about the music and all of its associated regional cultural significance.

At the Fortieth Anniversary celebration of the University of Washington Ethnomusicology program, two presentations about visions for the future of ethnomusicology seemed at odds with one another, yet fully compatible to me. Aaron Fox argued that we need to study the "country" musics of the world to understand conventions of sentimentality and identity—that through the discourse about "country"

musics, we can understand the complexities of identity in what may seem very commonplace everyday life. Shortly thereafter, Steven Friedson, seeming frustrated by the idea that country music could be worth studying, argued that we need to do fieldwork in remote places and try to discover radically different states of consciousness—pounding the lectern as he said it. In my opinion, these scholars have produced two of the most profound ethnographies in recent ethnomusicology. Fox's (2004) ethnography of working class Texans talking about and playing music is awe-inpsiring for the thoroughness of its linguistic analysis and his incredible ability to code-switch between the most difficult sociocultural theory and the most vernacular of bar-room talk. Friedson's (1996) study of spiritual healers in Malawi is one of the most ambitious in connecting music to medicine and alternate states of consciousness. Both Fox and Friedson's perspectives inspire me, and while I do not consider my work to come close to either one's amazing analyses, I hope that in some way, I have combined the visions for ethnomusicology that they professed. In many ways, *gaita* can be thought of as a "country" music in Venezuela, in the sense that it creates and represents an imagined community of regional sentimentality. While *gaita* contains none of the altered states of consciousness of Tumbuka prophet healers, my work is based on in-depth fieldwork in which I did my best to understand regionalist consciousness in Zulia, a place that is far removed from the geography of that of most of my readers'.

FEELING REGIONAL SENTIMENT IN ZULIA

In the fall of 1997, when I first encountered *gaita* during my *cuatro* lessons with Euclides Aparicio at the University of Washington, he simply presented it as party music that Venezuelans sing during the Christmas season. I was taken by the rhythm and the powerful sound, but confused by the lyrics. If this is Christmas music, why were there

hardly any references to Christmas and the holidays' symbols or stories? Why did the songs mention a little Chinese girl (La Chinita)? Why was she called the "Maracaibo queen" [*reina marabina]*? (For that matter, what or where was Maracaibo?) Why did the lyrics literally praise *nuestro folclor* [our folklore]? What did it mean to be a *buen zuliano* and why would this matter at Christmas? As a *caraqueño* from a family from the *llanos* [plains states], Euclides didn't seem to care much about *gaita*'s lyrics. For him, it was just music that was fun to sing around Christmastime, but he explained that it originated in Maracaibo, in Zulia state, and the songs spoke about things that were particularly important to people from that region.

This was the first time that I realized that there must be many different kinds of regional music in Venezuela—that this country I knew very little about was not one homogeneous "nation" to be distinguished culturally from its neighboring nation-states, but rather a conglomeration of regional diversity. National labels obscure regional diversity. For example, as an outsider (and perhaps for many insiders), it is easier to conceive of differentiating "English folk music" from "Irish folk music" than to imagine the many diverse styles that comprise each. In retrospect, my ignorance was, in part, simply that of a foreigner who cannot imagine the diversity within a foreign land. It was a stretch to think that I was studying "Venezuelan music" with Euclides, but an even greater leap to realize that I was only learning about a few aspects of Venezuela's diverse musical culture. In time I learned that *joropo*, the main musical style that Euclides had come to teach, was but one regional style—from the cowboy country of Venezuela's plains states—that had been nationalistically promoted as "national music" in the mid-twentieth century. Like most Venezuelans, Euclides could conceptualize, appreciate, and

perform *joropo* as his country's national music, but he also loved and played many other intra-national and international genres.

When I first went to Caracas in August 1999 to conduct preliminary research, I encountered *gaita* everywhere, but I repeatedly learned that this music, while popular in Venezuela's capital, was from somewhere else. Merchants sold CDs, groups played free shows on the street, radio stations played it, and college kids formed groups to play it. At the national ethnomusicology foundation, FUNDEF, archivists made it clear that if I wanted to study *gaita*, I would have to go to its source in Maracaibo. No matter how popular *gaita* was in Caracas, it was clear that it was from another part of the country, and it represented that region for many people.

It has become a commonplace in ethnomusicology to say that one is interested in the study of "music and identity," to the point that one could argue for that as a new "definition" of the discipline. Clearly, to study *gaita* in Maracaibo is to study regional identity within an increasingly nationalized, globalized context. If there is a single common theme of all *gaita* lyrics, it is the promotion of a sense of regional identity, and likewise, the music and instrumentation are seen as regionally particular, i.e., as identifying the region musically. Music, especially songs with meaningful lyrical content that people can sing together, can be particularly powerful in promoting senses of identity. As Simon Frith put it: "Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives. Such a fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice marks also the integration of aesthetics and ethics" (Frith 1996: 124). As I will describe, *gaita* lyrics *are* cultural narratives that Zulians can identify with; the

songs promote ideas of what it means to be a good Zulian (ethics), and what good Zulian music sounds like (aesthetics). Songs are particularly powerful in creating a sense of regional identity in performance situations, especially large outdoor concerts where Zulians sing along with regionalist lyrics.

Although Zulia is not a "nation" in the current sense of the word as an autonomous political entity, many Zulians fantasize about their state in that way, and *gaitas* often portray this conception. (Zulia is even included in James Minahan's *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations* [2002].) Thus I draw considerably on theories of "nationalism" to understand Zulian expressions of "regionalism". This calls to mind one of the "twin paradoxes" of nationalism identified by Thomas Turino in the introduction to his historical analysis of Zimbabwean popular music: that "nation-states celebrate and are dependent on local distinctiveness, but they are simultaneously threatened by it" (Turino 2000: 15). Many Venezuelans love *gaita*, but the music often expresses ideas that are so regional that they could be interpreted as threatening national solidarity. There are numerous *gaitas* that exemplify this specific threat, a few of which, such as "¡Independéncia Ya!" (Independence Now!), were even banned by the national government for their seditious lyrics.

While most *gaitas* do not promote political secession for Zulia state, this regionalist, independent spirit fuels regional sentiment in Zulia. The interconnectedness between regional sentiment and regionalist political discourse in Zulia leads me to disagree with another of Turino's assertions: that these concepts should be considered distinct or in a part-to-whole relationship. He claimed that "To blur the concepts of national sentiment and nationalism, as some musicologists have, is to confuse the part for

the whole, and to confuse two very different types of goals and operations" (Turino 2000: 14). In attempting to use terms such as regional sentiment and regionalism, at least in the Zulian context, I find it hard to believe in clear distinctions. Yes, in certain contexts, the terms "regionalism" and "regionalist" in Zulia suggest a deliberate quest for political autonomy that could be considered treasonous in Venezuela, and certainly one could not conceive of political regionalism without a strong sense of regional sentiment. But political regionalism is also an essential part of the concept of regional sentiment in Zulia. In chapter 6, I will trace the history of this thinking back to the era of Venezuela's quest for independence from Spain. *Zulianidad*, which is the term Zulians use to describe regional sentiment in Zulia, is very much informed by Zulians' knowledge of their history, especially the history of their brief periods of independence from the rule of the Venezuelan central government. That is, having a personal sense of *zulianidad* does not necessarily mean that one would want Zulia immediately to declare independence from Venezuela, but *zulianidad* is very much based on and strengthened by the belief that Zulia *could* survive on its own if it did secede—that it is strong enough and rich enough both in resources and in culture to be its own nation-state. Zulian regional sentiment is rather meaningless without the subliminal contemplation of secession.

The blurriness of the distinction between regionalism and regional sentiment—and the potential for regional sentiment to become national sentiment—is not unique to Zulia. We see it playing out in various places throughout the world. As I write this, Scotland is gradually regaining its autonomy from Great Britain, a development that would have been hard to predict twenty years ago, even for a scholar. To demonstrate the dramatic change, in 1992, David McCrone's book *Understanding Scotland* was subtitled

the Sociology of a Stateless Nation, while his 2001 revision carries the subtitle *the Sociology of a Nation*, in response to the re-inauguration of the Scottish Parliament. Scotland's political change has been fueled by the fact that for many if not most Scots, the sense of Scottishness (sentiment) was never fully separate from the potential for Scottish sovereignty (nationalism). "Lying behind this is a feeling that the old notion of sovereignty as a zero-sum game—all or nothing—no longer makes sense. A new process whereby political authority is layered and shared seems more meaningful. The debate which ensues concerns how levels of governance interact in the interests of the nation" (McCrone 2001: 2). In contrast to Turino's clear-cut distinction between nationalism and national sentiment, I would argue that in many situations, national sentiment is based heavily on sublimated nationalism that can surface or resurface whenever political conditions cooperate. As far as I can tell, most residents of Zulia identify as Venezuelans in some contexts and as *zulianos* when they want to express their resistance to centralized authority. In terms of musical preference, many love and respect *joropo* as *música venezolana*, but the think of *gaita* as their regional sound. Their identity is layered and determined by immediate context.

Like many scholars of my generation, my understanding of nationalism is heavily influenced by Benedict Anderson, who offered us the postmodern poetic that nations are "imagined communities." A nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983: 6). Although much of my field research took place in a relatively small area of an old neighborhood where *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans congregate, and while many of them *are*

intimate friends, even in this community, there are many strangers and vague acquaintances; yet all share a sense of being from Maracaibo, a part of Zulia, i.e., a geographic-political grouping of millions of inhabitants. I will argue that congregating in that neighborhood is an act of asserting that one is *maracucho*: gathering at the two or three bars where I centered my research is not only an act of meeting up with friends, but also an effort to seek out that which is considered most traditionally representative in the region, that is, it is a gathering place to be "regional" together. *Gaitas* frequently portray images of this neighborhood and similar ones as idealized zones for regional "communion." Anderson's work has been so influential for those of us who study "culture" because he asserted: "nationality, … nation-ness, as well as nationalism are cultural artifacts of a particular kind." Thus, we can study nationalism *as* culture and use our methods of participant observation fieldwork. Anderson continues: "To understand them [the concepts of nationalism, etc.] properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson 1991: 4). I believe my study of *gaita* addresses these goals.

It is not without some reservation that I employ Anderson's theory. Recent scholarship, especially among historians of Latin America, has called into question much of Anderson's claims, particularly his belief that print media like newspapers were essential to nationalist movements. From my point of view as a student of Venezuelan history, Anderson's most notable example of print media's creation of nationalism in the eighteenth century is his reference to "the newspaper of Caracas [which] quite naturally, even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of

fellow-readers" (Anderson 1991: 62). Recently, historians have shown that there was no newspaper in Caracas at that time (Guerra 2003: 6). It seems that Anderson's illustration was more conjectural than factual. Claudio Lomnitz (2001) offers a thorough critique of Anderson's history of nationalism that even goes so far as to challenge his definition of the "nation" as it applies to Latin America. (I will conduct a more complete critique of Anderson in Chapter Five.) Although the factual inaccuracy of Anderson's chronology of the genesis of nationalism may render it of little use to historians and political scientists, we in the humanities continue to draw on the poetic elegance of his titular formulation as we consider how group identities are imagined.

While historians find Anderson's theory wanting, literary critics and scholars in cultural studies have been profoundly influenced by his broad concepts. One of those is Lauren Berlant, and her expansion of Anderson's terminology from national imaginary to "national fantasy" is one that I find particularly useful in understanding *gaita*'s role in promoting regional identity. Berlant explains her wording as such: "By 'fantasy' I mean to designate how national culture becomes local—through the images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness" (Berlant 1991: 5). In popular songs throughout the world, lyrics are often fantasies of one sort or another, and in Zulia, most *gaitas* fantasize place. As I will show throughout this thesis, *gaita* lyrics offer Zulians a popular fantasy of the local—"a little paradise where all are brothers," as "Sentir Zuliano" told us.

I also appreciate Berlant's development of Anderson's concept of the role of "simultaneity" in imagining the nation. "The citizen's primal territorial affiliation produces the ritual, liminal time of national "simultaneity": participation in national

celebration connects the citizen to a collective subjectivity constituted by synchronous participation in the same national rituals, the same discursive system (Berlant 1991:29). *Gaita* is seasonal music, deeply connected to celebrations of the patron saint's festival in November and the subsequent Christmas season. Hearing *gaita* at the same time every year and associating it with annual rituals synchronizes Zulians on a localized calendar. At some point in *gaita*'s popularization, there appeared the marketing phrase: "hearing *gaita* is like smelling *hallacas* cooking." *Hallacas* are traditional Christmas food in Venezuela, similar to Mexican *tamales.* A rich stew of meats, raisins and capers is surrounded by cornmeal, wrapped in cornhusks, and steamed. Legend has it that the recipes for the *hallaca* filling originated in how servants would take the leftovers from their masters' meals and cook it into a stew at Christmastime. Connecting *gaita* to the *hallaca* creates a connection to an annual cooking ritual and the history of class distinctions and slavery. The catchphrase connects *gaita* to ritual nourishment and further localizes the Christmas holiday.

In some historical situations, Anderson's assertions about print media creating national synchrony must be true, but the experience of music seems even more effective in this regard. Print media is often experienced individually. There is the sense that when one reads the morning newspaper, many others of the same locality are reading the same words at roughly the same time. But when one listens to the radio, one knows that others are listening at exactly the same time. If you're singing along with a song on the radio, you can imagine others singing along elsewhere. At a concert, one can sing along and see and hear others doing the same. In Zulia, *gaita*'s seasonal nature enhances this idea of people moving through time together. New songs are released every September in

anticipation of the Feria and Christmas parties. It is the frenetic rhythm that accompanies this festive, frantic time—stores blast gaita recordings during the Christmas shopping season to remind people where they are and what time it is as only they, as *maracuchos*, would know. My assertion is that it is music's inherent power to provoke experiences of simultaneity, as opposed to print's ability to allow the imagining of simultaneity, that makes music so effective in creating a sense of group identity, and thus effective in nationalist/regionalist projects.

The use of local dialect in song lyrics is also a key way that *gaita* helps Zulians imagine their community. Although everyone in Venezuela speaks Spanish, diverse dialects and accents distinguish residents of different regions, and Zulians' manner of speech is arguably the country's most distinctive. Documenting characteristic Zulian speech patterns would be a study in and of itself, and one for which my language ability is completely inadequate, but some obvious local speech markers figure prominently in *gaita* lyrics. For example, Carruyo mentions how singer Neguito Borjas's protest *gaita* "El Paquetazo" sarcastically called a set of neo-liberal economic reform *machete*, a regional Zulian word for "cool" (Carruyo 2005: 106). One aspect of Zulian dialect that I point out throughout this thesis is the use of *vos* as the second-person familiar pronoun, instead of *tú*, which is much more common in Latin America. Zulia is the only region of Venezuela where the *voseo* is used, so its use in *gaita* lyrics immediately places the listener in Zulia. In many songs, the *voseo* merely adds a bit of local flavor or indicates that the character in a song is Zulian, as in what is arguably the most popular *gaita* ever, "Sin Rencor" (Gran Coquivacoa, 1978). In this post-breakup song, singer/author Neguito Borjas tells his former lover that she will think of him whenever she hears a *gaita.*

- estribillo -	- chorus -
Así siempre ha de pasar	So it will always be
Que cada vez que **escuchéis**	That every time you hear [*vos* conjugation]
Una gaita **lloraréis**	A *gaita*, you will cry [*vos* conjugation]
Porque en mi te hará pensar	Because you will think of me
Con bellas prosas	With beautiful prose
Que a ti te hará recordar	That will make you remember
Todas esas lindas cosas	All the beautiful things
Que no pudimos lograr	That we just couldn't attain

In songs with political significance, the *voseo* clearly invokes a sense of Zulian regionalism. For example, in the "anthem of *gaiteros*," "La Grey Zuliana," Ricardo Aguirre speaks to the regional patron saint La Chinita using *vos* verb conjugations:

Madre mía, si el gobierno	My mother, if the government
No ayudo el pueblo zuliano	Won't help the Zulian people
Tendréis que meter la mano	You'll have to reach down
Y mandarlo pa'l infierno	And send them to hell

Similarly powerful is the way the *vos* questions in "Independéncia Ya" by Firmo Segunda Rincón make it clear that the song is sung from one rebellious Zulian to another.

¿Hasta cuándo **soportáis**	How long will you put up with
zuliano esta humillación?	This humiliation, Zulian?
¿Porqué no **independizáis**	Why don't you declare Zulia
el Zulia de la Nación?	Independent of the nation?

In contrast to Zulian newspapers where the Spanish written is more formal and generic, *gaita* lyrics often employ regional dialect and catchphrases specifically to localize language and help people imagine colloquial community.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND COMMENTS ON SOURCES

I have chosen to organize this thesis based on five vectors of Zulian identity. Here I use the term "vector" instead of "pillar" because pillars are strong but stationary, but vectors, as understood in physics, are dynamic and directional. *Gaita*, as a genre, and *gaita* songs, through their lyrics and sonic presentation, actively construct and refresh these vectors of regional identity, with directions and forces that shift over time, depending on context. Chapter Two presents a fairly basic concept: that *gaita*'s sonic distinctiveness is essential to its function in identity promotion; because Venezuelans recognize it as a distinct sound associated with a specific region, it comes to speak poignantly for that region, and its mere sound can invoke notions of regional identity. While there are musical conventions that make *gaita* identifiable as a genre, because the music is a living tradition, composers and musicians frequently push boundaries, which leads to polemical discourse on what is and what is not "real" *gaita.* Chapter Three presents not only the history of *gaita*, as told by scholars, fans, and songs themselves, but also how *gaita*, as a genre and through its lyrics, actively chronicles the history of the region, thus becoming a source of history even as it is embedded in history. Chapter Four concerns the geographic aspects of *gaita* and how the music actively produces a sense of place in the Zulian regional fantasy. In Chapter Five, I argue that religion, the localized version of Catholicism as popularly practiced, is key to regional identity, and *gaita* is key to the imagination of Zulia as a religious community. In Chapter Six, I connect the tradition of using *gaita* lyrics to express political protest to the independence-era political history of Zulia, showing how *gaita* expresses a fundamental aspect of regional identity: the resistance to centralized government control.

Personally and professionally, I regret that it has taken me so long to complete this dissertation, but for many reasons, the finished product is far better than anything I could have accomplished in the early 2000s. On a basic level, the passage of time has allowed me to deepen my understanding of *gaita* and collect far more information than what I had after only nine months in Venezuela from 2000 to 2001. More significantly, I have been able to draw on numerous sources that were not available when I began this project. During a return visit to Maracaibo in 2007, Víctor Hugo Márquez, the great *gaita* composer and improviser, gave me a copy of his 2006 book, which became one of my main sources for the discussion of *gaita* history in Chapter Three. With the enormous political changes that occurred in Venezuela during the rule of President Hugo Chávez, historians, political scientists, sociologists and others have dramatically revised our understanding of the country's sociopolitical history. Miguel Tinker Salas' 2009 study of the oil industry's sociocultural impact on Venezuela helped me in many ways, especially in the discussion of the geographic significance of Lake Maracaibo in Chapter Four. In examining *gaita*'s role in local religious practice in Chapter Five, several recent sources were especially helpful: Light Carruyo's 2005 article helped me articulate the idea of Zulia as an "imagined religious community," and Suzel Ana Riely's 2002 *Voices of the Magi* led me to engage with new scholarship on popular Catholicism and offered the theoretical notion of "enchantment" as a way of understanding how music helps us imagine religious communities. My understanding of political resistance in Zulia was limited until I acquired a copy of Arlene Urdaneta de Cardozo's 1998 book in which she offers a critical historiography of the centralist bias in Venezuelan history. Several works by Steve Ellner (2007 and 2008) not only helped me to look more critically at pre-Chávez

democracy in Venezuela, but they also have led me to reassess the "democratic-ness" of our current two-party system in the United States. I am very grateful for the wisdom that these sources offered to this thesis.

In the past decade, perhaps even more dramatic than the flood of new academic publications about Zulia and Venezuela is the access to music and information that has improved with the development of Internet resources. In 2000, it was virtually impossible to obtain recordings of *gaita* in the United States, and I began my fieldwork having heard only a few distorted cassette tapes of the music. During my visits to Venezuela, I bought nearly every compact disc of *gaita* that I could find, so that I now have a collection of over a hundred to draw upon. But in the past decade, several websites have made hundreds of *gaitas* available for listening and offered dozens of articles, artist biographies, and other information, such as lists of important songs on specific topics. Of these, I am especially indebted to DJ Leon Magno Montiel and his archivist "El Primacho" Alfredo Arrieta for creating saborgaitero.com. When I met them in 2001 and appeared on their radio show, I had no idea that the website they would establish a few years later would offer me more information on *gaita* than I could have collected during fieldwork. In the past few years, several Youtube users have posted thousands of *gaitas*, and I am especially grateful to the gaitaszulianas channel. There are probably more *gaitas* and related information available on Youtube now than on all the CDs and books in my collection. Finally, like many foreign fieldworkers, I am grateful for the ability to use email to stay in touch with friends in Maracaibo, most importantly my good friend Gerardo Ardín, a singer and cable television show host.

Because this is a written document about music, perhaps the most obvious shortcoming is that the reader cannot hear the musical examples that I cite. Some *gaita* recordings now can be purchased through Internet resources, but many songs are still not available. At the time of this writing, all of the songs that I cite can be heard on Youtube, and I recommend my readers listen to them there. Additionally, in the discography that I have appended, I mention which songs are (as of late 2013) currently available for purchase on iTunes, and I encourage my readers to support these artists by buying the music whenever possible. As of now, only a few *gaita* groups have their own websites with streaming audio. Of these the most consistently useful is that of Barrio Obrero, and I urge my readers to listen to their music there at barrioobrero.wordpress.com.

CHAPTER II
IS IT OR ISN'T IT THE TRADITIONAL BEAT?: GAITA'S SOUND AS A MARKER OF REGIONAL IDENTITY

In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I will describe how *gaita*'s song lyrics and performance practice connect the genre to regional identity in Zulia through references to history, geography, religion and politics. However, this connection can only be made because *gaita* is understood as a distinct genre of music. Venezuelans recognize the sound of *gaita* as unique, and because its style is so recognizable, *gaita* is especially effective as a sonic identity marker of the state of Zulia. As such, *gaita* is still considered "traditional" music in Zulia, despite its commercialization and nationwide popularization since the early 1960s. As with almost any music that holds a status as a "traditional" genre, songs that deviate too far from commonly accepted sonic standards can sometimes be considered outside the genre. Yet most *gaiteros* recognize that without artistic innovation, the genre would lose its relevancy. Thus, a popular discourse arises concerning the boundaries of the genre, with some musicians becoming innovators and others remaining traditionalists. This discourse about tradition sometimes engages with broader ideological issues such as the role of music in regional identity, the effect of commercialization on *gaita*, and even the racial and ethnic makeup of Zulia. This chapter will describe the sonic elements that identify *gaita* music and the discourse, often expressed in song lyrics, about what the genre should or should not sound like.

Most Venezuelans could recognize a song as a *gaita* within only a few seconds based on the rhythm and the timbre of the unique instrumental ensemble that creates that rhythm. While many Venezuelan scholars who have tried to define *gaita* will list the verse form, rhyme scheme, or other aspects as essential elements of *gaita*, I agree with

the “father of Venezuelan ethnomusicology” Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera who asserted: “The only firm and constant aspect of *gaita* is the rhythm of the accompaniment; and this is the principal element for the classification of traditional *gaita*” (Ramón y Rivera 1980: 19, my translation). As Shannon Dudley says: “In Latin America the term “ritmo” is often used synonymously with genre” (Dudley 1996: 269). *Gaita* is characterized by a forceful sound, especially in its modern performance and recording, and because of the volume and intensity of this rhythmic ensemble, singers must project with considerable power. (There are no *gaita* “crooners.”) But even before a singer begins a song (in nearly every recording and performance), the instruments introduce the song, establishing the tonality and the rhythmic feel. The sound that is recognized as *gaita* is based largely on the “interactive rhythmic feel” (Dudley 1996: 269) created by the typical instruments. That is, the characteristic instruments interact in a particular way that defines the style. Like *gaita*, many regional styles of Venezuelan folk music could be described or notated in 6/8 meter with frequent hemiola or *seisquialtera* figures. What makes the *gaita* rhythm distinctive—an identifiable *ritmo*—is the sound of the instruments and the way those instruments interact.

Compared to the rest of this dissertation, I will be describing musical details more in this chapter, and in some cases, I have found it useful to include transcriptions in European notation, mainly to show how the instruments work together to create the interactive rhythmic feel. Whenever possible, I have tried to include enough prose explanation so that non-musicians can understand my points. In no way do I view my transcriptions as able to convey all the aspects of the sound, and as one of my informants

says, the essence of *gaita*'s rhythmic feel, its *cadencia*, is what cannot be notated and only becomes manifest through performance.

Besides describing *gaita*'s characteristic sound in this chapter, other themes include how tradition is negotiated in popular discourse and commerce, and the intertwined nature of tradition and commercialism. *Gaita*, like many musics in Latin America, straddles the fence between what we might think of as "folk" and "pop" music. It began as a regional folk music in Zulia, and there it is still treated as local *folclor*, but it has become a national pop music throughout Venezuela. In a sense, it exists in somewhat different forms in both the folk and pop realms, but these realms are engaged in a constant, sometimes tense, sometimes cooperative feedback loop. The commercialization of *gaita*, while threatening to some aspects of "*gaita* tradition," also helps to maintain the tradition, and for the most part, I've been impressed by how commercialization has helped keep the tradition alive. The "tradition" that traditionalists refer to was very much defined by the advent of commercial recording of *gaita* in the early 1960s, and variation from tradition often means varying from the style of the first decade of recordings. Still, Zulians discuss and debate *gaita* tradition, and song lyrics address the issue of what is or is not traditional. Often, what traditionalists criticize as "not *gaita*" or harmful to the tradition is some aspect of a recording or performance that is construed to be used purely for commercial success. One example of this is the introduction of instruments that are perceived to be non-Zulian, such as *timbales* or salsa-band horn sections, which might be used to give a song a broader, more pan-Latin appeal. In using the phrase, "negotiating tradition," I mean not only negotiation in the sense of popular discourse about tradition,

but also in the sense of business negotiation, since *gaita*'s commercial success relies heavily on references to tradition.

"LET'S PLAY THE TRADITIONAL BEAT"—GAITA INSTRUMENTATION

I have learned about *gaita* from *gaiteros* directly and from books, but as I will show throughout this dissertation, *gaita* lyrics themselves are perhaps the most publicly available repository of information about the genre. Much of my fieldwork in Venezuela involved looking for music, live and recorded, and, because I had so few recordings when I began my research, starting when I first arrived in Caracas in August 1999, I bought just about every *gaita* compact disc that I could find. One of those early finds was a collection of hits from the 1960s sung by "El Monumental" Ricardo Aguirre. I was already familiar with a few of the songs, like "La Grey Zuliana," the *gaiteros*' hymn, but many songs were new to me. One that caught my attention immediately was "Golpe Tradicional" [Traditional Beat] written by Ricardo Aguirre's brother Rixio and recorded by the group Cardenales del Éxito for their first long-playing album in 1963. With all the reading I had done about the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), I was intrigued that a composer would invoke the idea of "tradition" in a song title. Upon listening, I discovered that the song read like a folklore lesson on *gaita* orchestration, identifying the main instruments of the ensemble one by one. More than merely naming the instruments, the first and third verses speak to the players as if urging them on at a jam party, and the fourth and fifth verses personalize the instruments by connecting them to the singer's passion for the music. The chorus, which is sung after every verse as in most *gaitas*,

asserts that to play "the traditional beat," one has to know how to play the *cuatro*, *furro*, *tambora*, and *charrasca*, the four main instruments of the *gaita* ensemble.

I	I
Furrero con emoción Dale duro a ese coroto Formemos el parrandón Con muchisimo alboroto	*Furro* player with emotion Play that thing hard Let's have a jam party With raucous noise
(estribillo) Vamos a tocar ahora El golpe tradicional Pero hay que saber tocar El cuatro, furro y tambora Y la charrasca sonora Saber el golpe marcar	(chorus) Now let's play The traditional beat But you've got to know how to play The *cuatro*, *furro*, and *tambora* And the resounding *charrasca* To know how to play the beat
II El repique del tambor Es un ritmo sin igual Y el golpe tradicional Que se toca con sabor	II The drum fill Is a rhythm without equal And it's the traditional beat That it plays with such feeling
III Maraquero, maraquero Dale duro a tus maracas Que suenen aquí en el Zulia Y que retumben en Caracas	III Maraca player, maraca player Play your maracas so hard That they're heard here in Zulia And echo in Caracas
IV Voz de mi cuatro sonoro Es la que están escuchando Y sepan que estoy cantando La gaita que más adoro	IV The voice of my sonorous *cuatro* Is what you're hearing And you know that I'm singing The *gaita* that I adore most
V Cuando la charrasca suena Sus notas corren al viento Como al cantar yo así siento Que el Zulia corre en mis venas	V When the *charrasca*'s played Its notes run to the wind Like when I'm singing I feel That Zulia runs in my veins

As with many *gaitas*, the song is mainly about getting a rowdy jam party going, but, as is also common, the discourse about traditional *gaita* is infused with regionalist ideology. To some, the lyrics might seem dogmatic and culturally chauvinistic. The instrumentation is presented as an imperative—without it, you can't play the beat. The

drum fill of this beat is better than anything else out there (*sin igual*). The third verse hints at Zulian resentment of cultural domination from the capital: the *maracas* should be played so hard that they echo to Caracas, halfway across the country from Maracaibo. (This song was written right around the time when the first *gaita* groups were promoting the music in the capital.) The last verse says that the sound of the *charrasca* runs to the wind like Zulian blood flows through the singer's veins. One concludes that the traditional beat is not only the basis for a good party, but it is also a symbol of cultural pride, and there are rules about performing it.

Months after first hearing the song and spending time trying to learn how to play it on *cuatro* and sing it on my own, I got to meet the author, Rixio Aguirre, at a beer bar in the historic neighborhood of El Empedra'o in Maracaibo. In early 2001, Douglas Soto, the *furro* player who helped form the group Cardenales del Éxito with the Aguirre brothers in the early 1960s, opened Entre Gaiteros [among *gaiteros*] in an old house, decorating the walls with pictures of local musicians and other heroes, like a hall of fame. Douglas' opening the bar was hugely fortuitous for my research because it quickly became a meeting place for musicians, and I became a regular customer, knowing I would almost always run into *gaiteros* there. One of my first times there, early in the evening before it got very crowded, I tried to sing the *gaita* "La Grey Zuliana" for a few people who were asking about my research. I told them that I was teaching myself how to sing and play from recordings, and they wanted proof and the opportunity to critique me. As I was singing, Douglas, grinning broadly, brought over a stunned Rixio to hear me. When I finished, Rixio introduced himself as the brother of the author of that song, and I was flabbergasted. We chatted for a while, and I was struck by how kind and soft-spoken

he was—he didn't seem like the dogmatic type. I told him that I was also learning his song "Golpe Tradicional," and he seemed casually pleased. I asked him what had motivated him to write a song that seemed to establish rules for *gaita*, and he said that in the early 1960s, people were beginning to experiment with *gaita*, and he simply felt it was important to state what the traditional instruments were. He didn't think it was bad to add some other instruments as well, but he didn't want people to forget to use the traditional instruments. To him, without the correct instrumentation, the beat wouldn't be correct.

In the following sections, I will describe these instruments and how they contribute both to *gaita*'s sonic character and the ideology connected to the music. An important ideological component of *gaita*'s use in the construction of identity is the way the music and instruments have come to represent the Venezuelan ideal of their nation as a racial democracy. Numerous scholars, most notably historian Winthrop Wright (1990), have discredited the Venezuelan myth of racial democracy, the idea that there is no racism in Venezuela because the majority of the population is of mixed origin (Spanish, Indian and African). They have shown that, although Venezuela officially avoided the blatant racism of segregationist policies such as occurred in the United States, there is still considerable prejudice against those perceived as black or Indian and, in general, the lighter one's skin, the better off one is socioeconomically. Still, the idea of Venezuela as a racial utopia of mixed-race citizens prevails as a central trope in the national imagination. This trope is expressed in the way Zulians describe *gaita* and its instruments. Because the various instruments are seen as originating in each of the three racial components of the nation, and because the resultant composite rhythm sounds like

a fusion, the genre can be seen as representative of the racial democracy of the nation and/or region. As described in Chapter I, one of the most popular gaitas of all time, "Sentir Zuliano" (Pirela & Rodríguez, 1974), includes the verse "It's the land of the Zulian / A tiny paradise / Where everyone are brothers / From the Guajira [Indian] to the [black] man of the coast." Through *gaita*, the region/nation can be united.

The rhythm itself can be characterized as a fusion of sorts, and marketed as such. Like some other Venezuelan folk music styles, musicians describe *gaita* as having a 6/8 meter (*seis por ocho*), that is two strong beats per measure [♩. ♩.] that can each be subdivided into three sub-beats [♪♪♪ ♪♪♪]. But within the component parts that make up the interactive rhythm, some of the parts seem more like 3/4 time, which would have three duple beats per measure [♩♩♩]. Being able to hear binary triple (6/8) or ternary duple (3/4) meter simultaneously can be called a hemiola effect or *seisquialtera*, and it is quite common in Latin American, African, and Afro-Caribbean music (though far from universal, of course). A few musicians mentioned this effect to me as evidence of the fusion of European and African rhythms in *gaita.* Although one might observe that some musics that we think of as more "purely European," e.g., an Irish jig, can also display this rhythmic effect, the important point here is the fact that Venezuelans recognize the rhythm as a fusion of racialized components.

I was surprised to find a discussion of *gaita*'s rhythm as a justification for the international marketing of the music in the liner notes of a compact disc. The CD *¡Qué siga la gaita! Vol. 1* is a compilation of *gaita* hits released by CD Manía in conjunction with Venezuela's largest newspaper, *El Nacional*, around 2000, and marketed to a

nationwide audience. The following are the first two of three paragraphs of the liner notes written by the compilation's music consultant, Aldemaro Romero. The title is "La gaita: Binaria y ternaria" [Gaita: Binary and ternary].

La gaita. ¡Ah! La gaita… Todas nuestras esperanzas sobre la propagación internacional de la música venezolana están puestas en la gaita. Niguna otra música venezolana puede asumir con éxito esa responsibilidad. No es que los joropos, los valses y los merengues no sean músicas hermosas; cada uno de esos estilos tiene lo suyo. Pero la gaita es binaria; una música original de seis por ocho, música ternaria, de tres tiempos, que se mide y vibra en dos tiempos, como todas las grandes músicas de masas. Ahí están, para no dejarme mentir, la salsa, el merengue dominicano, la marcha, el samba, el tango, el mambo, el bolero, el foxtrot, la conga, la guaracha… y para usted de contar. Son músicas de dos tiempos, binarias, en ritmo de parejas, como es y son casi todas las cosas del ser humano. Tenemos dos piernas, dos piés, dos brazos, dos ojos, dos orejas, dos pulmones. Y la base del ser humano es la pareja: Un hombre y una mujer. En suma, la humanidad es fundamentalmente binaria.	*Gaita*. Ah *gaita*! All of our hopes about the international propagation of Venezuelan music are placed on *gaita*. No other Venezuelan music can successfully assume that responsibility. It isn't that *joropos*, waltzes, and *merengues* [from Caracas] aren't beautiful musics; each one of those styles has its own value. But the gaita is binary; an original music of six/eight, ternary music, of three beats, that is measured (divided) and vibrates in two beats, like all the great musics of the masses. There they are, but so that you know I'm not lying, salsa, Dominican merengue, march, samba, tango, mambo, bolero, foxtrot, conga, guaracha… and it's up to you to count. They are musics of two beats, binary, in rhythm of pairs, as is and are almost all the things of human beings. We have two legs, two feet, two arms, two eyes, two ears, two lungs. And the foundation of being human is the pair: a man and a woman. In sum, humanity is fundamentally binary.
Y esta condición humana nos hace refelxionar sobre los movimientos del cuerpo humano; no es fácil concebir un ejército que marche a tres tiempos; y por lo mismo, cuando bailan los seres humanos mueven su cuerpo con más facilidad con los ritmos binarios. He allí, pues, la potencia de la gaita y sus inmensas posibilidades de propagación internacional. Se dirá que por qué la gaita se mide y vibra a dos si su ritmo original es ternario. Muy sencillo: Ello obedece a su permiabilidad rítmica; ocurre con ella que tiene una risueña condición adulterina, como la almohadilla de la segunda base en el beisbol, que es una sola servida por dos jugadores: El segunda base y el short stop.	And this human condition is reflected in movements of the human body; it isn't easy to conceive of an army that marches to three beats; and similarly, when human beings dance they move the body with more facility to binary rhythms. So there you have the potency of *gaita* and its immense possibilities for international propagation. One might ask why *gaita* is measured and vibrates in two if its original rhythm is ternary. Very simple. It contains rhythmic permeability; it has a smiling, adulterated condition; like how second base in baseball can be covered by either of two players, the second baseman and the short stop.

There are obvious weaknesses in Romero's argument, but it reveals important aspects of marketing considerations in Venezuela. As examples of the flaws of logic, Venezuelan *joropo*, like *gaita*, is often perceived and notated in 6/8, that is, having two

triplet beats per measure; many people *do* dance to rhythms in 3/4, such as the waltz; and all of the other genres he cites (*salsa*, *guaracha*, etc.) are in simple duple meter (2/4 or 4/4), whereas *gaita* is compound duple (6/8). But what I find intriguing here is that Romero is making a musicological argument for genre promotion—that the binary nature of *gaita*'s rhythm is what would allow it to be marketed successfully alongside other popular Latin musics like salsa and Dominican merengue. In the last part of the second paragraph, Romero seems to be trying to explain away the hemiola effect. All of the other musical genres that he named—salsa, Dominican merengue, march, samba, tango, mambo, bolero, foxtrot, conga, guaracha, which have been internationally popular throughout the Americas—are commonly thought of as 4/4 or 2/4 rhythms, not the 6/8 of *gaita*. That is, they are binary rhythms with primarily duple beat subdivisions. Romero justifies this with a clever baseball analogy, saying that *gaita*'s flexibility between duple and triple beat subdivisions is similar to the way that either the shortstop or second baseman can cover second base on an infield hit. Baseball metaphors are very common in Venezuela, where it is the most popular sport, and I imagine many more Venezuelans would be able to understand a description of infield defense than two-against-three rhythm. While I cannot say I really follow his logic, his choice of metaphor also links *gaita* to the pastime that most obviously connects Venezuela to the United States, which could be considered the ultimate international market for music. I do not believe that there is something inherent in *gaita*'s duple-ness that makes it marketable internationally, but Romero's argument reinforces the idea that, to Venezuelans, *gaita* is a distinctive rhythm that is fundamentally separate from even other Venezuelan 6/8 rhythms like *joropo.*

Returning to the *gaita* instruments as enumerated in Rixio Aguirre's song, although it is certainly true that these instruments formed the basic *gaita* ensemble prior to recording, it was the recording of them that really codified the tradition. Numerous *gaita* historians told me that before commercial recording it was quite common for players at *gaita* parties to play whatever instruments were available. Though the *furro*, *charrasca*, *cuatro*, *maracas*, and *tambora* were probably used at most *gaitas*, if the house hosting the party had a piano, or if a saxophonist happened by, these instruments would be welcomed into the jam. Likewise, *gaitas* could be sung without all of the instruments present, as long as there was enough momentum at the party. As I will describe more in the following chapter, before recording, *gaita was* the party itself, not a clearly defined ensemble. As the talented *gaita* improviser Víctor Hugo Márquez put it in his history of *gaita*, "what was most valued was the gregariousness and the festive cooperation" (Márquez 2006: 75). It wasn't until 1960 when *gaita* groups organized and began recording regularly that the ensemble could be said to have been fixed in its instrumentation. Rixio Aguirre's song described the tradition as he understood it and suggests a resistance to change brought about by commercial forces, but, ironically, it could be argued that commercially released recordings standardized the tradition.

El Furro

Arguably the most distinctive instrument of the traditional *gaita* ensemble is the *furro*, sometimes called *furruco*, the large friction drum that provides the bass sound. Because of its uniqueness to this particular genre in Venezuela, Venezuelan folklorists identify the music as *gaita de furro* in order to distinguish it from some lesser-known

styles from Zulia (e.g., *gaita de tambora* from the south end of Lake Maracaibo). A *furrero* plays the instrument by rubbing his/her palms along a meter-long cane pole (*la verada*) that is attached to the drumhead by means of a short (3 cm.) wooden peg (*la espiga*) that is fixed to the middle of the drumhead. Many decades ago, *furros* were small enough that the drum could be held under one arm while the free hand rubbed the stick, which allowed players to stand or even walk while playing. (Note that unlike the Brazilian *cuica*, another Latin American friction drum, the *furro*'s pole that is rubbed is outside the drum, not inside.) By the 1960s, instrument makers had enlarged the drum considerably to create more volume and a lower pitch, so now, the *furro* sits on the floor, and the player sits in a chair facing the drum and rubs the stick with both hands. (Some players elevate the *furro* so they can stand and play.) The drum is a barrel, made with wooden slats; three or four of the slats are longer than the others to create short feet to lift the drum a bit so the sound can escape; the drumhead is made from goat skin (though the older, smaller ones used cat skin), and the skin is attached using a metal ring and threaded hooks, similar to the head on a modern conga drum. The cane stick is coated with rosin to create a tacky feel and enough friction to make the drumhead vibrate well. Talented *furreros* can vary the pitch of the sound a bit by adjusting their grip strength and the speed of the rubbing, but like most drums, the bass tones that the *furro* produces are not of any fixed pitch. Compared to the "boom" or "thud" of bass drums that are struck, the *furro*'s sound as created by rubbing the cane stick is more like a diffuse *whoomph*.

There is some debate about the origin of the *furro*, but most *gaiteros* believe it originated in Spain. A similar friction drum called the *zambomba* is used to accompany Christmas season songs in several regions of Spain. Although there are friction drums

used in various places in Africa, and some Zulians claim the *furro* has an African origin, most believe the Spanish instrument is the ancestor of the modern *furro.*

While the *furro*'s bass sound does not offer the music a harmonic foundation by playing chord roots, its rhythm and timbre are key to *gaita*'s characteristic interactive rhythmic feel. *Gaiteros* describe the meter as 6/8 (*seis por ocho*), and people tend to clap and dance on the first and fourth eighth notes of the 6/8 measure—the dotted quarter beats [♩. ♩.]. Distinctively, unlike bass rhythms in most other genres, the *furro* usually does not play on the downbeats of measures. Unlike the "oom" of the oom-pah rhythm of a polka or the "oom-pah-pah" of a waltz, in *gaita*, most of the time, the *furro* avoids the downbeat and plays a cross rhythm that seems more like 3/4 time, creating a hemiola effect. Generally, the only time the *furro* plays on the one is to mark the beginnings of song sections, using a measure of three quarter notes. (On the recording of "Golpe Tradicional," this entry rhythm of three quarter notes can be heard when the percussion instruments first enter at the beginning of the song and in the middle of each chorus after the break where the instruments drop, in between the words "Pero hay" and "que saber tocar.") Thus a phrase of a *furro* part could be written as follows.

| ♩ ♩ ♩ | 𝄾 ♪ ♩ ♩ | 𝄾 ♪ ♩ ♩ | 𝄾 ♪ ♩ ♩ |…

One shortcoming of such a transcription is that single eighth- and quarter-notes do not capture the sustained envelope of sound of the *furro*'s "vvvooom" that is created by rubbing the stick, but it gives a sense of the rhythmic articulations of the sounds in relation to the clapped beat.

Because this bass rhythm that avoids the downbeats seems backwards from nearly every other style of music that I know, I found it hard to learn to play it, and when I've tried to teach it to other North American musicians, they've found it hard to stay in sync. My first *furro* lessons took place at the bar Entre Gaiteros in the late afternoon before many people arrived. Milton Molina, a top *gaita* percussionist who performs with several different groups showed me the basics. The famous *furrero* from the original Cardenales del Éxito lineup (and the bar owner) Douglas Soto offered encouragement and a few pointers as he readied the bar for the evening. Milton would play along with me, and once I started to hold the rhythm on my own, he would stop playing *furro* and start clapping the dotted-quarter pulse until I started to lose the groove. Others on hand offered what I discovered is a common joke among *gaiteros*: that every guy can learn to play *furro* because rubbing the *verada* is so much like masturbating. The metaphor continues: everyone explained that the key to producing a good sound is to not grip the *verada* too tight. It takes some practice just to get a consistent sound, and much of this is about learning to play with just the right amount of pressure, but it's hard to grip gently and concentrate on playing the syncopated hemiola rhythmic figure. We beginners tend to lose the syncopated nature of the rhythm and start playing on the "one." Even with modest playing pressure, *furro* playing is rough on the hands, and *furreros* are usually proud to show their scars; their palms are usually covered in callouses and blisters. I am very grateful for Milton's patience in teaching me.

The uniqueness of the *furro* is celebrated in modern *gaita*, but it also poses problems. Most *gaiteros* consider the *furro* one of the most distinct elements of the music, and they want to feature it. Most groups place the *furreros* in front of the other

percussion instruments on stage. But some groups avoid mic'ing the *furro* onstage, and when recording in the studio, some groups choose to omit it entirely. Gustavo Luengo, one of the busiest *gaita* recording engineers, said that the low, diffuse, non-harmonic sound of the *furro* tends to muddy up recorded or amplified music, and he would prefer to avoid using it on recordings. Since the late 1960s, nearly every group has added upright or electric bass, and the basslines tend to follow the same rhythm as the *furro*, but because the sound of the *furro* can blur out the harmonic function of the bass, some groups record without the *furro*. However, many *gaiteros* consider it a travesty to eliminate the *furro.* Wolfgang Romero, one of the most successful composers since the 1980s, told me that "*Gaita* without *furro* isn't *gaita*," even though I know that many of his hit songs hide the *furro* in the mix. In my talks with him in 2001, Wolfgang expressed a desire to return to an older sound in the recording of his songs, partly because he believed that accentuating *gaita*'s uniqueness would help market the music internationally.

El Tambor/La Tambora

Locking in with the *furro*'s rhythm is that of the *tambora* (sometimes gendered masculine as *tambor*), another large barrel drum that is played with two large drumsticks (*palos*). The *tambora* has a thicker drumhead made of cow's skin that is attached with a metal hoop and threaded hooks. Inside the drum, a foam or cloth mute is attached to the underside of the drumhead to prevent it from ringing very long. Most *gaita tamboreros* sit in a chair and wrap their legs around the drum to hold it with the head angled outward. Players produce two main sounds: a "tack" sound by hitting the body of the drum or the

rim and a “boom” sound by hitting the head in the middle of the skin. (Different drummers used different vocables to describe these sounds, and since there is no standard terminology, I have chosen the words “boom” and “tack.”) Like the *furro*’s rhythm, and unlike most other styles of music, the bass drum “boom” sound is rarely played on the downbeat of the measure. The wood is hit to create the “tack” sound on the strong dotted-quarter beats of the 6/8 measures (i.e., eighth notes one and four), and the “boom” is heard on the off-beats. Drummers usually alternate left and right sticks through the rhythmic figures, which I found quite confusing to learn, since there is no correlation between hand and sound, i.e., sometimes the left hand is striking the head and sometimes the wood, and the same for the right hand. Below is a transcription of a typical *tambora* rhythm with its high tones on the wood (stems down) and its bass sounds on the head (stems up), and “R” and “L” to indicate which hand plays the sound. The pattern would sound like: “tack-boom-boom-tack-boom-tack-| tack-boom-boom-tack-boom-tack…”

|: ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ :|

|: R-L-R-L-R-L :|

Several *gaiteros* told me that the addition of the *tambora* to the *gaita* ensemble was relatively recent—probably in the 1950s, just before groups started becoming more organized and making records. Based on the few available photographs of early groups in the 1950s, the *tambora* was, at the time, half the size of those used today, so it made a much more modest sound that did not compete with the *furro.* Since the early 1960s, the *tambora* has been considered an essential element of the ensemble, and it adds a lot to the rhythmic drive. *Repique* is the word used for the drum fill that is usually used to start a

section of music, and drummers that I talked to mentioned a pantheon of earlier drummers who introduced innovative *repiques*. Most *repiques* used the hits on the rim or wood, but more recently, "tack" and "boom" sounds are combined into complex fills.

Gaiteros consider the *tambora* to be an African element in the ensemble. Afro-Venezuelan communities in various coastal regions of the country play drums with similarly large sticks, and one of the characteristics of the Afro-Venezuelan playing style is to alternate between hitting the drumhead and the wood on the side of the drum. A few historians, notably Ramón Herrera Navarro in his book *Historia de la Gaita* (2005), argue that the genre of *gaita de furro* evolved from the genre *gaita de tambora* that is played by Afro-Venezuelans on the southern coast of Lake Maracaibo. Because of the rhythmic and structural differences in the musics, few would agree with this genre genealogy, and I believe the two modern genres evolved in parallel. Retired African history professor Cheo Romero offered me a more widely accepted history: that Afro-Venezuelans from the south of the lake arrived in Maracaibo in the early 1800s, and aspects of their drumming music influenced the *villancicos* and other Christmas music that had come from Spain, resulting in the party music we now call *gaita*.

Maracas

For most modern *gaita* groups, the *maracas* are not an important instrument, though they are often played in informal jam parties. Whereas *joropo* music from the Venezuelan *llanos* features *maraqueros* playing dramatic cross-rhythmic solos, in *gaita*, when they are included at all, they are usually played by one of the singers, and they can barely be heard over the other percussion instruments. As I learned from my *joropo*

lessons with the Aparicio brothers at the University of Washington, merely keeping a basic 6/8 rhythm is a challenge, but this basic rhythm is all that is expected of a *gaita maraquero*, and sometimes a much simpler rhythm is sufficient. In the basic *joropo* 6/8 rhythm, which is used by some *gaita maraqueros*, the strong beats (the first and fourth eighth notes of the 6/8 measure) are played with a downward motion in the player's dominant hand, and the other pulses (eighth notes 2, 3, 5, and 6) are played with the other hand, having the pellets hit at the top and the bottom of the arm motion. In *gaita*, sometimes a *maraquero* will simply play the strong beats. Occasionally, at a *gaita* jam, the musicians gave me a pair of *maracas* to play. I am sure that they knew that my abilities on the other percussion instruments were fairly limited, but even poorly played *maracas* cannot really throw off the rest of the ensemble, so it was a small risk to ask me to play them. Because of my lessons with the Aparicios, I could maintain the basic 6/8 rhythm, and the musicians always seemed impressed. I learned that over the years, the owner or manager of a professional group would be allowed to play the *maracas*, the idea being that anyone could play them, even the manager.

Astolfo Romero and Nelson Romero (no relation) are among the few *gaita* singers who have made a point of playing *maracas* in recent years in order to make their performances seem more jam-like. Astolfo earned the professional sobriquet of El Parroquiano, literally "the parishioner," but in this case meaning the "neighborhood guy." Astolfo wrote and sang numerous hits from the 1980s until his sudden death from a heart attack in 2000. His output ranged from scathing protest *gaitas* to absurdly humorous novelties, such as "El Marciano," which describes his fantasy of getting rich by finding a Martian on the street and turning him into a tourist attraction. But most of his hit *gaitas*

describe places and people typical of the old neighborhoods in Maracaibo, like a barbershop or an old marketplace. Playing the *maracas* in performances or videos was a way to reinforce his image as a typical guy jamming in the neighborhood.

Nelson Romero is a unique performer in *gaita*, in that he appears more Indian in complexion and facial features than most mixed Zulians, and although he does not legally identify himself as Wayú [Guajiro], the dominant local Indian group in Zulia, he embraces his heritage. In Venezuela, the *maracas* are generally considered an instrument of indigenous origin, and Nelson's use of the instrument reinforces his stage persona as indigenous. He always wears hand-woven sandals, and on stage he wears an old-fashioned white suit and a wide-brimmed straw hat, the formal attire of a Wayú man. Nelson's nickname is El Ayayero, from a song he sang of the same name about a *gaitero* who would come to jams and interject Indian-like vocables: "Ay-ay-ay, ay-ay-ay…." He plays the *maracas* in a fairly random rhythm while performing a unique stuttering dance, which may have some indigenous origin or may be his own invention. I got to hang out with Nelson many times and talk to him about his stage act. He didn't seem to know much about his Indian heritage or want to talk about it, but he felt it important that some major *gaita* singer acknowledged and embraced this heritage onstage. Playing the *maracas* is part of this image.

El Cuatro

Often referred to as the "national instrument of Venezuela," the four-stringed small guitar called the *cuatro* is used in traditional musics throughout the country. Its use in *gaita* could be seen as connecting the music of Zulia to the rest of the Venezuela.

Small and portable, it is easy to imagine its convenience as informal groups roamed from one house party to another during the holiday season in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It is smaller than a standard six-string guitar, similar in size to a baritone ukulele.

Despite its small size, the *cuatro* has a relatively deep sound as compared to similar sized strummed lutes like the ukulele and the Brazilian *cavaquinho* because of its lower tuning. It has a re-entrant tuning, meaning that the strings do not go down (or up) consecutively in pitch from one side of the neck to the other, but rather, the outer two strings are the lowest in pitch. From the first string to the fourth (from floor to ceiling), the pitches are B3, F#4, D4, A3, so the B string is only a whole step above the A. (If this were a transposition of the top four stings of a six-string guitar, the first string would be a ninth above the fourth string.) While the range of notes is somewhat limited because of the re-entrant tuning, the deepness of its nylon (non-metal) strings and the density of the close-voiced chords produce a rich, low-midrange sound.

I often describe the playing style of the *cuatro* as "flamenco ukulele" because of the percussive strumming patterns used in most genres, especially in *gaita.* As I learned during my lessons with Euclides Aparicio, the key to playing *cuatro* is the correct placement of muted, percussive strums in the midst of fast down-up strumming. These percussive strums are made not by muting strings with the left hand, as I am accustomed to on six-string guitar, but rather by striking the strings with the right hand and immediately—as part of the strumming motion—muting the strings with the base of the thumb on down-strums and with the knuckles of the fingers on up-strums. It took me months of practice to manage to play even the most basic strum.

In the traditional *gaita* ensemble, the *cuatro* is the only harmonic instrument, so it is up to the *cuatrista* to establish the key and lead the singers through the frequent modulations. On many recordings, as in many jam parties that I participated in, the *cuatrista* will begin a song with an introduction called "dos pa'tres," which literally means "two for three," but in this case, it describes how the *cuatro* plays two two-bar phrases of tonic and dominant chords to establish the key and the tempo before other instruments enter on the third phrase. In the recording of "Golpe Tradicional," the *cuatros* play the following chords to open the song.

||: Cm G7 | Cm :||

Like many *gaitas*, "Golpe Tradicional" has multiple key centers, similar to short European classical pieces. The verses are in C minor and the *cuatros* modulate to E-flat, the relative major, for the choruses. (It is likely that the *cuatros* on "Golpe Tradicional" were tuned down a half step, so that the players might have thought of the song as in C-sharp minor and E major, but the chords sound in C-minor and E-flat.) Other common modulations include modulating from the tonic to the dominant and from a major key to its parallel minor. Within any key center, cyclical motion using secondary dominants is also common, such as the progression E-flat, C-dominant 7, F-minor, B-flat, E-flat that ends the chorus of "Golpe Tradicional." *Gaiteros* view this use of tonal harmony and the *cuatro* that produces it as the major European or Spanish contribution to the music.

Because of the tuning and what chords are comfortable to finger on the *cuatro*, some characteristic sonorities are more common in *gaita* than other genres. The most striking example of this is the use of the E-minor six chord (E-G-B-C#, an E-minor triad with an added major sixth above the root) as a tonic chord at the beginnings and ends of

phrases. Because of the re-entrant tuning, the voicing of the chord is B_3-$C\#_4$-E_4-G_4, which to my ear—and in the perception of some ethnomusicologists who have heard me demonstrate *gaita* at conferences—sounds very unstable. Without a low E in the bass, the chord sounds like a dense voicing of a C-sharp half diminished (C-sharp minor seven, flat five), a chord that is generally heard as unstable and in need of resolution in common-practice harmony. The chord adds particular drama to protest *gaitas* such as "La Grey Zuliana," a song I will discuss in later chapters.

In *gaita* recordings of the 1960s and 1970s, each *gaita* group had its own recognizable strumming rhythm. Before the addition of keyboards and other harmonic instruments, groups often used two or more *cuatros*, with each player placing the muted strums in slightly different places to create rhythmic complexity. This can be heard at the beginning of "Golpe Tradicional," where the first *cuatrista* enters using an accented sixteenth-note strum, and the next player comes in hitting the percussive muted strums on the "strong" dotted-quarter beats of each 6/8 measure, which will be in sync with the *tamborista*'s "teck" sounds on the wood when the drum enters. Other groups of the era had their own strumming styles. For example, the group Saladillo was known for using more heavily accented percussive muted strums, while Rincón Morales' *cuatrista* used a dragged-out strum on the first beat of each measure. Modern *gaiteros* taught me to recognize these differences, stressing that listeners at the time could recognize a particular group's recording from the first few *cuatro* strums. Some *gaiteros* complain that these distinctive *cuatro* rhythms have disappeared from modern recordings, because on most recordings, the same handful of professional studio musicians records the instrumental parts for almost all of the groups. *Locutor* (DJ) Humberto "Mamaota"

Rodríguez, who was once the musical director for Rincón Morales, explained this to me in some detail, and then I saw it happen while observing recording sessions at Sonofuturo studio in Maracaibo in 2001. Gustavo Luengo, the brilliant engineer, played the *cuatro* and bass parts for most groups (all while operating the recording controls himself—an impressive feat), so all of the groups' recordings sounded similar. Gustavo explained that it was simply too time consuming and costly to have each group bring in its own musicians, even though each group had its own in order to perform live. It was more efficient for Gustavo to learn and play all of the songs himself. I was truly amazed by Gustavo's musicianship—he must have to learn to play hundreds of *gaitas* a year as he records them—but I understood Mamaota's and others' complaints that this commercial constraint on *gaita* recording removed some of the musical diversity of the previous generations.

La Charrasca

The *charrasca* is a loud metal scraper made of a hollow pipe. In the 1950s and 1960s, *charrascas* were often made of copper, but by the 1970s, they were more often made of steel, which had the advantage of being cheaper and not causing the player's hands to smell, and by the 2000s, they were also available in aluminum, which is lighter in weight. Most *charrascas* that I've seen are between 8"–14" in length and about 1.5"–2" in diameter. Along one side of the pipe, deep grooves are cut perpendicular to the length of the pipe, and on the opposite side, a slot is usually cut the length of the pipe, with some larger holes as well, presumably to act as sound holes. Holding the pipe in one's non-dominant hand, the *charrasquero* scrapes the grooves with a large metal nail or

screwdriver in his/her dominant hand. This metal-on-metal creates a loud scraping sound, like the scratch of a *güiro* combined with the clang of a bell. The player modulates the amount of clang of the instrument by varying the grip on the pipe: a firmer grip mutes the resonance of the pipe and a looser grip allows for the production of more bell-like harmonics. To my knowledge, no other genre of Venezuelan music makes regular use of the *charrasca*, so it is readily identified as a *gaita* instrument, and something very Zulian. Like the *güiro* and other scraped percussion instruments used in Latin America, such as the wooden *guacharaca* used in Colombian *vallenato* music, the *charrasca* is considered a modernized version of an indigenous instrument.

It is the most portable of gaita instruments. Several *charrasquero*'s that I met carried one with them almost all the time, just in case they wound up somewhere where a jam might break out. While I was in Maracaibo in 2001, music stores started selling padded nylon *charrasca* holsters, so players could carry their instrument on their belts. I remember talking with a taxi driver once who said he recognized me and asked what I was doing in Maracaibo. I explained that I was a musician studying *gaita*, and I asked him if he liked *gaita*. He reached under the driver's seat and—with a wide grin—produced a *charrasca*. (It's possible that he also kept it with him to use as a weapon in case someone tried to rob him.) While a *furrero* or *tamborero* can't casually haul their instrument around, the *charrasquero* always comes prepared.

The *charrasca*'s most basic rhythm is a steady 6/8 pulse, with slight accents on the strong beats, but there are a myriad of rhythmic variations, some creating cross rhythms such as the 3/4 vs. 6/8 hemiola. Flourishes of sixteenth notes are used like drum

fills. Because of their dynamic range from scraping softly to creating more of a clang by hitting the pipe hard, the *charrascas* often dictate the dynamics of a *gaita* group.

Visualizing *Gaita*'s Interactive Rhythmic Feel

The following transcription of the first eight measures of the 1963 recording of "Golpe Tradicional" is included to graphically represent how the above instruments work together to create the recognizable sound of traditional *gaita.* While a written score cannot show all of the nuances of rhythmic feel, for musicians who are accustomed to reading such notation, this transcription should clarify how the various sounds of the instruments align, and how the three-against-two rhythmic effect is produced.

The first *cuatro* enters with a flurry of strums and establishes the 6/8 rhythm and the C-minor tonality. Arrows indicate the direction of the strumming, and an X on a note-stem indicates a percussive muted strum. The second *cuatro* joins after two measures with a more typical *gaita* strum that emphasizes the compound duple meter with muted strums on the dotted-quarter beats. Then the percussion instruments join the *cuatros*. *Gaiteros* refer to this part of the introduction as *dos pa'tres*—two iterations of the *cuatros* playing the tonic-dominant-tonic progression before the percussion joins on the third time. In bar five, the percussion enters with the *furro* and the "boom" sound of the *tambora* playing three quarter notes against the 6/8 meter that the *charrasca* and *maracas* play. Then in bar six, the *furro* and *tambora* shift to their typical parts with the *furro* and the *tambora* playing their low "boom" sounds on the off-beats, and the *tamborista* playing the "tack" sounds on the wooden body of the drum on the "strong" beats of the first and fourth eighth notes of each measure, as well as the sixth eighth note. "R" for

right hand and "L" for left hand indicate the way a right-handed *tamborista* would typically play the part. In the *furro* notation and on the accented beats in the *charrasca* part, squiggly articulation marks indicate the rubbed/dragged nature of the playing of those instruments. Though difficult to hear on this recording, it sounds like the *maracas* keep a simple dotted-quarter rhythm, which is the rhythm that most listeners would clap along with (and step if they were dancing).

At approximately 118 beats per minute, the song is an excellent example of the frenetic, dense, polyrhythmic sound of *gaita.* I posit that most Venezuelans would be able to identify this as *gaita* within these eight measures, and most of the *gaita* fans that I know in Maracaibo could probably even name the group and song before Ricardo Aguirre begins singing. That is, before the lyrics even make their powerful statements to connect the rhythm instrumentation to Zulian regional identity, the sound of the ensemble is perceived as *gaita zuliana.*

Golpe Tradicional

Rixio Aguirre

♩. = 118

C min G7 C min C min G7 C min

cuatro 1

cuatro 2

furro

tambora

charrasca

Maracas

C min G7 C min C min G7 C min

c1

c2

fu

tam

R R R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

ch

Mrcs.

Describing the particular interactive feel of *gaita*—what makes its two-against-three or three-against-two effect unique—requires a bit of subjective explanation to analyze the ensemble's rhythmic relationships. Using this transcription of the recording of "Golpe Tradicional" as a guide, I offer the following analysis. The *cuatros* initiate a fast 6/8 rhythm in the first four measures, though the first *cuatrista* plays such a flurry of strums that it could be difficult for a novice to identify a meter. Certainly, the second *cuatrista* plays a rhythm perceivable as 6/8—six eighth-note strums, with muted strums on eighths one and four. Then the *furro* and *tambora* counteract that *cuatro* rhythm when they enter in measure five in a pattern that suggests 3/4 meter: three quarter-note articulations against the 6/8 meter. Thus measure five is where the two-against-three rhythm becomes obvious. In measure six, the *furro* begins its most typical rhythm of not playing on the "one" of each measure, displacing its first articulation of each measure to the "and" after beat one (the second of six eighth-note pulses), and this shift away from the one really distinguishes *gaita*, in my perception, at least. (When introducing non-Venezuelans to *gaita*, it is this displaced downbeat of the *furro* that seems to confuse them most about the overall rhythm.) Meanwhile in measure six, the *tambora* begins hitting the wood of the drum body on the first and fourth eighth notes of each measure, which lines up with the muted strums of *cuatro 2*, the accented dragged scrapes of the *charrasca*, and the shakes of the *maracas*, so the "tack" sounds from the *tambora* outline the 6/8 meter. But the "boom" sounds of the drum line up with the "(one) AND-TWO-THREE" rhythm of the *furro.* So I would say that the low sounds of the ensemble, that is, the *furro* and hits to the *tambora* drumhead, suggest a triple pulse (though syncopated by the displaced "one,") while the higher pitched sounds—i.e., the *cuatro*'s muted strums,

the hits to the wood of the drum, the *maracas*, and the *charrasca*'s accents—all emphasize the duple pulse. The following table shows the contrast between the duple and triple sounds played by the *gaita* instruments.

DUPLE SOUNDS (*cuatro* muted strums, *tambora* hits to wood, *charrasca* stresses, *maracas*, audience hand-claps)
1 2 ♩. ♩.
𝄾 ♪ ♩ ♩ 1 2 3
TRIPLE SOUNDS (*furro* "whoomps" and hits to *tambora* drumhead)

A listener could perceive the rhythm in 3/4 or 6/8, and many non-Venezuelans for whom I have played this music have tended to clap on the three quarter-note pulses. But Venezuelans identify the rhythm as 6/8, and audience members articulate this in performance: listeners tend to clap and dancers tend to step on the two-beat dotted-quarter 6/8 rhythm.

Many different genres of Venezuelan folk music—especially the regional varieties of *joropo*—display two-against-three or three-against-two effects, but the sound of the *gaita* ensemble makes *gaita*'s hemiola distinctive. It is the displaced-one of the *furro*'s "vrrrooom" and the *tambora*'s "boom," along with the duple pulse that is stressed by the *charrasca*, the rim-shots, and the *cuatro*'s percussive strokes, that gives the music its particular feel. In some genres, to describe a triple-meter feel, we say the music has "a certain lilt," but, to me, the word lilt is completely inappropriate when considering the

weight of the *vrrrooom* of the *furro* and the *boom* of the *tambora.* Instead, I might say *gaita* has "a certain *whoomph* to it." Whatever it is, it is recognizable to Venezuelans as the sound of Zulia.

IS IT OR ISN'T IT GAITA: NEGOTIATING TRADITION IN THE 2000s

Since the 1960s, *gaita* has gained a nationwide audience in Venezuela, and commercialization has affected the music in positive and negative ways, as it has every other genre. *Gaita* groups have grown in size and become more professionalized, complete with uniforms and nationwide concert tours. Groups compete to contract the best singers every year, and members switch groups from year to year, which is often compared to the trading of baseball players in the major leagues. Still, only a few musicians are able to earn a living solely from playing *gaita*. Certain radio and television stations are known for their *gaita* programs. With the advent of compact discs in the 1990s, *gaita* went digital, and by the early 2000s, no group could make any money by selling their recordings anymore, because pirated CDs flooded the market. Since 2010, Youtube and other websites have become important media for promoting *gaita.*

The sound of *gaita* has changed over time, and every musical innovation seems to generate debates over the loss of tradition. Changes to instrumentation and rhythmic feel are still key to whether listeners consider something *gaita.* In 1967, the group Saladillo began using electric bass on its recordings, and within a few years, nearly every group did so. Similarly, most groups began adding electric piano in the 1970s, and later, synthesizers. By the 1980s, it was hard to hear the *cuatro* on many recordings because of

all the keyboards. Salsa band percussion instruments like congas and timbales and even full horn sections also became common on recordings. During my visit in 2007, I saw that one group, El Tren Gaitero, had added a full rock drum kit to its live performances, which seemed to me to make their *gaitas* sound a bit like heavy metal. Yet, usually, if a song maintains the 6/8 *gaita* rhythmic feel, it can still be considered *gaita.*

At two ends of the tradition/innovation spectrum are the longstanding groups Barrio Obrero and Guaco. Barrio Obrero, whose songs I will cite in later chapters, is the only *gaita* group that has never added any instruments beyond the ones mentioned in "Golpe Tradicional." Barrio Obrero de Cabimas first organized in 1955, and they made their first recordings in 1964. They have had several regional hits over the past decades, and they are especially known for their *gaitas* dedicated to the local patron saint and songs of political protest (which I will describe in detail in later chapters), but they are little known outside of Zulia. I got to talk to members of the group in 2001, and they made it clear that they consider their group to be the only exponents of real traditional *gaita* because of their instrumentation and their use of the typical *gaita* rhythm and song structure. In my discussions with *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans, I got the sense that most would agree that Barrio Obero's is the most traditional sound, but because it hasn't changed much, few people are interested in the group. In extreme contrast, Guaco began in the 1960s as a somewhat innovative *gaita* group, but over the next few decades, they created a fusion sound of international musical influences, especially pan-Latin sounds of salsa and *guaracha*. Their instrumentation looks like a salsa band with some rock instruments like electric guitar, and their songs incorporate all sorts of rhythmic elements. The one element that really links them to *gaita* is their use of the *tambora*; even as they have

added many other percussion instruments, their original *tamborero* Jhonny Flores continues to contribute an aspect of *gaita* to their sound. Because few of their songs since the 1960s use *gaita*'s 6/8 rhythm, most musicians I talked to in Zulia do not consider Guaco a *gaita* group anymore. Most Zulians seem to love Guaco's sound, and they are incredibly proud of Guaco's success, but they do not think of Guaco as *gaita.* In Caracas, I found that some people still think of Guaco as a *gaita* group, but Zulians would say that's because *caraqueños* don't really know *gaita.* (For an extended discussion of Guaco's fusion of *gaita* and *salsa*, see Berrios-Miranda 1999: 118–130.)

Some *gaita* lyrics continue to address the issue of the music's tradition directly, and in 2000, Koquimba's hit "¿Es o no es?" (composed by Wolfgang Romero and Oscar González) not only talked about what is and isn't *gaita*, but even included musical examples in the context of the recording. By Maracaibo standards, Koquimba is a particularly commercially oriented group. While many *gaiteros* are middle-aged and heavyset (the stereotype of a *maracucho* to people in other regions of Venezuela is a loud guy with a beer belly), Koquimba's singers are relatively young and physically fit. They wear skin-tight T-shirts on stage, and I heard more than one person refer to them derisively as the Backstreet Boys of *gaita.* Although they use non-traditional instruments on recordings, and they even featured salsa singer Oscar D'Leon on their 1998 album, they adhere strictly to some core elements of musical tradition in *gaita*, such as maintaining the standard 6/8 rhythm and always using the four core instruments.

In "¿Es o no es?", which literally means, "Is it or isn't it?," Koquimba uses the lyrics and musical texture of the song to show what they think *gaita* is and what corrupts it. In the chorus, the song says, "If I sound like this," followed by a salsa-style horn break

in 4/4 time that clashes with the 6/8 *gaita* rhythm, "then this isn't *gaita*." "Our people are aware of what is and what isn't *gaita*. But if I sound like this," followed by the "traditional" instrumentation and rhythm, "traditional with texture then don't come telling me that this isn't pure *gaita*." In the first verse, the bad implementation of foreign instruments like timbales, which have been adopted from salsa by some bands, is blamed for destroying its "ancestral essence." In the second verse, traditional *gaita* is compared to fine wine that has been aged, and the third verse seems to link glorifying God with *gaita* tradition. What's distinctive in this song is that the discourse about tradition and the essence of gaita is so out in the open in the music itself. In the song "¿Es o no es?" the sound of *gaita* is actually the subject of the song text and the subject of the "musical text", that is, that the music itself comments on the idea of tradition.

(estribillo)	(chorus)
Si me suena así [salsa horns in 4/4] Esto no es gaita Conciente está nuestro pueblo De lo que es gaita o no es gaita Pero si me suena así [cuatro chord melody] Tradicional con textura No me vengáis a decir Que esta no es la gaita pura	If I sound like this [salsa horns in 4/4] This isn't *gaita* Our people are aware Of what is *gaita* and what isn't *gaita* But if it sound like this [*cuatro* chords] Traditional, with texture Don't come telling me [in local dialect] That this isn't pure *gaita*
I Mata su cadencia y son Su esencia tan ancestral La mala implementación De metales y el timbal (demonstrate) Pero al pueblo no lo enredan A la hora de apreciar Lo que es la gaita moderna Y lo que es la tradicional	I What kills its cadence and sound, Its essence which is so ancestral, Is the bad implementation Of metal (instruments) and timbales But the people don't confuse— When it's time to appreciate— That which is modern *gaita* And that which is traditional

II La gaita es como mi estilo Alegre y jaracandosa Es añeja como el vino Porque vieja es más sabrosa Y la gaita estilizada Se parece a la mujer Por más que este bien andada Nunca quiere envejecer	II *Gaita* is like my style Happy and partying hard It's aged like a wine Because when it's old, it's tastier And the stylized *gaita* Resembels a woman: The more that she's walked The less old she wants to look
III Que Dios bendiga al destino De la gaita que amo tanto Gloria al Padre, Gloria al Hijo, Gloria al Espiritu Santo La gaita es un aleluya Que estimula el corazón Es tan mía como tuya Que viva la tradición	III God bless the destiny Of the *gaita* that I love so much Glory to the Father, Glory to the Son Glory to the Holy Spirit The *gaita* is an alleluia That stimulates the heart It's as much mine as it is yours Long live the tradition

In 2001, I interviewed Wolfgang Romero, one of the composers of "¿Es o no es?" among a staggering number of other *gaita* hits. In fact, he is the most commercially successful *gaita* composer in the last decade, and from 1990 to 2000, he won at least one major *gaita* prize (song of the year, composer of the year, etc.) each year. In 2000, about one hundred of his *gaitas* were recorded, and he expected to continue in that prolific output. Wolfgang told me he didn't have any particular gaita group in mind when he scolded about the use of foreign instruments, but that he meant that the people who know *gaita* will not be fooled by imitations. In fact, he reminded me that many of his songs, in which he usually participates in the recording as an assistant producer of sorts, do use instruments like timbales. His point was that these instruments may be added, as long as they don't detract from the essence of *gaita*: as long as the rhythm and *cadencia* are respected and the traditional instruments are used.

Cadencia is the word most often used by *maracuchos* to describe the rhythmic essence or groove of *gaita*, and one of the most common criticisms of some *gaitas* is that the *cadencia* isn't correct, but like terms such as "rhythmic feel," *cadencia* can be hard to define. During my interviews with *gaiteros* in 2001, I always tried to elicit an explanation of this elusive term, in an effort to better understand local music theory concepts. When I pressed Wolfgang Romero, he located a good *gaita*'s *cadencia* in the rhythmic flavor of its melodies. "Mamaota" Rodríguez also located *cadencia* in melodies, but he expanded on the idea with a poetic metaphor, saying a good *gaita*'s melodies must flow and sway like the waves on Lake Maracaibo, linking the region's culture with its nature. Composer Rafael Rodríguez, in whose house I lived for several months, said *cadencia* was where the emphases are placed in the rhythm, and he demonstrated the difference between the graceful, suave, Zulian *danza* rhythm, which is also in 6/8, and the harder-edged *cadencia* of *gaita.* When I pressed him on the distinction, he seemed to acknowledge that *gaita cuatristas* are so individual in their strumming styles, that the difference isn't black and white, but to him, one can distinguish genres based on their perceived *cadencia.* Alejandro Silva, Barrio Obrero's musical director, who studied at a music conservatory, explained *cadencia* as the feeling of the music that eludes standard notation—that rhythm and meter can be notated, but *cadencia* is only made manifest in performance. Singer Ricardo Cepeda demonstrated the concept by tapping *gaita*'s 6/8 rhythm on the table while jerking his head back and forth, saying the *cadencia* is what makes his head move in that way. Singer Nelson Romero, el Ayayero, also related *cadencia* to physical motion, saying it's the way the two-against-three rhythm makes him dance. I gave up on the goal

of being able to "define" *cadencia* in *gaiteros'* usage, but our discussions reinforced the idea that *ritmo* in Latin music, is a multidimensional, kinetic concept.

Despite his own role in producing commercial pop *gaita*, Wolfgang presented himself as a new traditionalist when it comes to *gaita*. He lamented the fact that several of the most popular groups have stopped using the *furro*, either in recording or in live performance or both, pointing out that this was one of the essential elements to *gaita.* The metaphor he used to describe promoting *gaita* without its key elements (such as the instrumentation, rhythm, verse structures and melodic inflections) was that of decorating a house that didn't have a firm foundation. He said that as a professional *gaita* composer, he has a responsibility to maintain the *gaita* tradition for future generations. He was very excited to talk about how he was about to record some songs in 2001 with *only* the traditional instruments, without keyboard, something that is only done consistently by Barrio Obrero.

The traditional sound is something ripe for marketing in Wolfgang's opinion. He explained that part of the motivation behind this traditional turn was the potential of international popularity. Adding keyboards and elements of non-Venezuelan Latin music such as timbales has helped to nationalize the music, but to gain international popularity, he recognized the need to accentuate the unique aspects of *gaita*. He stated that he understood that it is the *furro* that will really draw the attention of international audiences, not the keyboard. He mentioned the popularity of the old Cuban music celebrated in the 1998 documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* as an example of how people in North America and Europe want to hear real traditional music. Thus, the

potential of marketing *gaita* to an international audience is part of what makes Wolfgang want to accentuate the older, more traditional style.

Conclusion

Gaita is simultaneously a local tradition that connects people to history for the people of Maracaibo, and also a pop music with national significance in Venezuela. This duel status is actively negotiated among Venezuelan musicians, journalists, DJs, and music fans, as well as in the lyrics and musical sounds of *gaita* songs themselves. *Gaitas* like "Golpe Tradicional" (1963) and "¿Es o no es?" (2000) show how song lyrics address issues of tradition and relate the genres sound to regional identity, and the latter even "musics about music" by demonstrating what is and is not genre-appropriate. A professional *gaita* composer like Wolfgang Romero can see himself as helping the tradition survive, both through personal conviction and an awareness of international music market values. While some purists bemoan how *gaita* tradition has been threatened or even destroyed by commercialization, I see many ways in which commercialization is merely one part of *gaita* tradition, and that commercialization may even serve to reinvigorate this tradition from time to time. One could argue that the advent of commercial recordings in the 1960s is what galvanized the idea of what the "traditional" style is.

The trope of the tripartite racial mix manifests itself throughout Venezuelan culture, and one of the reasons that *gaita*'s instrumentation is considered so essential is because the origin of the instruments reflects the components of the racial triumvirate that make up the nation: the European *cuatro* and *furro*, the African drum, and the indigenous

charrasca and *maracas*. Removing one of the instruments would upset this balance and seem to make the music less representative of the nation. I must admit that this ideology appeals to me in some way, along with the syncretic nature of *gaita*. Although I agree with scholars who criticize Venezuela's "racial democracy" as a myth, as myths go, it's one I'd like to believe in, and it's fascinating to see how it plays out in discussions of instrumental tradition.

In sum, *gaita* is a distinct genre in Venezuela, a characteristic *ritmo* that people recognize when they hear it. Some prefer a more traditional sound, and some appreciate innovation that pushes the boundaries of the genre. The discourse over tradition connects to broader issues of regional and national identity and the potential for market expansion. The fact that *gaita* tradition is the subject of so much discussion is also due to how people associate it with other important aspects of regional identity, such as history, geography, religion, and politics, which are the subjects of subsequent chapters. The autochthonous sound of authentic *gaita* must be policed and maintained so it can serve as the musical accompaniment for lyrics that express a regionalist point of view.

CHAPTER III—HISTORY OF *GAITA* AND *GAITA AS* HISTORY

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things actually, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other is in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common. (Renan 1882) [1994].)

A sense of shared history is often a fundamental aspect of group identity, especially when that identity is based on a geographic or regional definition of the nation, state, or polity. Without a "rich legacy of remembrances," as Renan put it, it is difficult to conceive of a group having a national or regional identity. But history is always re-written and promoted in the present, so that a group's cohesiveness exists, at least in part, through "the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common." Thus the past only matters if it is remembered and considered significant in the present.

In my visits to Maracaibo, I found that people who sing and listen to *gaita* are also deeply interested in the history of their region, and *gaitas* are crucial in this historical discourse. As one example, history was a frequent topic of conversation among the men with whom I socialized at the streetcorner bars in Santa Lucía. They were so interested in local history that twice on Sunday afternoons in early 2001, they hired a school bus and driver to take them around the older parts of Maracaibo and a town on the other side of the lake. For some, these self-guided "historical tours" merely provided an opportunity for an afternoon of socializing and drinking, but for most, these were pseudo-academic events where each person took the opportunity to point out historical sites along the way. I learned a lot from hearing their stories and seeing the interest they took in each other's tales. Besides the cases of beer on the bus, we also had an ensemble of *gaita* instruments, and people took turns leading the group in songs, especially songs that spoke of specific

historical places on the route. Undoubtedly, some of the sites we visited would be forgotten if not for the songs that mention them. *Gaita* is inseparable from history: it is an essential element of Zulia's cultural memory, and its lyrics record, reinterpret, and put a local spin on sociopolitical history.

Over time, *gaita* lyrics come to be treated as a local historical record. Because of its seasonal nature, *gaita* is renewed annually, and every autumn, in anticipation of the Christmas season, *gaita* groups release albums of songs that reflect current social concerns and musical tastes to the Venezuelan music market. As these *gaitas* mature over the years, they become a historical record of cultural concerns. As Light Carruyo put it in her master's thesis about *gaita*: "Not only are *gaitas* a part of historical memory but they themselves actively *create* memory through re-renderings of history and nostalgic glimpses into *antaño* (yesteryear)" (Carruyo 1998:21). While in Maracaibo, I was fortunate to have many conversations with Miguel Ordóñez, a celebrated *gaita* composer, a journalist, and the biographer of singer Ricardo Aguirre. In almost every discussion we had, Miguel would remind me that "*la gaita es una crónica*"—that *gaita* lyrics function as a popular chronicle of the people of Maracaibo and Zulia, and that part of a *gaita* composer's function is to document the local history for present and future generations. Given that Miguel is a professional journalist in addition to a *gaita* composer, his emphasis on the music's historical documentary function is not surprising, and time and again, I saw how *gaita* composers, like Miguel, are treated with respect in Zulia because people see their lyrics as poignant commentary on the state of the region and nation. Newspapers, television shows, and radio broadcasters treat composers as public intellectuals because their songs poetically record history with a distinct Zulian bias.

Gaita did not begin as music with professional groups and composers who are treated as gifted *cronistas*. Rather, in the nineteenth century, *gaita* developed as an improvisatory communal singing party where people would gather in a circle and encourage each other to make up verses to a song. Many Zulians told me about this history, but none stressed it and longed for it as much as Víctor Hugo Márquez. Besides being a retired psychology professor, lawyer, and *gaita* composer, Márquez is also the most famous living *repentista* in Zulia. *Repentismo* is the vanishing art of spontaneous poetic speech and song, and Márquez is well known for his incredible speeches and singing in which he expounds on any topic in improvised rhymed verse. More than anyone, he taught me that *gaita* originated in the nineteenth century as a spontaneously improvised singing party where a refrain would be composed as the basis of the *gaita del día*, and those in attendance, accompanied by the typical *gaita* instruments or whatever instruments were available, would take turns improvising verses on whatever topics concerned them. Very little documentation of this era exists, so we cannot be sure what people sang about, but it seems that, not unlike early hip-hop in New York and Trinidadian calypso, the spontaneous verses were boastful or humorous or about the activities of the party, and occasionally, singers addressed current sociopolitical concerns.

Over the course of the twentieth century, much of *gaita*'s improvisatory performance practice disappeared, and now composers write songs for professional groups to record and perform; yet *gaita* maintains a sense of traditionality because it is embedded in local cultural history. Some *gaitas* evoke nostalgia for simpler times by depicting idealized festive scenes from past generations. Others offer specific historical details about people, places, and events. Many songs invoke the long history of religious

devotion to the regional *patrona*, La Virgen de Chiquinquirá (La Chinita). Some, known as *gaitas de protesta*, articulate particular regional political opinions that help to unify Zulians in attitude, and with time, these protests form the basis of a regional political history. (Religious and protest *gaitas* will be the subjects of chapters Five and Six in this dissertation.) *Gaitas* promote images of the past, and the genre itself is so wrapped up in local history that merely hearing the sound reminds people of their past.

In this chapter I will provide a brief history of *gaita* and the ways that the genre constantly connects itself to local history. I offer a survey of its origins in nineteenth century community gatherings through its recorded era that began in the mid-twentieth century and led to organized *gaita* groups and star singers. But, just as importantly, I analyze how *maracaiberos'* telling of *gaita* history reveals broader cultural values that they wish to project about themselves. In his study of steelband, Shannon Dudley examines the musical histories that Trinidadians tell in order to distill themes of heroics, musical progress, and resistance to authority. "The stories function as myths of a sort, not in the sense of an exaggeration or an untruth, but in the sense of an origin story by which the tellers anchor their history and their place in the world. And although they differ in their names, dates, and plot details, consistencies in the manner of their telling underscore core values that Trinidadians associate with the steel pan" (Dudley 2008: 31). Building on Dudley's style of reading oral history, I will show how the retelling of *gaita* history invokes and negotiates core values of *zulianidad* (Zulian-ness), such as knowledge of local geography, social commentary, and spontaneous verbal and musical creativity. I will also show that much of the telling of *gaita* history takes place in song lyrics themselves, so songs not only document the history of the region, but also of the music

itself. This discourse also engages with broader tropes about the racial makeup of Venezuela and the tensions between regional and national identities. *Gaita*, as a genre, is a crucial element of local cultural history, and the song lyrics themselves create and chronicle history. In Renan's terms, *gaita* music both creates a "rich legacy of remembrances" and, through constant re-singing, encourages "the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common". Thus, understanding the history of *gaita* requires understanding *gaita* music *as* an historical chronicle both of the genre and of the culture of its singers, composers, musicians, and listeners.

***Gaita*: Etymology and Speculative History**

The word *gaita*, as used in Zulia to name a musical genre, has caused considerable confusion, and nearly every Zulian who has written about the music has debated the origin of the word. As Dudley suggests, what is sometimes more important than the truth of people's versions of history is "how and why they are told" (Dudley 2008: 30), and in Zulia, the history of the word itself plays a role in the debate about whether *gaita* is more of European or African origin. Personally, I never had any hope of learning the "true" origins of *gaita*, especially the word's etymology, but because Zulian scholars do argue over these topics, I wish to present at least a brief account of the nature of this debate to show how this discourse involves broader issues about race, cultural history and geography. In modern peninsular Spanish, the word *gaita* most often refers to a set of bagpipes played in parts of northern Spain, but no one believes that bagpipes were ever used in Venezuela, which prompts the question of how Zulians came to use the same word for their percussive vocal party music.

For me, it was enough to say that *gaita* is a folk music style that began in the neighborhoods of Maracaibo and other Zulian towns as a party music. In his book-length study of *gaita*, Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, sometimes referred to as the "father of Venezuelan ethnomusicology," discouraged reading too much into the name of any music: "it is a norm of folklore studies that we should not classify music by its name because it occurs that sometimes it refers to an instrument, other times to a musical piece—as happens with *gaita*" (1980: 17, my translation). Considering how the names of popular music genres in the United States (e.g., blues, jazz, and rock & roll) get attached to sounds without much literal significance, it doesn't seem surprising that a word that means bagpipes in Spain could come to mean a musical party in Venezuela. Also, musical terms morph over time and space: for example, in modern Spanish, *tambora* means drum, but east of the Balkans, cognates of the word refer to stringed instruments, such as the Bulgarian *tambora* and the *tampura* of Indian classical music. Returning to the *gaita*, in Colombia, the word refers to an end-blown flute and the style of folk music that uses this instrument, a genre that is quite distinct from Zulian *gaita*. There is small hornpipe played in El Gastor, in southern Spain, known as the *gaita gastoreña*. While its music would seem to have little in common with *gaita zuliana*, it is, curiously, played in the final months of the year around Christmastime, so it is possible that the term was brought to Venezuela with some group of Spanish who used *gaita* as a term for music played around Christmas. I believe it is impossible to tell if there is any connection between these other *gaita* genres and that of Zulia, other than the word itself. While the word *gaita* might have referred to an instrument as some point in Zulia, it long ago came to mean a musical party or event and eventually a genre or cohesive style.

It is clear that by the late nineteenth century in Maracaibo, the word *gaita* was used to describe a kind of song and the parties where such songs were improvised. Alberto Moreno Urribarry (1992) has published a compilation of nineteenth-century newspaper references to *gaita*, and though I have never seen his work, Víctor Hugo Márquez cites it extensively in his book *La Gaita zuliana: oralidad en evolución* (2006). Based on newspaper reports, by the 1880s, Maracaiberos were performing a style of music called *gaita* around the holiday season at the end of the year. The music featured instruments like the *furro* bass friction drum and maracas, and four-line verses were often humorous or insulting (Márquez 2006: 80–82). The way the word is used in print reveals that the music had been around for some years and most readers would know something about it. In one article from 1883, the author even criticizes recent changes to the style that he hears sung on the streets around Christmastime: "…they entertained themselves with singing something they gave the name *gaita*, but it was rather a corruption of the old popular song that has lost a great part of its value with today's changes" (Márquez 2006: 79, my translation). This suggests that by the 1880s, *gaita* had been sung long enough that some people were beginning to see its style change, and observe, "it wasn't what it once was."

However, these few articles offer little in terms of musical or other details about what *gaita* was like in the nineteenth century. For examples, there seems to be no mention of how the music came to Maracaibo, the meter of the music, why it was called "*gaita*," what class or ethnic group was playing it, or in what neighborhoods the *gaitas* were heard—details that have led to speculation and heated debates among those who study *gaita*'s history. In truth, we know very little about the sound of the music and its

performers prior to the advent of recording *gaita*, which did not take place until the 1950s.

Because the word *gaita* refers to some kind of wind instrument everywhere except Venezuela, some *gaiterólogos* have hypothesized that, at some point in the distant past, there must have been a *gaita* wind instrument in Zulia. Curiously, this logic has been used to support the theory that *gaita de furro*, the style developed in and around Maracaibo, is of African or Afro-Venezuelan origin. In modern Zulia (and in several other regions throughout Venezuela), there are several other, wholly distinct genres of music known as *gaita.* Only one of them uses a wind instrument: at the south end of Lake Maracaibo, in Afro-Venezuelan communities of Bobures and Gibraltar, a style of music called *gaita de tambora* is played to honor the patron of that area, San Benito, and a featured instrument is the modern clarinet. Those who believe in a fundamentally African origin of *gaita zuliana* theorize that the clarinet replaced an earlier wind instrument that was called *gaita*, and that, over time, the term came to refer to the music as a genre, as opposed to the instrument. For example, Ramón Herrera Navarro presents this theory in his *Historia de la Gaita*, which is largely an argument for *gaita*'s African origin: "the instrument *gaita* was created in Egypt, and Africans knew it and used it profusely, and so from this fact, this was the instrument that was used to play, originally, *gaita de tambora* from the South of Lake Maracaibo" (2005: 67, my translation). I know of no Egyptian reed instrument called *gaita*, but there are instruments of that name in Morocco and West Africa, which would seem to support Herrera Navarro's theory.

Retired University of Zulia African history professor José "Cheo" Romero, with whom I spent many an afternoon at the streetcorner bars of Santa Lucía offered another

argument for the African, or Afro-Venezuelan origin of *gaita*. He told me that his research of property documents showed that a specific group of Afro-Venezuelans had moved from the south end of Lake Maracaibo to an area near Santa Lucía in the nineteenth century, where they could have interacted musically with white and mixed-race Venezuelans, developing what we now know as *gaita*. To him, this located Santa Lucía, also called El Empedra'o, as the "birthplace" of *gaita* in Maracaibo.

Arguably better known than any of these written or academic sources is a hit song on the same topic, "Historia de la Gaita," performed by the group Gran Sinamaica with soloist Moisés Medina in 1979. Composer Luis Oquendo Delgado gives credit to Afro-Venezuelans for creating gaita by presenting a mythological story in which a black drummer sang about his frustration with his enslaved condition. Below are the introduction, refrain, and first two of four verses.

<table>
<tr><td>-introducción -
Todo era afán sin sosiego
Esclavitud y tiranía
Y sólo el tambor del negro
Como una queja se oía
Hacía falta no más
Un ritmo y una expresión
Un canto alegre de amor
Esperanza, fe y paz</td><td>-introduction-
Everything was effort without calm
Slavery and tyranny
And only the black man's drum
Could be heard, like a groan
The only thing missing was
A rhythm and an expression
A happy song of love,
Hope, faith, and peace</td></tr>
<tr><td>- estribillo -
Y así comenzó la historia
De la gaita de mi pueblo
Porque al cantarla aquel negro
Nos dio su herencia y memoria
Un canto para el folklore
Una voz eterna alegre
Una oración pa'l pesebre
Y un alma para su honor</td><td>-refrain-
And so began the history
Of the gaita of my people
Because when that black man sang it
He gave us his legacy and memory
A song for folklore
An eternally joyful voice
A prayer for the Nativity scene
And a soul for its honor</td></tr>
</table>

- verso I -	- first verse -
Empezó con su tambor A cantar la gaita el negro Como un lamento del pueblo Y la discriminación Y como tenía en su son La igualdad y el progreso Por primera vez fue preso De la gaita el precursor	He started with his drum The black man singing *gaita* As a lament from the people About the discrimination And because he had in his song Equality and progress For the first time he captured the enchantment of precursor of *gaita*
- verso II -	- second verse -
Y llegó de Gibraltar A Maracaibo un buen día Y formó en Santa Lucía Un conjunto pa' gaitear Y la fueron a llevar A que la Chiquinquireña Y la Chinita risueña Se puso al negro escuchar	And he came from Gibraltar To Maracaibo one fine day And formed, in Santa Lucía, A group to play gaita And they went to take it To the Chiquinuireña And the smiling Chinita Had to listen to the black man

Here we have some important themes that carry through any discussion of *gaita*—protest, religion and geography. The dramatic, minor-key, non-metered introduction presents the idea that *gaita* began with black slave's drum sounding "like a groan." The major-key refrain says that a joyful, hopeful music came out of this difficult situation, specifically crediting the black man. The first verse establishes that the drummer sang *gaita* as a lament about the discrimination he faced as a black man, establishing that protest was a fundamental motivation of the music and connecting the music to equality and progress. In the second verse, the drummer brings the music to Maracaibo from Gibraltar, arriving specifically in the neighborhood of Santa Lucía. Then the drummer plays his music for La Chinita, the patron saint of Maracaibo, whose image is kept in the Basilica in what was the Saladillo neighborhood. In the past, residents of Santa Lucía and Saladillo, the two oldest neighborhoods in Maracaibo, have fought over the status of

being the "birthplace" of *gaita*, and this lyric offers a mythical, peaceful resolution of the issue: that *gaita* was brought to Santa Lucía by a black man from Gibraltar who then brought it to Saladillo and received La Chinita's blessing.

While I have no doubt that Afro-Venezuelans contributed greatly to the history of what we now know as *gaita de furro*, I doubt that the truth is quite as succinct as the above sources suggest. This Afrocentric history is, on the one hand, completely plausible, but there is insufficient documentation to prove it, and there are some reasons to doubt it. Most significantly, the modern style of *gaita de tambora*, the Afro-Venezuelan music from the south of Lake Maracaibo, sounds very little like modern *gaita de furro.* Significantly, the former is played in 2/4 time and the latter in 6/8, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, this 6/8 rhythm is generally considered one of the distinguishing elements of *gaita de furro.* Further, the song structure of *gaita de tambora* is often call-and-response singing, whereas *gaita de furro* uses four-line verses and refrains of (usually) four-to-eight lines. Although, it is impossible to say whether these rhythmic and structural aspects of either *gaita* style have been consistent since the nineteenth century when it is hypothesized that Afro-Venezuelans would have brought *gaita* to Maracaibo, the dissimilarities make me doubt that one genre developed directly (and certainly not exclusively) from the other. Further, there are several other genres called *gaita* in Venezuela, as far away as the island of Margarita, and none of these features a wind instrument. This suggests that the term *gaita* may have come to mean the name for a musical party in Venezuela and then been applied to several different kinds of music over space and time.

I make these points at the risk of discounting the African element of Venezuelan music, which is not my intention. I certainly do not wish to argue, as does Arnoldo Hernández Oquendo, that *gaita* is essentially of European origin (Oquendo 1997: 29–30). Rather, I wish to point out the uncertainty in the history. One of the central tropes of Venezuelan culture is that it is a nation of people who are all mixed of European, African, and Indian ancestry, and for that reason, there is supposedly no racism in the country. Numerous scholars have criticized how Afro-Venezuelans' "cultural contributions to Venezuelan society went unnoticed" and that "most Venezuelans have denied that they had a racial problem" (Wright 1990: 4 and 5). While I applaud the historians who seek to give credit to Afro-Venezuelans who have been so marginalized in the country's history, I simply find it very difficult to see a history as clear as they do.

Remembering an Oral Tradition

What is clear from oral histories and from the few newspaper accounts is that, by the nineteenth century in Maracaibo, during the holidays of November and December, people played and sang a kind of improvisatory music, and both the music and the party where it was played were referred to as *gaita*. Víctor Hugo Márquez taught me the most about *gaita*'s improvisatory past. Márquez has been a *gaitero* since childhood, and he is particularly well known in Zulia as one of the last great *repentistas*, a singer capable of spontaneous poetic/lyrical improvisation. I had several opportunities to talk with him on my trips to Maracaibo and to hear his amazing improvisational abilities at public and private events. In 2006, he published *La Gaita Zuliana: oralidad en evolución*, in which

he applies his psychology scholarship to his artistic ability as an oral improviser. In the latter half of the book, he presents a history of *gaita* in the following seven stages: 1) incubation or implantation (1700–1850), 2) neighborly spontaneity (1850–1880), 3) pre-organization or peri-mercantile (1880–1947), 4) organized with group predominance (1947–1960), 5) creating stars (1960–present), 6) professionalization and business-ization [empresarialización] (1975–present), and 7) globalization (1990–present). Although I tend to view history more as a continuum, Márquez's history of *gaita* with its origins in participatory singing parties in the nineteenth century and the subsequent, ever-growing commercialization of the genre has comprehensively influenced my understanding of *gaita*.

Márquez's *gaita* history carries a negative tone. He laments the loss of community participation and vocal improvisation in *gaita*, which were replaced by professionalization of groups and precomposition of songs by the mid-twentieth century. Even though he is a revered gaita composer himself, he bemoans how *gaita* was once participatory community music with spontaneous composition that has now evolved (or devolved) into a presentational music with professional roles. I do not doubt that Márquez would trade all his compositional awards and accolades for a situation where common people still got together to improvise songs. However, as a fan of modern *gaita*, like many Zulians, I do not see the change in *gaita* from an improvised oral genre to a recorded one to be wholly negative, and, in fact, as I will show, there are still some very spontaneous ways that *gaita* is employed in Maracaibo. This spontaneity is part of what helps Zulians maintain their sense that *gaita* is their local folk music, whereas in Caracas, it really is "pop" music. But to a *repentista* like Márquez, the commercialization of *gaita*

has resulted in a loss of the spontaneous musical creativity that it once had, and the loss of communal musical improvisation is a tragedy.

In the early nineteenth century, according to Márquez' synthesis of oral histories and folk knowledge, *gaita* was a neighborhood jam party. A party would be announced by placing a white flag on a house or someone's boat as a way to signal that that family would host a *gaita-fiesta.* Márquez offers a vivid description of the musical spontaneity that would occur: "Throats were warmed up with the first drinks and some old songs while a *repentista* would propose a refrain made in homage to the host or his boat or the celebrated saint, a refrain that could have been made up the day before the *parranda* (jam) and that after being repeated some six or eight times would be memorized and sung by the group and would become the '*gaita* of the day,' which could have verses already learned by the soloist, but improvised ones were more celebrated and frequent. The interventions of soloists, between refrains, were announced by the raising of a handkerchief, or by taking turns in a circular motion, or by using a sub-refrain 'You now, you now, you play now'" (Márquez 2006: 74). Such a *parranda* could go on for hours, or even days according to legend. Márquez here emphasizes the participation of all those attending and the spontaneous creativity of the participants. While one person might have composed the refrain, all those present contributed to the singing.

Numerous popular *gaitas* refer to this history and teach it to new generations of Zulians. One 1998 hit sung by the powerful tenor Danelo Badell with the group Gran Coquivacoa (composed by Neguito Borjas) describes how the hanging of the white flag creates anxiety as the host hurriedly prepares for a *gaita* party to be held on "El Zaguán," the patio surrounded by shrubs that some old houses had.

-verso I- Apúrate corazón Anda barrer la enramada Hay bandera en la ventana Y aquí será el parradón	first verse Hurry up Go and sweep up the place There's a flag in the window And the party will be here
-estribillo- Voy adornar el zaguán Y a matar cuatro gallinas Mi casa ha sido escogida Pusieron bandera blanca Haremos una velada Que dure dos y tres dias	chorus I'm going to decorate the patio And kill four chickens My house has been chosen They put up the white flag We're going to have a party That'll last two or three days

A classic *gaita* that refers to how people would gather in a singing circle to trade improvised verses is "Ronda Antañona" (1967), the "old circle." Composer Virgilio Carruyo is so revered that for years, the annual prize for "*gaita* of the year" was named for him. The "Monumental" Ricardo Aguirre recorded the song with the group Saladillo. In his confident-yet-relaxed style, Aguirre sings the part of a boastful, drunken *gaita* improviser at a *parrandón*, a big jam party, singing and drinking rum in the singing circle as he celebrates his own sex appeal. Rather than describing a *gaita* song circle in the third person, the song is almost like a scene from a play, where the listener is a witness to actors recreating an event. Instead of descriptive details, the singer's words and actions are enough for a Zulian listener to understand the context. In the first verse, Aguirre sings a quatrain about waving his handkerchief, the gesture that a singer would use to indicate his intention to improvise the next verse at the party. To a Zulian listener, this gesture and the reference to the "circle" is enough to paint the picture of the old singing circles at the center of a *gaita* party. Since this practice of waving the handkerchief and improvising verses was long extinct by the time this song became a hit in 1967, the lyrics' reference to

it serves a folkloric educational function—to remind listeners of the oral tradition of *gaita* and the practice of spontaneous vocal improvisation. Thus the lyrics create history by depicting a past event, but in the way the story is told, only a local listener with knowledge of cultural traditions would fully understand the scene.

verso I:	First verse:
Para todos los presentes Cantemos con alegría **Les echaré este pañuelo** Sigamos el parrandón **En esta ronda cual cielo** **De la gaita de occidente**	**To all those present** Let's sing with joy **I wave this handkerchief at you** Let's keep the party going **In this heavenly circle** **Of the *gaita* of the west (Venezuela)**
coro: **Alza la voz negra mía para beber** Mucho ron **Ay que bueno** El parrandón **Que grande** El parrandón Sabroso está el parrandón **En esta ronda cual cielo** **De la gaita de occidente** **Alza la voz negra mía para beber** Mucho ron **Ay que bueno** El parrandón **Que grande** El parrandón Sabroso está el parrandón	refrain: **Raise your voice, woman, to drink** Lots of rum **Oh, how good is** The music party **How great is** The music party Awesome [delicious] is the party **In this heavenly circle** **Of the *gaita* of the west (Venezuela)** **Raise your voice, woman, to drink** Lots of rum **Oh, how good is** The music party **How great is** The music party Awesome [delicious] is the party

Several atypical musical features of the song add to its lively partying feel. At the beginning of each chorus, there is a dramatic, nonmetrical delay. The percussion instruments and bass drop out while the *cuatros* shift from their normal 6/8 rhythm to a fast, unmetered tremolo strum to provide harmonic support as Aguirre sings "Rise, my black voice, to drink". This draws attention to the beginning of the refrain and to the lyrics of the line, which could be a reference to the racial character of the working class

people who would have been singing at this party, or a reference to Aguirre's somewhat dark skin. Next, call-and-response is not a normal feature of *gaita* songs, but here, the chorus singers interject lines in between Aguirre's lines, creating a participatory effect. (I indicate Aguirre's lead lines in bold and the chorus singers in plain text above.) These choral response lines, "Let's sing with joy/Let's keep the party going," add momentum to the song and reinforce the dual social and musical purposes of the gathering. Then, before repeating the chorus, Aguirre sings the final two lines of each verse, which helps to remind the listener of the words of the previous verse.

Songs like "Ronda Antañona" and "El Zaguán" remind listeners of *gaita's* origin as a party where Zulians improvised songs in a circle. It does so not by lecturing or describing, but by depicting the singer as an actor in a typical event, the neighborhood *gaita* party. This narrative style situates the singer and the listener in a historical scene, promoting the imagining of Zulian history as playful, communitarian, and spontaneously creative.

Perhaps the most important legacy of this improvised oral tradition of the nineteenth century is the verse structure that most *gaitas* still use. The standard *gaita* verse remains four octo-syllabic lines long, with an end-rhyme scheme of either ABBA or ABAB. Having a fixed form like this made it easy for singers to improvise. Then and now, Zulians respect the cleverness deployed in composing quatrains that retain this, somewhat restricted, form. Although there are many modern *gaitas* that use other verse forms, this four-line structure remains the most common.

Gaita as advertising

In the early 20th century, gaita came to be used as advertising for local businesses. According to Márquez's history, a local business would hang the white flag to signal a *gaita* party and then hire musicians to play. One of the musicians would compose a song to sing the praises of the business' products, and this would serve as the *gaita del día* for the party, with some degree of improvisation of verses. Márquez criticizes this change because the focus of the event shifted from neighborly versification of spontaneous songs to promoting the products through precomposed lyrics. "The figure of "composer" began to be substituted for the wild, joking, and unrestrained recreational improvisation (*repentismo*)" (Márquez 2006: 83).

Virgilio Carruyo became one of the most renowned composers of this era, and many of his compositions are still sung today (e.g., "Ronda Antañona," above). A few of his "advertising" *gaitas* remain popular, most notably two songs he wrote to promote a local cigarette company, "La Flor de la Habana," numbers 1 and 2, which were adapted and recorded by Ricardo Aguirre with the group Saladillo in 1967 and 1968. Below are two verses and the refrain of "The Havana Flower, Number 1."

- verso I -	First verse
Hoy recuerdo La Zuliana Tiendas que en el saladillo (viva la Flor de la Habana Y su famoso cigarrillo) Vendieron los cigarrillos De aquella Flor de la Habana	Today I remember La Zuliana Stores in Saladillo (long live the Havana Flower and its famous cigarette) That sold the cigarettes Of that Havana Flower

- estribillo -	Refrain
Vamos a fumar La Flor de la Habana Que es la soberana Marquilla sin par Y la Gran Cruz lleva Su excelente aroma El Aguila asoma Como marca nueva	Let's smoke The Havana Flower It's the sovereign Brand without equal And the Great Cross has Its excellent aroma The Eagle comes out Like a new brand
- verso III - Se nos revienta el orgullo Cuando cantamos ahora (viva la Flor de la Habana Y su famoso cigarrillo) Esas gaitas que en otrora Fueron musas de Carruyo	Third verse We burst with pride When we sing now (long live the Havana Flower and its famous cigarette) These gaitas that in old times Were the muses of Carruyo

When I first heard these lyrics, I thought it very strange that we were singing the praises of a cigarette at a jam party, and I asked *gaiteros* to explain their origin. They confirmed what Víctor Hugo Márquez writes about songs being used as advertising in the early twentieth century before other forms of mass media were as common as today, but some went further in explaining their significance. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a succession of dictators ruled Venezuela, and one of them chose to nationalize the tobacco industry, which eliminated regional cigarette brands like La Flor de la Habana. By continuing to sing this song after tobacco nationalization, Zulians were subtly protesting the dictator's decree. Songs like this took on extra significance when a democratic system replaced dictatorship in 1958. One of the central tropes of Venezuelan political history since 1958 is pride in their democracy and resentment of the century of dictatorial *caudillo* rule, and the subtext of performing "La Flor de la Habana" is a

criticism of despotic rule. I do not know how many Zulians know this song's history, but enough people corroborated the story to convince me that *gaita* plays a crucial role in the way Zulians situate themselves in national political history. Singing the praise of an extinct brand of cigarettes can be viewed as a pro-local, anti-national, pro-democracy political statement about the history of the region. It is also a document in the history of the genre itself—evidence of the beginnings of the commercialization of *gaita* as advertising for local businesses.

Márquez's history could leave a reader with the sense that commercial advertising was the only topic for *gaita* lyrics from 1880 to 1947, but this was not the case. Numerous other authors (e.g., Matos Romero [1968], Ramón y Rivera [1980], Arrieta Abreu [1984]) stress that composers wrote songs of protest, religious devotion, and, of course, pure humor. It appears that only fragments of these songs remain, since there was no recording of *gaitas* or any other systematic documentation. As an example of a strong protest *gaita* written during the rule of the dictator Cipriano Castro (1899–1908), Manuel Matos Romero (1968: 67) offers the following quatrain from "Muerte a Cipriano" whose policies led to higher prices of goods through illegal taxes and price controls.

Virgen de Chiquinquirá Dále la muerte a Cipriano Que el pobre pueblo zuliano Muere de necesidá	Virgin of Chiquinquirá Bring death to Cipriano Because the poor Zulian people Are dying of need

One humorous *gaita* of the early twentieth century that survived in oral tradition, was recorded by the group Saladillo in the early 1960s, and remains a popular as a song sung at jam parties is "La Cabra Mocha," which is based on off-color jokes about a girl's crippled goat.

Ahí viene la cabra mocha De Josefita Camacho Es mocha de los dos cachos Del rabo y de las orejas Y es por eso que no deja Que la cojan los muchachos	Here comes the crippled goat Of Josefita Camacho It's crippled in its two horns In its tail and in its ears And that's why she won't Let the guys take her

ORGANIZING GROUPS AND RECORDING GAITA

Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, *gaita* groups were loosely organized, but this changed as folkloric competitions were created to encourage local music production, and *gaita* was promoted as popular music through radio performances and recordings. After several decades of Zulians using *gaita* to advertise local products, through recordings, *gaita* came to be a product in and of itself. To make these recordings efficiently, musicians became more organized and marketable *as groups*, taking on group names and uniforms.

Several socioeconomic factors led to these changes, most due, at least in part, to the fact that Maracaibo had become the oil capital of the nation. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, by the 1950s, Venezuela's economy became increasingly based on the petroleum reserves under Lake Maracaibo. While the first few decades of oil production in the 1920s–1940s were chaotic, by the 1950s, the industry had been stabilized under the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, leading to dramatic changes in Maracaibo's infrastructure and geography. In his cultural history of the impact of the oil industry in Venezuela (2009), Miguel Tinker Salas argues that the presence of "oil camps" of foreign workers, which were built to look like middle-class neighborhoods of the 1950s, fundamentally changed middle class values in Maracaibo, as locals came to

view the oil industry as the model of success and progress. Márquez explains that *gaita* became professionalized with the general socioeconomic transformation of Maracaibo in the 1950s as labor became more specialized (2006: 85–88).

In the 1950s, government and private industry began to give economic support of regional culture productions, which led to an increase in folkloric groups. The Pérez Jiménez dictatorship took an interest in local cultures as a way to consolidate power by recognizing and co-opting regional diversity. The "Semana de la Patria" [Week of the Fatherland] began in 1952 as a way to celebrate local cultures and encourage people of various regions to participate in the dictatorship's nationalistic project. Through a booklet published with government sponsorship, *gaita* was promoted with pro-dictatorship propaganda (Hernández-Yepes 1956).

Gaita recording began slowly. According to Hernández Oquendo (1997: 133), the first recordings of *gaita* were made in the "Ondas del Lago" radio station studio in 1947, though they were not widely distributed, if at all. The first group to adopt a name and record was Los Gaiteros del Zulia, whose first 78-RPM records were released in 1952. Few people listen to these recordings today because of their tinny sound, and I do not know how well the records sold, but many *gaiteros* know of the group and some of their songs because of cover versions recorded in the 1960s and later.

Folkloric competitions fueled the formation of groups and the composition of new songs. By 1962, several competitions existed to promote local folklore, and one *gaita* won all of the contests that year, simply entitled "Gaita Zuliana." Moisés Martínez composed the song and performed it with the group Saladillo, and they made several recordings of it within a few years. After winning all of the contests sponsored by various

industries, including Pampero Rum, the song became known as "La Campeona" [The Champion], and groups still perform it frequently. Most of its lyrics read like an advertisement for *gaita*, encouraging Zulians to listen to their local music.

Estribillo	Refrain
Vamos a cantar la gaita maracaibera Que en el Zulia es la primera En música popular Se puede imitar Pero no igualar Y sólo el zuliano Ese golpe sabe dar	We're going to sing The Maracaibo gaita That in Zulia is the foremost In popular music It can be imitated But never equaled And only the Zulian Knows how to play the beat
Verso I La Chiquinquirá La gaita nos la cedió Para que cantemos La gloria que Dios les dio	First verse La Chiquinquirá Gave us the gaita So we could sing Of the glory that God gave us
Verso II Están acabando La gaita que es tradición Por estar cantando Música de otra nación	Second verse They're losing The gaita that's our tradition By singing music From another country
Verse IV Virgen de Chiquinquirá, En la tierra de Urdaneta Cuna de grandes poetas La gaita resurgirá	Fourth Verse Virgin of Chiquinquirá, In the land of Urdaneta, The cradle of great poets Gaita will resurge

The recording of "La Campeona" sounds happy, exciting, fun, and somewhat improvisatory, as soloists take turns singing the lines of each verse. The chorus tells us that *gaita* is the best popular music in Zulia and only a Zulian would really know how to

play it. The first verse credits the Virgin of Chiquinquirá for giving her people *gaita*, which connects the music to local religious devotion. (Moisés Martínez was a devotee of La Chinita, and in nearly every conversation I had with him in 2001, he offered his thanks for her blessings.) The second verse discourages from losing their local traditional *gaita* by singing foreign music. The fourth verse tells La Chinita that *gaita* will resurge in the land of great poets and the revolutionary war hero Rafael Urdaneta, offering hope for local culture. The song won folklore competitions with lyrics that actively promote local folklore.

Numerous groups formed in the 1960s, some of which still exist today. The first to appear on national television was Rincón Morales in 1962, with the help of Zulian TV star Oscar García, who fought to get *gaita* recognized by the media. Probably the most famous *gaita* group of all time is Cardenales del Éxito, founded in 1963 by Ricardo Aguirre and his brothers Rixio, Renato, and Alvez, along with others who would have long *gaitero* careers like *furro* player Douglas Soto. (As mentioned earlier, an important center of my field research was the bar Entre Gaiteros, which Soto opened in Santa Lucía in 2001.) Some groups, like Barrio Obrero de Cabimas (on the east coast of Lake Maracaibo) had been formed earlier but began recording in the 1960s. According to Humberto Rodríguez (1998: 160), at the beginning of the 1960s, only a few albums were released per year, but by the end of the decade, the number was close to thirty, and the number has continued to grow steadily over the years to the point where over a hundred *gaita* groups have released annual recordings in the 2000s. During my visits to Maracaibo in the early 2000s, I found that many of these 1960s recordings, especially those by Ricardo Aguirre, are now considered classics and even the "traditional" sound of *gaita.*

Some, like Víctor Hugo Márquez would disagree with this assessment, since he sees traditional gaita as the improvised kind of the 1800s, but even the staunchest traditionalist would admit that this period of the mid-1960s established a kind of canon of classic *gaitas*. More than forty years later, in live performances, nearly every group includes a cover version of at least one of these "standards" in their set, as a way of connecting themselves to the time of *gaita*'s "resurgence" in the 1960s.

Another factor in the renewed popularity of *gaita* in the mid-1960s was the creation of the "Feria de la Chinita" as a public cultural holiday, sponsored by state and local governments and regional businesses. *Gaita* had long been considered the music of the holiday season that started with the feast day of la Virgen de Chiquinquirá, the regional patron saint, on November 18th and went through New Years. The Feria was established as a way to promote local culture, and *gaita* was, in a sense, officially sanctioned as the music of Feria. The Feria begins around November 9th, like a traditional Catholic novena, nine days of prayer leading up to an important day on the religious calendar. While audiences are constantly reminded of the religious foundation of the Feria, it is a largely secular event full of parades, beauty pageants, bullfights, baseball games and concerts. *Gaita* groups are hired to perform in venues large and small throughout the Feria, and the music is played on the radio even more than usual, so Zulians are constantly reminded that *gaita* is the traditional music of the season. The partying climaxes on the night of November 17th, when people are encouraged to *amanacer gaitero*, literally, to party with *gaita* until dawn. For some, this means playing *gaita* with friends, but for most (by the 1970s) the *amanacer* involves club-hopping from one venue to another, hearing the best professional *gaita* groups until daybreak.

Perhaps because of this connection to the Feria, starting in the mid-1960s, nearly every *gaita* group has recorded at least one song per year to express their devotion to La Chinita. (These will be discussed in a later chapter.) Some singers and groups, like Ricardo Aguirre and Barrio Obrero, are especially known for their particularly devotional songs. Numerous songs, such as "La Campeona" mention La Chinita or use her as a character in lyrics. Some repeat the legend of a poor washerwoman finding the image of La Chinita on a board floating in Lake Maracaibo centuries ago. This proliferation of religious songs embeds *gaita*, local religious identity, geography and history in Zulian identity.

Creating *Gaita* Stars

Since the 1960s, *gaita* has increasingly become commercialized as a marketed, mediated popular music, and some of its performers have become recognized as "stars." One effect of this is what Víctor Hugo Márquez mourns as the separation between performers and audiences as *gaita* has shifted from a participatory to a presentational music. While I agree with the spirit of his concern about the loss of the community aspect of music-making, I think most Zulians would celebrate the fact that *gaita*'s development over the past fifty years has produced some brilliant musicians. But one effect of this *estellarización* is that great singers frequently switch their affiliation from one group to another from year to year. Many Zulians explained this to me by comparing *gaita* groups to professional baseball teams that trade their players and court free agents to improve their prospects.

By far, the most lauded *gaitero* of the era of recordings is Ricardo Aguirre. He is now universally recognized in Zulia by the title *El Monumental*, a moniker coined by a radio announcer in 1967, just a year before Aguirre was killed in a car accident at the peak of his popularity. Throughout this thesis I will refer to Aguirre and cite his hit songs, many of which are now considered the greatest classics of *gaita*.

The nickname *El Monumental* that was bestowed upon Aguirre has led to other *gaita* stars receiving similar titles. I regret that I never got to meet *El Parroquiano* (the parishoner) Astolfo Romero, who died in 2000 just a few months before my first visit to Maracaibo, but I was there in the spring of 2001 when a plaza was named for him and his statue was unveiled. On several occasions I got to meet *El Colosal* Ricardo Cepeda, whose career really took off in the late 1960s when he took over many of Ricardo Aguirre's vocal parts with Cardenales del Éxito. He has embraced his nickname and named his own group Los Colosales. I had a few chances to chat with *El Juglar de la Gaita* Ricardo Portillo. Once, I got to attend a rehearsal of Cardenales del Éxito in 2000 when Portillo was their musical director. His subtle and fluid directions efficiently perfected the group's sound, demonstrating his careful ear. While some purists may frown at the practice of bestowing these honorary *sobriquets* on select *gaiteros* as mere marketing, I have tremendous respect for these musicians, and I believe they have earned their titles.

Ricardo Aguirre has been celebrated in many songs. In this chapter about history, I want to focus on two songs in particular that have contributed to Ricardo Aguirre's star status. The first is "Aquel Zuliano," written by Ricardo's brother and bandmate Renato Aguirre and sung by Ricardo Cepeda with the group La Universidad de la Gaita in 1980.

In the words of journalist and composer Miguel Ordoñez, Aguirre's biographer, this song "has been one of the songs dedicated to the Monumental with the greatest popular acceptance, virtually converted into the emblematic *gaita* that blurs the mythic figure of Ricardo Aguirre" (Ordoñez 1998: 235). If there is a masterpiece in the *gaita* repertoire, it is "Aquel Zuliano." Renato's beautiful poetry presents his deceased brother as an inspiring apparition that emerges in the wee hours. When I discussed the song with Renato, he explained that he frequently rises in the hours between 3 and 5 a.m. to compose music, when the air is cool and the city is quiet. It was in one of these private moments that the song came to him like a gift from his brother.

(verso I)	(First verse)
Fresca está la madrugada Y en la aurora maracucha Una inmensa voz se escucha Es el bardo que en parranda Cantando sus gaitas anda Deleitando a quien lo escucha.	It's cool in the wee hours, And in the Maracaibo dawn An immense voice is heard. It's the bard in revelry, Singing his *gaitas* as he wanders, Delighting all those who hear.
(Estribillo) En la bruma resplandece Maracaibo cuando duerme Y taciturna desprende El aroma de su arcano Cuando noble y grata emerge La imagen de aquel zuliano En la aurora se agiganta. Despierta y se estremece La ciudad del sol amada Cuando la voz adorada De aquel bardo fiel le canta Y orgullosa se levanta Y a su terruño le ofrece Su corazón en la mano.	(Chorus) In the mist, Maracaibo radiates as it sleeps, Silently projecting The aroma of its mystery, When, noble and pleasing, The image of that Zulian emerges, Growing gigantic in the dawn. The city of the beloved sun Awakes trembling As the adored voice Of that faithful bard sings to them. So proudly the city rises As he offers to his homeland His heart in his hand.

(verso II) Con rumbo firme al ocaso Proyecta el sol su agonía La voz se apaga y el día Muere vagando cual duende De nuevo la ciudad duerme Con el bardo en su regazo.	(Second verse) Returning to land at sunset The sun projects its agony The voice is extinguished, and the day Magically dies like a vagabond. Once again the city sleeps With the bard in its lap.
(verso III) La luz nace en la mañana Interrumpe en mí el ensueño La voz creo que fue un sueño Pero hay un misterio grato Dejó olvidado su cuatro Debajo de mi ventana.	(Third verse) The birth of the morning light Interrupts my dreams. I'd thought the voice was just a dream, But there's a pleasant mystery: He forgot his *cuatro*, leaving it for me Under my window.

As the lyrics say, Aguirre's image appears and "becomes gigantic." I cannot overemphasize his stature in the history of *gaita.* The songs that he recorded are re-recorded more than any others, and his strong-yet-relaxed baritone is still revered as the best voice for *gaita*. Zulians frequently pause to pay their respects to his statue outside the Basilica de San Juan de Dios where the image of La Chinita resides.

There have been dozens of songs dedicated to Aguirre's memory over the years, and in 2000, the first *gaita* season that I spent in Maracaibo, one of the biggest hits was "De La Vida Real" [From Real Life] written by Rafael Rodríguez and sung by Ricardo Cepeda with his group Los Colosales. Rafael and I became good friends in 2001 when I shared a house with him, and I got to talk to him about his compositions. "De la Vida Real" was inspired by his imagining the night that Aguirre died in a drunk driving accident, telling the story from the point of view of *furrero* Douglas Soto, who had gone looking for him. In his biography of Aguirre, Miguel Ordóñez (1998: 130–134) described

how Aguirre knew Soto was looking for him and played a game of cat-and-mouse with him, going from one bar to another, leaving each before he could be found. The chase went into the pre-dawn hours when a rain shower had made the roads slick, and Aguirre's jeep skidded into a truck on a blind corner. To Rafael, the point was to create a song that put the listener in Soto's shoes, feeling Aguirre's demise as a personal friend did.

(introducción)	(spoken introduction)
1969, 7 de noviembre La noche se hizo ansiedad para Douglas Soto, compañero de divisa gaitera del monumental Ricardo Aguirre González Fue larga la busqueda y el encuentro imposible	1969, 7th of November The night was full of anxiety For Douglas Soto, The gaita bandmate of the "Monumental" Ricardo Aguirre González. The search was long And finding him impossible.
(Verso 1) Quiero tomarme unos tragos Alegres muy sabrositos Te fui buscando negrito En los sitios acostumbrados Con animo entusiasmado Llegué a una esquina vibrante Pero hacia solo un instante Que ya tu te habías marchado	(Verse 1) I wanted to go have some good drinks And have fun, so I went looking for you, little black guy, In the usual places. With enthusiastic spirit I arrived at a vibrant corner, But it was just a moment After you had already left
(Estribillo) Te busqué, te busqué Por los distintos caminos Pero que amargo el destino Esa noche no te encontré Como un lobo caminé Tras la huella del hermano Y junto al pueblo zuliano Al día después, te lloré	(Refrain) I looked for you, I looked for you Along all the various paths But how bitter was destiny That night that I couldn't find you. Like a wolf, I walked In the footsteps of my brother, And together with the Zulian people The next day I cried for you

(Verso 2) Mis viejas calles me vieron Rodando en la madrugada Yo te busqué para nada y Me saludo un aguacero Las calle de mi ciudad Se perfumaron de agua Y aborddaste la piragua Que lleva a la eternidad	(Verse 2) My old streets saw me Going around and around in the wee hours I looked for you in vain, and I was greeted by a downpour. The streets of my city Were perfumed with water And you boarded the canoe That carries souls to eternity
(Verso 3) Se hartó el templo de la China De multitud que te amaba Yo llorandote cantaba Esa tarde marabina Vivo vertiendo un tributo Cada noche de noviembre Pero pintaste de luto Mi corazón para siempre	(Verse 3) The temple of the Chinita was full Of the multitude that loved you I sang crying for you That Maracaibo afternoon. I live pouring out a tribute Every night of November For you painted my heart With eternal mourning

"De la Vida Real" is a passionate tribute to friendship and the pain of losing a friend. Unlike most *gaitas*, it begins with a somber spoken introduction to present the anxious setting and identify the characters. The verses express Soto's exasperating search for Aguirre and his heartbreak at the subsequent funeral. Many Zulians have seen the photographs of the streets around the Basilica filled with thousands of people for Aguirre's funeral. The chorus begins with a major-key melody for the line "I searched for you, I searched for you," almost sounding like a patriotic military anthem, but it ends on the minor chord of the verses. Like many of Rafael's compositions, the music conveys the drama and emotion of the lyrics.

During my fieldwork in Maracaibo in 2001, I was fortunate to see an example of how *gaiteros* celebrate the memory of their stars when *furrero* Douglas Soto and his son

Angel (also a great percussionist) opened their bar Entre Gaiteros in a nineteenth-century house in the Santa Lucía neighborhood. The Sotos' mission was to honor *gaiteros* and create a place where they and their fans would want to hang out. There are many bars in Maracaibo with a few pictures of *gaiteros* on the walls, but the Sotos created a rustic "Hall of Fame." Because Douglas is much loved in the *gaita* community, "pa'que Douglas"—"Doug's place"—became instantly popular, and it became the most important place for me to meet *gaiteros* and learn about the music. The portraits of *gaita* stars were conversation-starters, a chance for Zulians to teach me their history through *gaita.* On more than one occasion, I had the honor of being present when Douglas or Angel brought out a portrait to hang when a famous singer or player visited for the first time, as if it were a "Hall of Fame" induction. Once this happened when elderly Oscar García G., El Ventarrón—the loudmouth, the television show host who first brought *gaita* to national TV in the early 1960s stopped into the bar for the first time; the normally brusque Señor García was moved to tears. I met Rixio Aguirre, Ricardo's brother, at Entre Gaiteros and got my first *furro* lesson from him. There I met singers Ricardo Cepeda, Danelo Badell, Denys Daguín and countless others, and they all agreed to help me with my research. Entre Gaiteros celebrated *gaita* stars, and it gave them a place to hang out and be respected for their success.

Presenting History as Nostalgia

While many *gaita* lyrics document actual history, it is more common for them to describe nostalgic versions of yesteryear. Songs already mentioned, like "El Zaguán"

present images of an idealized past that many *maracaiberos* long for. One of the most popular *gaitas* of the 2000 season is a nostalgic look at the street festivities associated with the patron saint's feast day of the 1960s, before that time was formalized into the modern Feria de la Chinita. "La Retreta" depicts the bustling streetcorner parties that would fill the old neighborhoods of Maracaibo as people waited for the sacred image of La Chinita to pass in procession. Several *gaiteros* told me off the record that this was their choice for *gaita del año* in 2000. (The prize was won by Iluminación Gaitera's "Toda una Vida" featuring a virtuosic lead vocal by Danelo Badell.) Gran Coquivacoa recorded "La Retreta" with Javier González singing lead, and the group's leader Neguito Borjas wrote the song. *Gaiteros* told me that *retreta* was a term used for the outdoor performance of a brass band.

Verso I	First verse
Seis de la tarde Ya estoy empatiquina'o Hay gaitas por todos la'os Y el ambiente está que arde Bien adornada Cada calle cada esquina Para que pase la China Y bendiga la barriada	Six in the evening And I'm already dressed to the nines There are gaita parties all over And the scene is burning hot Every street and streetcorner Is well decorated So that the China will pass by And bless the neighborhood

Estribillo Coro: Voy al baile y la retreta Voy hasta la plazoleta A disfrutar las veladas Busco el sonido pueblero De Rubén, el Campanero, Que retumba en la barriada Soloista: Y busco el bullicio de la gaita y los gaiteros del rincón más parrandero así es nuestro gentilicio Coro: Y llevo en mi sangre El sentir maracaibero Jocoso, populachero Que mi corazón expande Voy al baile y la retreta	Refrain Chorus: I'm going to the dance and the party I'm going to the little plaza To enjoy the soiree I'm looking for the sound of the people Like Ruben the bell-ringer That rings in the neighborhood Soloist: And I'm looking for the boistrousness Of gaita and gaiteros Of the partying streetcorner That is our people Chorus: And I carry in my blood That Maracaibo feeling So joking and friendly That it fills the heart I'm going to the dance and the party
Verso II Se vuelca el Zulia La noche se maravilla Entre sombreros, pajillas Entre cultura y tertulias La muchachera grita En música de viento Y las musas van saliendo En la noche bullanguera	Second verse Zulia goes all out We marvel at the night Among umbrellas, tents Among the culture and get-togethers Groups of girls shout Through the marching band music And the muses go out In the raucous evening
Verso III Que gran momento Ya viene la procesión Todo el pueblo es emoción Llantos y un gran sentimiento Entre oraciones y serenatas gaiteras Viene mi reina morena repartiendo bendiciones	Third verse What a great moment Here comes the procession Everyone is emotional Weeping with feeling Between prayers and Gaita serenades My brown queen comes Giving out blessings

Any *maracaibero* can imagine the scene presented in the song because, to this day, the highlight of the *patrona*'s feast day of November 18th is the procession of her image through the streets of the city. In fact, the verses could be describing a present-day event; especially the way the first verse begins the story *in media res* with the narrator dressed up to party. Here, the adjective *empatiquina'o* is an important clue to the listener that this is a story of the past, as it is an old-fashioned local dialect term for "dressed up"—hence, my translation "dressed to the nines." The refrain makes it clear that this is a Chinita's Day of a past decade through images such as: the *plazoleta*, which refers to the older, smaller plaza in front of the Basilica, before it was expanded to its current size; the *velada*, the old term for a street party; and Rubén, el Campanero, the now-deceased famous church bell-ringer. The second verse describes the raucous scene of the street parties of yesteryear, and the third verse describes the religious climax of the event when the image of La Chinita passes to bless the revelers. The lyrics depict a simpler time when the population of the city was concentrated in the old, dense neighborhoods around the Basilica downtown, and the streets would fill with parties on holidays like La Chinita's Day.

Like many historical *gaitas*, "La Retreta" presents an idealized, nostalgic look at a historical past that many would consider "real." It is not a literal history of a particular day or event, but rather a description of a typical scene of the past that present-day *maracaiberos* can imagine as one from their childhood or that of their ancestors. Through the use of local dialect (e.g., *empatiquina'o*) and specific images (e.g., *la plazoleta*), the lyrics speak very clearly to the people of Maracaibo. The details of the story are general

enough that a wide portion of the population could relate to it as their own history, one that connects them to their fellow citizens.

Spontaneity in Modern Gaita Tradition

Throughout my *gaita* research, one of my guiding questions has been: how does *gaita* maintain its "traditional" status in Zulia despite nationwide commercialization in Venezuela? Since most folklorists now acknowledge that little or no "folk music" is free from the influence of media and commercialization, the question itself may reveal outdated notions about what is "folk" or "traditional" music as opposed to "popular" music. But while contemporary ethnomusicologists may question the validity of such distinctions, these definitions still have a strong effect in Venezuela. For example, staff at the national folklore institute in Caracas subtly discouraged my research pursuits on *gaita*, because, to them, it was not as authentically "traditional" as other lesser-known genres that they wanted to support. These folklorists' catalog classifies some music, like *joropo* from the plains states as *música folclórica*, but considers *gaita* as *música tradicional popular*, and these definitions affected their research and archiving priorities. However, upon arriving in Maracaibo in 2000, I was struck by how Zulians continue to refer to *gaita* as their local "folk" or "traditional" music, despite the fact that it seemed more like a professionalized commercial pop music to me, especially after seeing it performed in stadiums in Caracas. While a cynic might say that the "traditional" label is merely a marketing device, I came to understand that most *maracaiberos* really do think of *gaita* as their traditional music. Part of that status comes from the association of *gaita*

with the end-of-year holiday season, but the way modern Zulians use *gaita* often refers to its history of spontaneous musical partying. Although all Zulians are no longer proficient *repentistas*, as Víctor Hugo Márquez imagines they once were, *gaita* is still a vibrant part of spontaneous partying in Maracaibo. In this section I will describe some of the ways that I witnessed spontaneous creativity manifested through *gaita.*

Gaita composers are very quick to turn feelings, emotions, and events into verse. On February 9, 2001, one of the first nights that I was at the bar Entre Gaiteros, the week that it opened, I was introduced to the composer Heriberto Molina. A friend of mine had told Heriberto about my purpose in coming to Maracaibo to study *gaita* as the topic of my doctoral dissertation, and he immediately grabbed pen and paper and composed a *décima* for me, a ten-line poem, which I treated as a great honor. Although it is not a *gaita*, it is evidence of how quick-witted *gaita* composers can be. Note how, by inventing a Spanish pronunciation of Seattle as "Say-AHT-lay," he gets it to rhyme with other words like *adelante* and *brindarte*.

Robert Carroll	Robert Carroll
Robert Carroll, adelante Que es mucho lo que sabeís Y al escucharte la Grey Me pareceís buen cantante… Very well que es importante Tu trabajo Robert Carroll… Me gusta que te gustaron Mis gaitas para graduarte… Un welcome quiero brindarte Y nos vemos allá en Seattle.	Robert Carroll, go ahead May you know much And by listening to you sing "La Grey" You seem to me a good singer "Very well" it's important Your work, Robert Carroll… It pleases me that you have liked My gaitas enough to help you graduate… A "welcome" I want to give to you And we'll see each other there in Seattle.

A few weeks later, I was again at Entre Gaiteros when I saw a *gaita* composer quickly write a song for a new guest at the bar. Nena Aizpurina was a prominent *gaita*

singer in the 1970s and 1980s, and shortly before her first visit to Entre Gaiteros, the owners had hung her photograph among other famous female vocalists. She was duly touched to have her picture displayed. Shortly after her arrival, José Marrero, a great lyricist, arrived and greeted her reverently. After exchanging pleasantries, José went to the back of the bar and composed *gaita* lyrics welcoming Nena to the bar. He then grabbed *cuatrista* Edgardo Chirinos, who had been showing off some neo-classical *cuatro* playing and selling his CDs, to set the lyrics to music. They created a melody and chord structure virtually in real time—it seemed as if he invented the music as fast as he could read the lyrics. They then performed the song for Nena on the spot, bringing both her and José to the brink of tears. It was simply a beautiful display of the spontaneous ability of *gaita* composers. Later that evening, after more musicians arrived and started a jam session of classic *gaita* songs, José occasionally interjected a newly improvised verse, showing that *repentismo* is not dead.

Gaita fans and *gaiteros* who frequent the bars in Santa Lucía do not passively listen to background music—they frequent interact with it. People will sing along with songs played on the stereo and comment on the lyrics or the history of the recording. The typical instruments—*cuatro*, *furro*, tambora, and charrasca—are available in the bars, and often people will play along with the sound system, sometime even drowning out the recording with their percussion.

Sometimes, *gaita* jams break out, or people help to stage them. The repertoire leans heavily on hits from the 1960s and 1970s. Occasionally, I even heard new lines or verses composed on the spot, especially when singers could not remember the original lyrics. Although singers' *repentismo* was not as fluent as it might have been at one time, I

noticed that *parranderos* will give a singer two or three chances to get a verse rhyming well, once everyone realizes that a singer is spontaneously (re)composing a verse.

On June 9, 2001, one of my final nights of my eight-month visit to Maracaibo, I not only witnessed old-fashioned *gaitero* spontaneity, but I was the subject. I ventured down to the bars in Santa Lucía to say my farewells to whomever I might find. Because I considered it a purely social call, I left my audio and video recording devices at home—I just wanted to say goodbye to anyone I happened to see. After a beer or two at one bar, I made my way across the plaza to Entre Gaiteros, which had opened only a few months earlier. By now, the walls were mostly covered with framed photos of famous *gaiteros*, and most nights of the week, there was a lively crowd there drinking beer, singing along with the stereo, and occasionally pulling out instruments to jam. That night, there were already a number of people there, and the beer was flowing. I greeted several people and thanked them for their hospitality during my stay. Two amateur *gaiteros* whom I'd met on numerous occasions, Alberto Valencia and Ramón Alberto Quero saw me, said hello, and then darted into the back portion of the bar. A few minutes later, they emerged and dragged me to the back. Accompanying themselves with a *cuatro*, they sang a song for me that they'd composed on the spot—a present-day *gaita del día.* Without any recording equipment, the best I could do was grab a scrap of paper and copy down the chorus, which they were singing over and over, trying to refine the lyrics and tune.

El Gringo volvió otra vez Pa' ca pa' Santa Lucía Entre gaitas y alegrías Ha pegarsele otra vez Y si consigue una novia Se le olvida hasta el inglés	The gringo came back again Down here to Santa Lucia Between the *gaitas* and the partying He's gotten drunk again And if he hooks up with a girlfriend, He'll even forget his English

Once they had the chorus down, they started playing it for all the people in the bar, causing insane laughter. Soon, a few tipsy patrons were attempting to improvise four-line verses on the spot. Although few were successful in their *repentismo*, confirming Víctor Hugo Márquez's fears of the loss of *gaiteros'* improvisatory prowess, just the fact that they had composed a topical chorus and were trying to create quatrains on the spot showed that the tradition of musical spontaneity was far from dead. I cannot venture a guess as to how common such an occurrence is in twenty-first century Zulia, but I can assert that for the crowd of twenty or thirty drunks that night, *gaita* was still the traditional spontaneous music of the people of Maracaibo.

Conclusion

Gaita is interwoven with local Zulian history. *Gaiteros* and *gaita* fans are the kind of people who care about history and talk about it. Nearly everyone I talked to about *gaita* offered his or her perspectives on its history and how it relates to broader cultural history. To a certain extent, the more you know about *gaita*, the more you know about local history, and the more Zulian you are.

Composer Miguel Ordoñez, a journalist and the biographer of the Monumental Ricardo Aguirre, taught me that "la gaita es una crónica", that *gaita is* history. Composers record history in *gaita* lyrics, and those songwriters are respected as public intellectuals because of this cultural historical function. Sometimes these histories describe important events or political situations, and sometimes things as seemingly mundane as the old local barbershop or cigarette maker. *Gaita* lyrics also document and

mythologize the history of the genre itself. To *gaiteros* and fans, and to many Zulians, stories recorded in *gaitas* are the most relevant and accessible histories of the region.

Víctor Hugo Márquez taught me much about *gaita*'s history as a spontaneously improvised singing party where a refrain would be composed as the *gaita del día*, and those in attendance, accompanied by whatever typical instruments were available, would take turns improvising verses on whatever topics concerned them. As the most famous living *repentista* in Zulia, Márquez laments the vanishing art of spontaneous poetic speech and song.

To some extent, my presentation of *gaita* history has been an attempt to reconcile these two points of view: one that celebrates gaita as a popular chronicle recorded by respected poets and another that wishes for a return to pre-professionalism, where the music was completely interactive. I have come to celebrate both how Zulians remember their cultural history through song texts, and also the way that many people continue to think of *gaita* as their traditional folk music, even as it becomes ever more commercialized. *Gaita* lyrics not only tell the history of the region, but they often mention aspects of the participatory tradition that Márquez longs for, and through these lyrics, people can continue to see *gaita* as part of a long tradition in which they participate. While few modern-day *maracaiberos* can remember a time in their own lives when *gaita* was a purely oral tradition, many can imagine and tell a history of the music as originating in the social gatherings of their ancestors. When they speak of *gaita* as their folklore, they are alluding to a history of socializing in the crowded *barrios* of old Maracaibo, where neighbors knew each other's business and got together to sing about it. When they hang out in bars in the old neighborhoods of Maracaibo, they continue to use

gaita for spontaneous musical expression, occasionally even making up a "*gaita* of the day" and improvising lyrics as in the nineteenth century. *Gaitas* record history and remind people of history. Hearing, singing, playing, and talking about *gaita—gaitear*—connects Zulians to their musical tradition.

CHAPTER IV: ASÍ ES MARACAIBO: *GAITAS* PRODUCING PLACE

On my flight to Venezuela in October 2000, I struck up a conversation with the man seated next to me. Gilberto was originally from Maracaibo but now lived in Valencia (in the middle of the country) where he taught part-time at a small university. I explained that I was headed to Venezuela to begin nine months of research about *gaita* music, and after a few weeks in Caracas, I would be moving to Maracaibo. He seemed emotionally moved that a *norteamericano* would come to research *gaita* for a doctoral thesis, and talking about *gaita* made him miss living in Maracaibo. "*La gaita es muy particular*," he said, as his eyes moistened, repeating the phrase several times to convey the weight of the statement. "*Es muy particular a la región*." To Gilberto, *gaita* was uniquely Zulian, connected to its region with an emotional particularity. It was one of the things that made Zulia unique to him and a source of pride.

There are many reasons why *gaita* is so closely associated with its region of origin, even though it is now played throughout Venezuela. As explained in other chapters, the rhythm itself is instantly recognizable as Zulian, the references to the patron saint La Chinita connect it to regional religious devotion, lyrics document local history, and—perhaps most dramatically—songs frequently articulate a particularly regionalist, anti-national political stance. But the most obvious connection between *gaita* songs and its region of origin are the many lyrics that explicitly address the geography of the region. To put it briefly, many—if not most—*gaitas* sing fondly of specific places in the state of Zulia. Love of place might be the single most common theme in *gaita* lyrics, and quite frequently, this affection is expressed in deliberately geographic terms. In this chapter I

will address how *gaita* lyrics sing the Zulian geography, deeply connecting the genre to its place of origin by producing popular images of this place.

Music Producing Place

Since 1970, some cultural geographers have looked at how music "produces place." A "place" is a social construct, a culturally relevant labeling and demarcation of a physical space. In the introduction to their collection *The Place of Music*, editors Leyshon, Matless and Revill speak of the "mutually generative relations of music and place" (1998: 4), which suggests a dialectic in which a place produces music, as that music, in turn, produces place. I would humanize that relationship to insist that it is the *people* of a place who make music, that, in myriad ways, reflects their location, and that music creates a sense of place for a given group of people. In this sense, *gaita* is strongly identified as being from Zulia, and it also produces Zulia, creating images in the collective cognitive map. As Zulian composers and musicians produce *gaita*, *gaita* lyrics sing the Zulian geography into existence.

Zulians relate their music to their geography in many ways. Once, while singing in a streetcorner *gaita* jam in Maracaibo, a friend, who went only by the nickname Trino, commented that I needed to sing louder. I replied that I was singing about as loud as I could, and I expressed my admiration for *gaita* singers' power. Trino quickly offered history lesson to explain the volume of *gaita* singers: generations earlier, the best way to get around Zulia was by boat on Lake Maracaibo, so *gaiteros'* ancestors had to communicate with one another by shouting from boat to boat. This vocal power was handed down to modern day singers. Trino could have simply pointed out that gaita was

traditionally sung at outdoor parties without amplification, and singers had to project above the level of several rhythm instruments (as we were doing that evening), but instead, he credited a regional geographical feature, the lake, as the explanation for an aspect of musical sound. In other words, as Trino puts it, singers aren't loud because they have to be heard in a jam session, but because their historical connection to local geography makes them that way. Dialectically, there are hundreds of *gaitas* that celebrate Lake Maracaibo as a central geographic element of the region, constantly reinforcing the popular image of Zulia's connection to the water. (*Gaitas* about Lake Maracaibo will be the subject of a section later in this chapter.)

Besides singing about specific places, one of the ways that *gaita* music is connected to places in the popular imaginary is the fact that numerous groups over the past decades have been named for specific places in Maracaibo or Zulia. Perhaps the first example of this is the group Saladillo. My friends who hang out at the streetcorner bars in the Santa Lucía neighborhood of Maracaibo frequently recounted the story of how this group got its name. One of those was the actor/radio personality Oscar García G., a native of the Saladillo neighborhood, who was retired by the time I started my research in Maracaibo in 2000. In 1962, Señor García succeeded in bringing the first *gaita* group to Venezuelan national television during the fundraising Venemaratón. The group, led by the brilliant composer Moisés Martínez and featuring such singers as Nerio Ríos arrived at the TV studio without a formal name, so Sr. García named them Saladillo, the neighborhood where and most of the group's members were born. The sensation of the first appearance of a gaita group on television—probably the first time most Venezuelans outside of Zulia state ever heard the music—promoted the idea of the Saladillo

neighborhood as the ancestral center of Maracaibo, at the very moment that the city was rapidly spreading into numerous scattered suburban areas. This naming made it clear that *gaita* music is deeply connected to place.

Over the following decades, numerous groups have named themselves for geographic origins. To name only a few and the approximate years of their first recording, which is when they would become known outside of their immediate neighborhoods: San Isidro in 1963, named for an island community in Lake Maracaibo; Barrio Obrero de Cabimas in 1964 (Cabimas is an oil camp town on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo); Gran Coquivacoa in 1968 (Coquivacoa is a native name for Lake Maracaibo); Los Alegres Gaiteros de Valle Frio in 1981 (a neighborhood next to Santa Lucía in Maracaibo); and Gaiteros de Ziruma in 2004, named for a neighborhood a few miles from the old downtown Maracaibo. Identifying groups with geographic place names simultaneously claims gaita for their neighborhoods and also locates gaita throughout the state of Zulia, so listeners are reminded of the geography of their state.

In popular music genres throughout the world, people often sing about places, but *gaita* lyrics may stand out for the proportion of songs in which geography is the primary topic and in the level of geographic detail that is sung. According to cultural geographers John Connell and Chris Gibson, "most popular music (including most country music) is subtle, ambivalent or vague in its designations and descriptions of place and identity" (2003: 71), and I would agree with this generalization. Although I can think of many individual songs in various American genres that honor places, no one genre is dedicated to one specific place in its lyrical content. *Gaita* is a particularly place-conscious song genre. In the songs that I will analyze in this chapter, I will show just how extensive and

how explicit this musical mapping is in Zulia. While some popular music genres describe places in general terms, *gaitas* often name specific avenues, neighborhoods, streetcorner bars, churches, and businesses. It is this specificity of place that makes *gaita* so key to Zulian identity—the places sung about are very real. But singing about places mythologizes those places, making them seem extra-ordinary, which leads to what Connell and Gibson call "a fetishization of localities" (110). The places identified in song take on magical qualities that evoke powerful nostalgia like the reaction of the teacher seated next to me on the airplane.

As one example of this fetishization or mythologizing of place, consider the song "La Esquina Roja" from 2000. It was one of the big hits that year, a contender for the "*gaita* of the year" prize. Sung by Dennys Daguín and Cardenales del Éxito, the song connects a current place with the mythic history of the formation of Cardenales, arguably the most consistently successful *gaita* group since the early 1960s. La Esquina Roja is the nickname of the current home of Alves Aguirre, one of the founding percussionists of Cardenales, the youngest brother of the famous singer Ricardo Aguirre. In the patio behind his "red corner house," his family runs an informal beer joint. The patio is just big enough that they can fit a *gaita* group there and host a concert for an audience of maybe 50 people. The lyrics advertise the good time to be had at this back patio bar—a real place that most *gaiteros* and many *gaita* fans have been to at some point. The song links the current place to the "origin myth" of the group Cardenales and to *gaita*'s commercial resurgence of the 1960s, saying this is where the founding members gathered to "make history."

-Estribillo-	-Chorus-
¿Quien está en la esquina Alegre muy parrandera? La madrugada es gaitera No importa que llegue el día Es como en otrora De gaitas nunca acabar Es un canto cardenal La llaman 'La Esquina Roja'	Who's at the corner— That happy party place? The wee hours are for gaita It's not important that daybreak arrives It's just like it used to be Never ending gaitas It's a Cardinal song [reference to group] They call "La Esquina Roja"
-verso I- Toda la nostalgia flora Cuando en el sesenta y dos En la gran esquina roja Cerca de San Juan de Dios Ramón Romero Luzardo, Douglas Soto, Pedro Suares Hicieron de Cardenales Historia junto a Ricardo	-first verse- All the nostalgia blooms When in 1962 In the great Red Corner [house] Near San Juan de Dios (Basilica) Ramon Romero Luzardo, Douglas Soto, Pedro Suares Made history with Cardenales [del Éxito] Together with Ricardo [Aguirre]

Curiously, the song places the Red Corner House near San Juan de Dios Basilica, home of the sacred image of the patron saint, La Virgen de Chiquinquirá, when, in fact, it is about a mile away, which is not "near" in terms of neighborhood geography in old Maracaibo. But saying the bar is near the Basilica gives it a spiritual power, further mythologizing the place. To listeners in other cities, or even to Zulians without first-hand knowledge of old Maracaibo's winding back streets, the mention of the Basilica just adds to the emotion of the imagined place. In 2000, some *gaiteros* told me that, in fact, this red house is not where Cardenales del Éxito formed at all, as the Aguirre family didn't live there until years later, but it made for a good story in the song, and it helped build the reputation of this place by imagining it as a place where history was made. (I regret that I never met the song's author, Nestor Guerra, to ask him about this poetic license.) At the very end, Daguín, the singer, adds (spoken): "Nos vemos en La Esquina Roja" ["We'll

see each other at the Red Corner House"], as if personally inviting the listener to the bar. (Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the several times I got to hang out with Dennys was at La Esquina Roja.) "La Esquina Roja" is a good example of how *gaita* lyrics constantly reconnect the music to history and geography, creating a map of fetishized or mythologized present-day places.

Gaitas usually project images of the geographic beauty of Zulia, creating a rich regional fantasy that people can try to believe in, despite pollution and other prominent detriments to this beauty. Building on Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community" (1983), literary critic Lauren Berlant coined the term "national fantasy" (1991). Her goal was to show how "a bond between erotic desire and the desire for collective political existence serves the nation, by connecting national identity and more local and personal forms of intimacy" (7). Compared to almost any other genre of music that I know, *gaita* is not concerned with the erotic, but in a more general sense, *gaitas* portray a "fantasy" version of Zulia, and *gaita* lyrics personalize the geographic. I consider "regional fantasy" as a useful term for all of what one might fantasize about—both sexually and not—in one's region. The concept of "fantasy" emphasizes the desired, the potential, the impossible dream. The "regional fantasy" of Maracaibo that is heralded in *gaita* includes not only the thirst for autonomous power, love for regional traditions, and pride in local identity, but also the fantasy of a beautiful place, even though, as I will show in this chapter, much of the region's physical geographic beauty has been greatly compromised. While "imagination" can be idle daydreaming, "fantasizing" is intense and passionate—it gets one excited—and music is often a means of stirring passions. If

there is an erotic focal point of *gaita* lyrics, it is the region itself, a passionate love of place that is (usually) blind to its faults.

When *gaiteros* sing of specific Zulian places, they validate themselves as local culture-bearers, even as their music gets caught up in national and global markets. Listeners in various places feel recognized as the image of their state is sung to them, and listeners who hear about places they've never visited assume the singer has first-hand knowledge of the place being sung about, which lends cultural credibility to the singer. This is a process described by Connell and Gibson:

> The identification of musical difference through regional sounds is an integral component of the fetishisation of place—securing the 'authenticity' of local cultural products in particular physical spaces as they move through national and global economies. Connections to place emphasize roots and points of origin. Remaining 'true' to one's roots emphasizes credibility. (2003: 111)

Authenticity is an essential quality in *gaita*'s popular image as a traditional music. By singing about specific places, *gaiteros* establish their authentic connection to the local geography. In *gaita*, musical authenticity and geographic authenticity are deeply connected. As Moises Martínez put it in the chorus of his 1962 hit, "La Campeona," "Solo el zuliano este golpe sabe dar": "Only the Zuliano knows how to play this beat."

Lago de Maracaibo: From 16th C. Mediterranean to 21st C. Oil Slick

Zulia is in the northwestern corner of Venezuela, bordering Colombia and the Venezuelan states of Falcón, Lara, Trujillo, Mérida, and Táchira, and the central topographical feature of the state is the Lago de Maracaibo. The modern state of Zulia essentially rings Lake Maracaibo, the largest lake in South America. Zulia claims almost

all of the lakeshore except for two parts in the southeast where Trujillo and Mérida touch the lake. Near the city of Maracaibo, located near the northwest corner of the lake, the lake narrows before it flows into the Gulf of Venezuela and the Caribbean. Except for the largely uninhabited Perijá mountains around the border with Colombia, Zulia is mostly flat, and there is ample agricultural land. Other than some rain-forested areas near the south of the lake, most of the Zulian climate is known for its perpetual dry heat, with temperatures reaching 90º F. most afternoons. Up until the early twentieth century, agriculture drove the Zulian economy, especially coffee and cocoa exports. In 1922, huge petroleum deposits were discovered under Lake Maracaibo, forever changing the economy and environment of Zulia and Venezuela.

From earliest colonial contact, Europeans compared the maritime culture around the Lake to that of the Mediterranean Sea, with people connected more by navigation than overland contact. Zulians proudly reminded me that their region was responsible for the origin of Venezuela's name: in 1499, Amerigo Vespucci called the area "Venezuela" because the indigenous people's stilt-house *palafitos* along the lakeshore reminded him of a "little Venice." Through the colonial era and into the twentieth century, Zulians largely lived off the fishing and nautical trade routes that the lake provided.

Thousands of *gaitas* fondly mention Lake Maracaibo as an important geographic feature of the region, and many are full songs dedicated to the lake's glory. Several of these were composed by one of *gaita*'s most famous composers, Luis Ferrer, who is nicknamed "El Poeta de la Gaita" for his particularly artful lyrics. Ferrer found particular inspiration in the image of the lake, and it is the subject of many of his verses. One of his most famous songs is "Lago Ideal," [Ideal Lake] which was sung by Nerio Ríos and

Cardenales del Éxito in 1973 and is still heard often forty years later. In fact, Nerio, nicknamed El Roble Gaitero [The Oak Tree of Gaita] for his tall stature and his over fifty years of gaita performance, is still asked to perform the song. The verses offer poetic images of the nautical life on the lake, and the refrain compares the lake to a muse that inspires poets to compose.

- verso I -		- verse 1 -
Hilos de plata tejen estrellas en tus palmeras El viento norte trae a tu puerto viejas piraguas Sobre las aguas entre las olas salta la espuma Mientras la luna pasa en la noche y deja quimera		Threads of silver weave stars in your palm trees The north wind brings old boats to your port Foam spurts over the waters among the waves While the moon passes in the night like a fantasy
- estribillo - Así es mi lago ideal Donde nace una ilusión Donde un poeta canción Siembra y recoge Con nuevas musas Para volverte a cantar		- chorus - This is my ideal lake Where an illusion is born Where a poet Sows and reaps song With new muses To return to sing to you

Despite the fact that, by 1973, Lake Maracaibo was quite polluted because of the oil industry, "Lago Ideal," like many *gaitas*, describes the water in idyllic poetic language. *Gaitas* continue to celebrate the lake as a central geographic feature, using the lake as a symbol of pride in producing the regional fantasy of Zulia.

Lake Maracaibo's geographic importance in the Zulian imaginary is enhanced by its religious significance. As will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter about Zulian religious devotion, according to legend, the sacred painting of the regional patron saint of La Virgen del Rosario de Chiquinquirá (La Chinita) was found floating in the lake. This story is retold in countless *gaitas*, simultaneously promoting devotion to *la*

patrona and celebrating the lake's geographic importance. The first verse of Ricardo Aguirre's famous song "La Chinita" (1963) tells the story most directly.

Cuando iba la ancianita A lavar ropa en el lago Encontró con gran halago Una preciosa tablita.		When an old woman went To wash clothes in the lake, With pleasure she found A precious little wooden board.

The appearance of the Virgin's image on the board is referred to as "el milagro"—the miracle—in Maracaibo, and the avenue that runs north from the old downtown along the lake bears that name. Other miracles of shipwrecked sailors being saved by La Chinita further connect Lake Maracaibo to regional religious devotion. Thus the lake is conceived not only as the geographic center of Zulia state but also as the site of miraculous events.

Prominent among the lake's geographic "miracles" that *gaitas* reinforce in the Zulian imaginary are the Relámpagos de Catatumbo. The "Catatumbo lightning" is a natural phenomenon that occurs where the Catatumbo River feeds into the southwest end of Lake Maracaibo. Because of a unique cloud formation above the mouth of the river, nearly every night, dramatic silent lightning bolts occur, sometimes one after another for hours on end. On clear evenings, the flashes in the sky can be seen as far away as the city of Maracaibo. The image of a lightning bolt appears on the Zulian state flag, reminding all of the natural phenomenon at the south of the lake. Such a unique and magical natural phenomenon adds to the mythical power associated with Lake Maracaibo, and hundreds of *gaitas* make reference to the phenomenon.

Since the 1920s, oil extraction has transformed Zulia and Maracaibo. Oil had bubbled to the surface of Lake Maracaibo for thousands of years, and the local

indigenous peoples used it for various things and even traded it with the first European explorers, but it wasn't until the twentieth century that oil exploration became a major global business. Within a decade of the first gusher on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo in 1922, much of that stretch of coast was dotted with oil derricks, and Venezuela became one of the world's top producers of crude oil. In a classic *gaita* from 1965, "Lago de Maracaibo," sung by Deyanira Enmanuells with the group Los Compadres del Éxito, the refrain celebrates the petroleum riches found in the lake.

- estribillo -		-refrain-
Lago de Maracaibo El de las aguas de seda Donde llegara el de Ojeda Quedando maravillado Tus riquezas petroleras Al mundo tiene asombrado		Lake Maracaibo From your silken waters What comes from Ojeda city Keeps everyone marveled Your petroleum riches Have the world amazed

In the verses of this *gaita*, author Rafael Rincón González lauds other aspects of the lake: that this is where the sacred image of the patron saint La Chinita was discovered, that the bridge built across the lake will help Zulia, that the lake inspired poets like Baralt and Udon Pérez, and that women bathe in the lake to become beautiful. All is positive. As an example of geographic specificity, the refrain names the city of Ojeda, one of several towns on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo that arose around the oil camps, as the source of the "petroleum riches."

Historian Miguel Tinker Salas' book *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, culture, and society in Venezuela* (2009) provides a critical analysis of the dramatic impact that oil

production has had on the culture and environment of Venezuela, especially Zulia. As he puts it,

> The uncontrolled search for oil ... proved damaging to the environment and the health of the people who inhabited the production sites. Wells often spewed their contents over lakes, land, and foliage. The smell of oil and leaking gas wafted over the communities, and the once pristine Lake Maracaibo, the largest body of freshwater in South America, became quickly contaminated. (Tinker Salas 2009: 7)

By the time I first visited Zulia in 2000, oil slicks and other pollution from industrial accidents had so polluted Lake Maracaibo that swimming and fishing were prohibited at every beach that I visited.

Lake Maracaibo, once a regional natural resource for fishing, became the engine of the entire national economy thanks to the production of oil. Meanwhile, the towns on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo had to expand dramatically to accommodate the influx of laborers, and traditional towns of *palafitos* (stilt houses) were devastated by oil spills and accidents. Royal Dutch Shell, Standard Oil, and British Petroleum built enormous, self-sufficient "oil camps" to house their workers near the derricks and their administrative staff in Maracaibo. In sum, over the course of a few decades in the mid-twentieth century, Zulia's economic geography shifted from using Lake Maracaibo for fishing and shipping agricultural produce to extracting the oil that lies beneath it, in turn, destroying the livelihoods of those who had relied on the lake for subsistence.

> Oil production displaced people from their land and initiated an environmental catastrophe, the cost of which has never been fully measured. No government has completely addressed the despoliation of Lake Maracaibo, the incidence of diseases in oil-producing areas, or the long-term damage of oil spills on flora and fauna. (Tinker Salas 2009: 240).

Since the early 1980s, when the extent of the damage to the lake became undeniable, numerous *gaitas* have addressed this "environmental catastrophe." Victor Hugo Márquez's song "Se Nos Muere el Lago," recorded by the star Ricardo Cepeda, expresses the "agony" that a *zuliano* feels at seeing lake's condition, concluding with the singer saying that if the lake dies, he'll die, too. Barrio Obrero's "¿Porqué, Mi Lago?" asks for an explanation of the poor condition of the lake. Rincón Morales' "Lago Marginado" (1987) bemoans how the environment has been neglected. In 1989, a popular *gaita* group from neighboring Táchira state, Koquimba, insisted that the government and the people had to work together to save the lake in their hit "El Lago." Probably the most direct protest *gaita* concerning the environmental damage to the lake comes from Barrio Obrero, the group from Cabimas, one of the oil towns on the east coast of the lake, where people have suffered directly as a result of the oil fields. "Sí Petróleo Fuera, Sí" (2004) simply asks for an end to oil production.

-estribillo-		-chorus-
Sí fuera petróleo, sí Ya lo hubieran achicado Estuviese refinado Con amor y frenesí Lago yo te conocí Cristalino, bello y tierno Y gobierno tras gobierno Ninguno ha hecho por ti		Yes, oil, get out They've already drained it You've been refined With love and frenzy Lake, I knew you as Crystalline, beautiful and tender And government after government Have done nothing for you

-verso I-		-first verse-
Para producir millones Tu oro negro te chupan Mientras que a ninguno culpan Por tus tantas infecciones Ya no hay aguas cristalinas Grita el pueblo con dolor Y no tiene aquel color Cuando apareció la china		In order to make millions, They sucked out your black gold While no one took responsibility For so many infections Now there are no clear waters The people shout in pain And you don't have the color That you had when La China appeared

The refrain echoes what historian Tinker Salas claims, that no government has adequately addressed oil's environmental impact on the lake. The first verse cites the illnesses that residents near the oil fields have suffered and that the lake lacks the color that it had when La Chinita, the image of Zulia's patron saint appeared. Coming from the group Barrio Obrero, these protests are particularly poignant because the group is from Cabimas, where the local residents' health has been endangered, and because this group is known for their particular devotion to La Chinita, the patron saint. Lake Maracaibo remains an inspiration to poets, but it may never recover from the damage done by the oil industry.

"Así es Maracaibo": the City as Regional Focal Point

From the colonial era into the early twentieth century, the city of Maracaibo served as a major seaport for western Venezuela and eastern Colombia. Maracaibo is the capital of Zulia state and the second largest city in Venezuela, after Caracas. Because it is located on the western shore of Lake Maracaibo and because the lake's size was too great to go around, no overland route existed between Maracaibo and Caracas until the 1960s.

The old joke that many *maracaiberos* told me was that you used to need a passport to travel between Caracas and Maracaibo because all passenger boats stopped at the Dutch island of Curaçao on the way. Culturally and geographically, this isolation made Maracaibo seem like a separate country from Caracas and the rest of Venezuela, and this cultural distinctiveness remains today as one of the pillars of Zulians' independent spirit. In the nineteenth century, large commercial houses along the Maracaibo waterfront controlled the importing and exporting of goods for Zulia and much of the rest of western Venezuela. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, Maracaibo was oriented around the lake and population was concentrated around the seaport.

"Así es Maracaibo" is a classic song from 1965 that describes an imagined tourist's encounter with the city, and it offers a nice snapshot of the mid-twentieth century city. It was the first major hit for the group Barrio Obrero, written by José "Chinco" Rodríguez and sung by Bernardo Bracho, founding members of the group, and it remains one of the most popular *gaitas* of all time. (Technically, its structure is that of a Zulian *danza*, which was a salon dance form in nineteenth century Maracaibo, and the verses alternate between major and minor keys unlike typical *gaitas*, but it is played with *gaita* instruments, so it is thought of as a classic *gaita*.) The song's popularity was renewed in the 1980s when singer Astolfo Romero recorded a version at the height of his fame.

The first line of the song's final chorus has become a kind of sung catch phrase nowadays. Numerous times when I was in Maracaibo, when something odd or noteworthy occurred, one of my friends would sing to me, "Así es Maracaibo, Señor Turista..."—"such is Maracaibo, Mr. Tourist"—with its plaintive minor-key melody. It's

a musical commonplace in Maracaibo. Also, it has been used as a theme song for television short programs about the city's history. In a way, it is a theme song for the city.

The song imagines a long day of a tourist's exploration of Maracaibo from dawn until night. The first verse and chorus paint a picture of arriving at the seaport at dawn with sounds of local music seeming to float on the waves of the lake. The second verse and chorus describe the tourist venturing from the port to see the city's bustle of public transportation and street vendors, things that would have marked Maracaibo as a "big city" in the 1960s. In the third verse, the tourist explores the Saladillo neighborhood at night to hear *gaita* music. The final verse suggests that the city's charms, such as the image of the patron saint La Chinita, will have bewitched the visitor, and he will remember Maracaibo as emotionally as the singer does. The singer's dramatic presentation of the lyrics adds to the magic of the song—it sounds like he is revealing a mystery one clue at a time. The imagined tourist's visit is a dream-like fantasy of sights and sounds of a magical city. As mentioned, unlike most *gaitas*, the verses alternate between starting in minor and major keys in a way that seems to vary the tone of the story: the first verse about arriving at the port just as day breaks is in F-sharp minor; the song modulates to a bright A major for the second verse about seeing the busy city by day; the third verse about hearing *gaita* at night returns to F-sharp minor; and the final verse about fond memories of the city goes back to A major. Thus darker nighttime images are harmonized in F-sharp minor, and brighter daylight ones with A major.

-verso 1- Cuando lleges a un puerto de madrugada Donde el marullo lleve hacia lontananza El ritmo cadencioso de alguna danza Que despide el bogero en la ensenada	F# minor	-first verse- When you arrive at a port at dawn Where the waves carry to the distance The catchy rhythm of a *danza* That sends off the sailor in the inlet
-coro 1- Esto es Maracaibo cuando amanece Un puerto que ofrece toda la gracia que hay en su rada		-first chorus- This is Maracaibo when it wakes at dawn A port that offers all the charm of its cove
-verso 2- Pero si atraido por el bullicio de la ciudad Saltas a tierra a curiosear El vendedor que ofrece sus chucherías O el conductor que grita, "a las Veritas, a nueva via"	A major	-second verse- So, attracted by the bustle of the city You come ashore to have a look around at The vendor who offers his snacks Or the conductor who shouts: "To Veritas, new road"
-coro 2- Esto es Maracaibo en pleno día Muestra el ajetreo con que subsiste a la realidad		-second chorus- This is Maracaibo in broad daylight Showing the bustle that sustains reality
-verso 3- Y si sientes deseos por las afueras Al escuchar un furro en el Saladillo O al tararear de un verso con su estribillo De una música alegre y dicharachera	F# minor	-third verse- And if you feel like looking further out To hear a furro in Saladillo Or to hum a verse and a refrain Of a happy and witty music
-coro 3- Esto es Maracaibo en plena noche Te muestra un derroche de lo que es gaita maracaibera		-third chorus- This is Maracaibo in middle of the night Showing you Maracaibo's *gaita* in abundance
-verso 4- Y cuando zarpes del puerto aquel que te impresionó Sientes en el alma que algo te embrujó Fue el titilar nocturno de Bella Vista O la imagen sagrada muy venerada de la Chinita	A major	-fourth verse- And when you set sail from the port that impressed you You'll feel in your heart something that bewitched you It was the nocturnal sparkle of Bella Vista Or the much venerated sacred image of la Chinita
-coro 4- Así es Maracaibo, Señor Turista, lo recordará igual que yo		-fourth chorus- That's Maracaibo, Mr. Tourist You'll remember it just like I do

"Así es Maracaibo" promotes the seaport, the bustle of the city, the music of *gaita* and *danza*, the sparkle of the streetlights, and the image of the patron saint La Chinita, suggesting that the visitor will be enchanted by the city's charms. Further, it names specific places in the city: the working-class neighborhood of Saladillo, the decorated boulevard Bella Vista, and the (then) suburb of Veritas, offering a guide map of attractions to the tourist. Decades after its release, the song reminds listeners of a time when visitors arrived to Maracaibo by boat, and the attractions were "big city" things like the shout of a bus conductor. As I will describe later, it is merely the first *gaita* of many to describe Maracaibo like a tourist advertisement.

Neighborhoods to "Experience Tradition": Saladillo and Santa Lucía

In Maracaibo, until the twentieth century, most of the housing was along the lakeshore, and the Saladillo neighborhood was the spiritual and cultural heart of the old city. People told me it was named for the fish salting businesses that were once based there, a few short blocks from the *malecón*, the old docks along what is now Avenida Libertador. Saladillo was the tightly-packed area of one- and two-story houses and businesses surrounding the Basilica de San Juan de Dios, which, as the location of the sacred image of the patron saint, La Chinita, is the city's religious focal point. In a story similar to many in other places, legend has it that La Chinita chose the Basilica in Saladillo as her home: in the 1700s, when a procession tried to bring the sacred image to the Cathedral at the east end of the old downtown where richer people lived, the platform became too heavy to move, but when they moved toward the Basilica, it became light

again. Thus Saladillo has a sacred value to it, as the patron saint chose it as her home. Many claim that gaita music was born in Saladillo (though others argue for Santa Lucía), and the *gaita* street parties during saints' festivals are remembered in stories and song.

By midcentury, with increased car traffic on its tiny streets, Saladillo had become quite congested, and access to downtown Maracaibo became quite difficult. Many middle class *saladilleros* began moving to newer neighborhoods away from downtown, and the area went into serious decline. This lead to a massive urban renewal project in the 1960s that involved the destruction of much of the housing around the Basilica to create wider streets, high-rise residential towers, a corporate park for the state oil company, a shopping center, a hospital, and a long park that extended all the way to Plaza Bolívar to the east. Tens of thousands of people were displaced, and what had once been a dense, bustling area of many mini-neighborhoods was razed. This project caused major changes to the geography of downtown Maracaibo, and might have been a success, if the rebuilding projects had not been delayed or even abandoned over the following decades.

Numerous *gaitas* in the early 1970s bemoaned the destruction of the old Saladillo neighborhood. "Remodelación" by Rincón Morales mourned how the place where *gaita* had thrived was now gone. In "Lágrimas de un Barrio," sung by José "Bolita" Ríos with the group Saladillo, Ramón Rincón wrote that La Chinita and the people of Saladillo were crying as the joy in their hearts had been demolished with the neighborhood. My friend and housemate Rafael Rodríguez wrote two laments that are still heard often: "Gaita Entre Ruinas," which speaks of the residents and *gaiteros* struck dumb by the destruction, and "Frente a Frente." The latter song's chorus describes the change to the neighborhood in particularly geographic terms while anthropomorphizing two church

buildings, saying the Basilica is now “face to face” with the church of Santa Bárbara. Rafael told me that it seemed bizarre that these two churches now stood with nothing in between them, when before the destruction, they had been two separate parishes within their own immediate neighborhoods. He held up his hands, palms facing each other, a few feet apart to express what he meant by “face to face.” Prior to the destruction, one couldn’t even see one church from the other because of the densely packed buildings, and now the two churches—and their *patronas*—look at each other.

Se disiparon los muros Que antaño las separaban Ella nunca se miraban Santa Bárbara y la China. Frente a Frente están hoy día Y desde San Juan de Dios Podéis rezarle a las dos Camino a Santa Lucía.		The walls have been shattered That had separated them forever They never could have seen each other Santa Barbara and la China They’re Face to Face today And on the way from the Basilica You could pray to them both While going to Santa Lucia

Today, some of Saladillo seems to remain in the ruins left in the late 1960s, while one small street is maintained as an example for tourists of what old Saladillo looked like. Calle Carabobo, the “Calle de la Tradición,” is a few blocks long, a few blocks east of the Basilica. (Some of my older *saladillero* friends said that Calle Carabobo technically was outside the vague boundaries of old Saladillo, since it’s closer to Santa Bárbara Church.) On Calle Carabobo, the old houses have been decorated in bright colors, and some serve as small businesses and bars. The corner house where poet Udon Pérez lived is now a state-supported modern art gallery. One of the first places where I encountered live *gaita* when I arrived in Maracaibo in 2000 was the bar/restaurant El Enlosa’o, a nickname given for the enclosed tiled patio around which several houses were built. It was on this

patio where I spent my night of November 17, 2000, the eve of La Chinita's feast day when many *maracaiberos* party all night long. There was a "house band" there that played *gaitas* on weekends and holidays. It was a fairly informal scene—*ambiente familiar*—with various guests getting up to sing a *gaita* with the band from time to time.

Later, I would learn that my *gaita* expert friends dismiss Calle Carabobo as a tourist trap, but for many Zulians, it represents the architecture and culture of old Saladillo, the old heart of Maracaibo. It is one of several places where people—locals and tourists—go to have what feels like a traditional experience: hanging out on the patio of an old house, drinking, and hearing traditional music. Although there are many venues for hearing *gaita*, especially during the Feria, many *maracaiberos* choose to come to a place like Calle Carabobo because there it feels more traditional. The architecture of the old neighborhoods enhances the musical experience.

Another important historical neighborhood is Santa Lucía, located about a mile northeast of Saladillo. It is also referred to as El Empedra'o for the narrow cobblestone streets that weave between the old houses. While a few small urban renewal projects have changed Santa Lucía over the past few decades, most of the historical buildings remain—many from the 1800s. On my first day in Maracaibo in 2000, Andreína Rangel, an administrator at the U.S.A.-sponsored English language school that serves some consular functions, took me on a tour to old downtown Maracaibo, driving back and forth across Santa Lucía. She seemed to take pleasure in my fright as she sped through the tiny lanes, narrowly missing parked cars, pedestrians, and enormous potholes. She made it clear that I would probably wind up spending a lot of time in El Empedra'o because *gaiteros* like to hang out there. Streetcorner bars, like Pa'que Luis, offer a scene where people can hang

out and drink and sometimes get a *gaita* jam going. There, beers are very cheap, so one doesn't have to have much money to party. Many people come from the wealthier neighborhoods and the distant suburbs just to hang out there, creating a diverse crowd integrated across class distinctions. One night I struck up a conversation with a couple who live in a nice uptown area, but come to El Empedra'o every few weeks just for the ambience. They made it clear that most of the time they would go out to upscale clubs, but they come to Santa Lucía when they want to feel real Maracaibo. They enjoyed the random joking conversations, cheap beer, and the anticipatory feeling of waiting to see if some *gaiteros* would show up and start a sing-along. So did I.

Santa Lucía and Calle Carabobo now stand in sharp contrast with newer neighborhoods. With the growth of the oil industry in the mid-twentieth century, Maracaibo's population grew immensely, and new neighborhoods were developed farther from the lakeshore. The port of Maracaibo, which had been dominated by centuries of agricultural trade, became the oil capital of the country as the entire Venezuelan economy shifted from agrarian to petroleum production. The port grew as the multinational oil companies imported oil extraction equipment, and oil tankers exported crude. Maracaibo expanded rapidly as industries and services developed around the oil industry.

To house their ever-growing administrative staff, the major oil companies built self-contained "oil camps" in undeveloped areas of the city, complete with their own hospitals, schools, country clubs, commissaries, and other facilities. Seeing the residences in the oil camps as a new ideal of housing layout, "Venezuelans adopted the oil companies' vision of modernity" (Tinker Salas 2009: 172), and new neighborhoods began to look more like the oil camps than the old neighborhoods downtown. The old

houses in Saladillo were usually one story tall, narrow but very deep, sharing walls with neighboring houses, and often with a patio or shared courtyard in the middle of a block. This arrangement allowed for extended families to live together and be very close to their neighbors. In contrast, the oil camps' architecture favored a United States-ian ideal of detached, single-family, two-story dwellings. As the oil industry came to dominate the Venezuelan economy, the architectural model of the oil camps became the new ideal for middle class Zulian housing. Several *gaiteros*, like Víctor Hugo Márquez and Miguel Ordóñez, explained how *gaita* was once the music of the patio or the courtyard, but with the change in architecture, families were more separated from their neighbors and less likely to socialize musically outdoors. Thus, besides the historical attraction of older areas like Santa Lucía, *gaiteros* also like to gather there simply because there is space for spontaneous musical activity to occur on the streetcorners and old patios.

General Rafael Urdaneta Bridge

One of the most significant changes to Zulian geography in the twentieth century was the construction of the General Rafael Urdaneta Bridge across the mouth of Lake Maracaibo, which dramatically changed Maracaibo's access to the rest of the country. For the first time, cars and trucks from eastern Venezuela could easily access Maracaibo without ferries, increasing both economic connections between the seaport and various markets, and cultural links between Zulia and the rest of country. At over 5 miles long, it was one of the world's longest bridges when it opened in 1962, and it remains a symbol of economic and technological progress. Optimism about the bridge's opening was expressed in *gaita* lyrics and even marketing: in 1963, the group Cardenales del Éxito's

debut album *A Venezuela* featured an illustration of the bridge, representing the new cultural connection to the rest of the country as *gaita* came to be marketed outside Zulia for the first time. In the 1965 hit song "Lago de Maracaibo" (mentioned earlier), the second verse suggests that Zulia will advance with, and be envied for, its new bridge.

Con su lago y con su puente El Zulia se crecerá Y el mundo te envidiará Por ser algo diferente		With its lake and with its bridge Zulia will grow And the world will envy you For being something different

My friends in Maracaibo still view the bridge as a source of regional pride, and just taking a drive to go to look at the bridge, especially when it is colorfully illuminated at night, is a favorite pastime. Hundreds of *gaitas* mention the bridge as a landmark, and it represents modernity in the images used on postcards and other regional tourist material. As mentioned in other chapters, the chorus of the *gaita* "Sentir Zuliano" (1973), one of the most popular and performed to this day, emotionally connects the Zulian's return home to Maracaibo with the bridge crossing.

Cuando voy a Maracaibo Y empiezo a pasar el puente Siento una emoción tan grande Que se me nubla la mente Siento un nudo en la garganta Y el corazón se me salta Sin darme cuenta tiemblo Y sin querer estoy llorando		When I go to Maracaibo And I begin to cross the bridge I feel an emotion so immense That it clouds up my mind I feel a lump in my throat And my heart starts to race Without thinking, I tremble, And without wanting to, I'm crying

For *maracaiberos*, the bridge is both a symbol of "big city" status and an emotional reminder that every journey to the east side of Lake Maracaibo ends with a return across its lengthy span.

The opening of the bridge was a factor in the decline of the maritime culture of Lake Maracaibo, as automobile travel replaced boating, and this impacted the geography of the city of Maracaibo. For centuries, the city's neighborhoods were oriented around the lakeshore, but as cars and buses became more available, Maracaibo began to sprawl as new neighborhoods were built father from the old center of the city near the port. Also, by the 1960s, residents had begun to protest the walled-in enclaves of the oil camps, and the walls came down, creating new suburbs away from the docks.

Commodifying Place: *Gaita* as Tourist Advertisement

"Así Es Maracaibo" (discussed earlier) might have been the first recorded *gaita* with lyrics that seem to market the city itself to *Señor Tourista*. Numerous *gaitas* are so glowing in their description of the city that they could be read as trying to sell the city to prospective visitors. Some are even explicitly directed toward the imagined tourist. In a sense, these songs commodify place, turning Maracaibo into a thing to be sold. This section will address these songs and the economic factors that encourage *gaiteros* to encourage tourism.

In various ways, music has been used to market places to visitors probably as long as there has been tourism. As geographers Connell and Gibson put it: "Music is bound up in place and in transformations of material spaces; increasingly this occurs through tourism and its promotion" (2003: 221). In his book *The Festive State*, anthropologist David Guss describes several regional scenes in Venezuela where music and performance are used to market local culture to visitors, especially the Afro-Venezuelan drumming used to celebrate the feast of San Juan Bautista in the Barlovento region on the

northeastern coast (2000: 24–59). During my stays in Caracas in 1999 and 2000, I saw how *caraqueños* have come to be attracted to the "exotic" Afro-Venezuelan drumming along the coasts both east and west of the capital. Drumming groups seem to encourage this tourism as it brings them an audience, and thus, an income—at least enough to pay for bottles of cane liquor to keep the weekend dance parties going for hours. In addition to the cultural draw of seeing and hearing energetic drumming and dancing, tourists head to the coast for the beautiful beaches.

Maracaibo cannot claim any natural geographic features as tourist attractions as do other regions, even others nearby in the west of the country. As examples, travelers flock to the city of Mérida to the south of Zulia, where the Andes mountains provide beautiful views and a moderate climate; and the white sandy beaches of Los Cayos in Falcón state to the east of Zulia lure beachgoers. But in Zulia, as discussed, the lake is polluted to the point where it is unusable for most recreation activities like swimming and fishing. In the city, Maracaibo's streets are often choked with traffic, and the climate is miserably hot every day. What Zulia does have to offer the tourist is culture, and *gaita* music is central to the marketed cultural experience.

Gaiteros have a vested interest in promoting tourism to Maracaibo, especially during the Feria de la Chinita, the weeklong festival that culminates in the local patron saint's feast day on November 18th. *Gaita* is a seasonal music, and groups release new music annually in September and October in anticipation of the November Feria and "*gaita* of the year" contests in December. (This practice goes back to the early 1960s, even before local businesses and government created the Feria, since *gaita* was the music traditionally used to celebrate the patron saint's feast day.) By getting tourists to visit

Maracaibo, *gaiteros* increase the market for their music and their performances. The more people who come to Maracaibo for the Feria, the more people who will attend concerts and buy music. Those who come for the Feria are more likely to want to buy CDs and attend concerts of *gaita* when they return to their home states, so this advertising can extend beyond Zulian borders. Thus there is a symbiotic relationship between *gaiteros* and Feria organizers—*gaitas* advertise the Feria as a great event, one that is full of great *gaita* music and parties, and *gaiteros* are hired to entertain.

Many *gaitas* are literally invitations to Maracaibo visitors. One early example is "Vámanos para la Feria" (1967) written by Luis Pirela, in which singer Ray Correa with the group Estrellas del Zulia rave about the partying that accompanies the *patrona*'s feast day. Two of the best examples of these sung invitations were composed by Ricardo Portillo, now known by his nickname *el juglar de la gaita*, the jester of *gaita.* Portillo is a brilliant singer, composer, and bandleader, and since the 1970s he has appeared with several of the most important *gaita* groups. His 1979 hit with the group Guaco, "Venite pa'Maracaibo" literally invites the visitor to "come to Maracaibo" for the Feria. Its upbeat, major-key sound conveys the joy advertised in lyrics that tell the visitor that every day is like Christmas.

-estribillo-		-chorus-
Nací en la región zuliana Donde existe el calorcito Contagioso y sabrosito Sea de noche o de mañana Donde la gaita te anuncia Que todo el año es navidad Venite pa' Maracaibo A la Feria de la Chinita Aquí la cosa es bonita En el bello Paseo del Lago Venga, el zuliano te envita Como buen venezolano		I was born in the Zulian region Where there exists a warmth That's contagious and tasty Whether night or day The *gaita* announces to you That all year is Christmas Come to Maracaibo To the Chinita's Fair Here it's beautiful In the lovely park by the lake Come, the Zulian invites you As a good Venezuelan
- verso III - La hospitalidad sincera Que conserva el marabino Es un don tan cristalino Que le ofrece a Venezuela		-third verse- The sincere hospitality That the Marabino maintains Is a crystal gift That is offered to Venezuela

The chorus, which is sung six times during the four-and-a-half minute song, explicitly invites the tourist to the Feria. In clever re-branding, the city's brutal heat is characterized as contagious and tasty. The third verse stresses the hospitality that the visitor will experience in Maracaibo. Portillo's 1990 hit with Cardenales del Éxito "La Ciudad Más Bella" won the *gaita* of the year award in 1990. Here he asserts that Maracaibo is "the most beautiful city" in South America citing many of the features described earlier in this chapter: the lake, La Chinita, the bridge, and the Catatumbo lightning. Again, the heat is humorously marketed as being "of the highest quality."

-Estribillo-		-Chorus-
Esta es la ciudad más bella Que existe en el continente Tiene lago, China y puente Gaita y hospitalidad Tiene el calor y la gente De más alta calidad		This is the most beautiful city That exists on the continent It has the lake, La China, and bridge Gaita and hospitality It has warmth and people Of the highest quality
Verso 2 Esta es la ciudad más bella Más atrayente del mundo Donde nacen las estrellas Y el Rayo del Catatumbo		Second Verse This is the most beautiful city The most attractive in the world Where the stars and the Catatumbo lightning are born
Verso 4 El pueblo maracaibero Se siente muy orgulloso Y se muestra generoso Ante el turista extranjero		Fourth Verse The Maracaibo people Feel very proud And generosity is shown To the foreign tourist.

Gaitas like these invite tourists to come to Maracaibo. The people are depicted as generous and fun, creating culture that the visitor will want to experience. Mentioning natural phenomena and man-made landmarks emphasizes the region's physical geography. If the songs are successful, *gaiteros* benefit by increasing the audience for their music.

Uniting the State of Zulia: Geographies of Race and Class

Es la tierra del zuliano Un paraiso pequeño Donde todos son hermanos Desde el Guajiro al costeño		It's the land of the Zulian A tiny paradise Where everyone are brothers From the Guajira Indian to the coastal resident

This is the third verse of the popular *gaita* “Sentir Zuliano,” mentioned earlier for its refrain’s emotional evocation of crossing the bridge to Maracaibo. Here the singer promotes the image of Zulia state as a tiny paradise where all are brothers, from the Guajira (Wayú) Indians to the (presumably poor, perhaps black) residents of the coast. Numerous *gaitas* engage in promoting this aspect of the Venezuelan national fantasy, the idea of the nation as a racial democracy where, due to the mixed-race ancestry of most of the population and the lack of specifically segregationist laws, there is—or should be—no racism. In Zulia, there are specific geographic aspects to race issues, and *gaitas* engage with this racialized geography.

Many scholars have critiqued the ideology of an absence of racism in Latin America. Winthrop Wright’s *Café con Leche*, a history of race issues in Venezuela, states that “...most Venezulans have denied that they had a racial problem, especially one like that of the United States, with its segregationist practices [in the twentieth century]. But, nevertheless, they placed blacks in an inferior social position” (Wright 1990: 5). My experiences in Venezuela support this view. I found it quite common for friends and acquaintances to claim that there is no racism in Venezuela because everyone is mixed. Those same people in another context would tell a joke that I considered a blatantly racist or make generalizations about Afro- and Indio-Venezuelans. Although the greater racial mixing in Venezuela is something I find appealing, in comparison to the white/black divide in the United States, it does not eliminate racist attitudes.

In Zulia, racial issues are not only white and black, but also complicated by the large Indian population. Violent Indian resistance to white domination lasted well into the twentieth century in Zulia, and to some extent, still exists in a more peaceful form. On the

east coast of Lake Maracaibo, in the early twentieth century, the Bari Indians resisted the conversion of their territory into oil drilling fields (Tinker Salas 2009:59). To this day, Maracaibo remains the only city in Venezuela with a significant Indian population, due to its proximity to the Guajira Peninsula, the home of the Wayú Indians (formerly referred to as the Guajira). Many Maracaibo residents view their peninsula as a no man's land, preferring a policy that allows the Wayú to control its own territory, but the area is also strategically important to Zulia because the border with neighboring Colombia divides the peninsula. In Maracaibo, the majority *mestizo* population often treats the Wayú as a low class who are only fit to serve as domestic help and menial laborers.

-estribillo-		-chorus-
Paraguaipoa, región zuliana Tierra galana de gran primor Rinconcito el soñador De mi patria soberana		Paraguaipoa, Zulian region Elegant land of great beauty Place of dreams Of my sovereign fatherland
-verso 1- Paraguaipoa y su mar Aire puro se respira Pedazo de mi Guajira Mi rinconcito natal		-first verse- Paraguaipoa and its sea Pure air is breathed A little piece of my Guajira (peninsula) The little town of my birth
-verso 2- La chica maya con ganas El guajiro baila bién Pero le gusta también Cantar la gaita zuliana		-second verse- The girl meows heartily The Wayú Indian dances well But he also likes To sing Zulian *gaita*

-verso 4-		-fourth verse-
Nos vinimos desde Guana Para que sepas bién Que los Guajiros también Cantamos gaita zuliana		We come from Guana (village) So that you'll know well That we Wayú also Sing Zulian gaita

However, many *gaitas* mention the Wayú in positive ways and try to incorporate them into the regional fantasy. One of the earliest hit songs to do so remains a popular standard. "Paraguaipoa" (1965), written by Saúl Sulbarán and sung by Rafael Barreto with the group Sorpresa, celebrates the town of that name on the Guajira Peninsula and "Zulianizes" the Wayú by complimenting them on their ability to sing *gaita*, the music of the city of Maracaibo.

The chorus repeatedly claims that Paraguaipoa is part of the "sovereign fatherland" of the "Zulian region." In the first verse, the singer or the song's author seems to claim that he was born there. While I do not know if this was true of Barreto or Sulbarán, it is a way of claiming a birthright to the Guajira territory. The second and fourth verses use *gaita* to bond the Wayú with Zulian culture, saying that the Indians also sing *gaita*. Thus music serves as the unifying force to incorporate the Guajira geography with the cultural regionalism of Zulia, i.e., "if the Indians sing *gaita*, they must be Zulian."

The minority Afro-Venezuelan population in Zulia is historically located at the south end of Lake Maracaibo where plantation owners brought large numbers of African slaves around 1800 to work the cacao and coffee fields. Over time, many Afro-Venezuelans have migrated to Maracaibo, but the south end of the lake around the town of Bobures is still considered their homeland. San Benito, the black saint of Palermo, is the patron saint of the region, and the *chimbanguales* drumming tradition is dedicated to

playing for him. In 1967, Barrio Obrero had a hit with "Bobures," written by José Chiquinquirá Rodríguez and sung by Bernardo Bracho. While the song makes no territorial claims about the Afro-Zulian region, it speaks of the residents of Bobures in positive (if generalizing) terms. It celebrates the devotion to San Benito and, in the first verse, subtly states that all Zulians are dependent on the agricultural produce of this area.

- estribillo -		-chorus-
Bobures tierra del Santo Benito Donde todos sus negritos Son humildes y sinceros Porque tienen negro el cuero Lo mismo que San Benito		Bobures, land of Saint Benito Where all its blacks Are humble and sincere Because they have black skin Just like Saint Benito
- verso I - Porque nací en el Batey Me llamais pelo maluco Cuando yo tengo un conuco Del cual vos también comeis		-first verse- Because I was born in el Batey You say I have ugly hair But I have a small farm That provides your food
- verso II - Devotos de san Benito Son todos los bobureños Porque allá hasta el más pequeño Veneran a ese negrito		-second verse- All the people of Bobures Are devotees of Saint Benito Because even the littlest kids Venerate that little black guy

Venezuelans often claim that what might be perceived as racism in their country is better described as classism, and there is no doubt that class-based prejudice is prevalent in Venezuela. In Zulia, one example of this that I frequently saw was a generally superior attitude of city-dwellers in Maracaibo toward those in the towns and villages around the lake. Still, *maracaiberos* are very fond of taking trips to these places to get away from the city for a while, and they are proud of the rural villages in their state. One such place is a small village of stilt-house *palafitos* on the east coast of the lake

called Ceuta. The fact that this village cannot be found on the national map became the center of a protest of the song “Ceuta” (1986), sung by Ricardo Cepeda with Cardenales del Éxito.

-estribillo- Existe un pueblo situado Allá en la costa oriental Parece se va acabar Pues lo tienen marginado Ceuta a ti ya te han borrado De aquel mapa nacional		refrain There’s a town situated There on the east coast (of Lake Marac.) It seems like it’s been finished off It’s been so marginalized Ceuta, you’ve just been erased From the national map
-verso I- En tus playas navegué En una linda canoa A Ceuta puse la proa Y en Ceuta yo me quedé		verse 1 In your beaches I navigated In a lovely canoe I set sail for Ceuta And in Ceuta I stayed
-verso III- Este pueblo marginado Reclama pronta justicia Y desea la noticia Que en cuenta va ser tomado		verse 3 This marginalized people Demand prompt justice And desire the news That they will be taken into account
-verso IV- Ceuta mi pueblo bonito Con sus hermosos parajes Deben cuidar sus paisajes Manglares y palafitos		verse 4 Ceuta, my beautiful town With your lovely places They should protect your landscapes Mangroves and houses on stilts

Here, the singer argues for geographical justice for this marginalized village—to be recognized on the map and to have its environment protected. While there is no racial reference in the lyrics, Zulian listeners would know that the people of Ceuta are dark-skinned and at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

Including the Wayú, Afro-Zulians, and poor *costeños* in *gaita* lyrics is a way to unify the state of Zulia. Such references implicitly invoke the trope of racial equality by reinforcing the idea that all Venezuelans are of mixed heritage: part Indian, African, and European. Minority groups are incorporated into the ideal of the *mestizo* region, and *gaita* music is further connected to the region by extending its cultural claim to all racial and ethnic groups.

"I Sing to My Venezuela": *gaitas* about and for the rest of the country

As *gaita*'s popularity spread throughout Venezuela beginning in the 1960s, the geographical topics of song lyrics expanded to include places far removed from Zulia. I cannot say whether this was a particular marketing technique on the part of *gaiteros* to appeal to a broader audience or simply composers' reactions to the growing awareness of Venezuela as a whole. With the opening of the Rafael Urdaneta Bridge to Maracaibo, *gaita* groups' touring the country and performing in cities like Caracas, and the increased nationalization of media—especially television, *gaita* composers were exposed to geographies outside Zulia, and their lyrics reflected that experience. As *gaita* lyrics' content expanded to include places outside Zulia, the music served to "produce place" on a larger scale. These *gaitas* may appeal to those outside of Zulia who have less interest in local regionalism, but they may also appeal to Zulians who can see their regional identity as nested within a larger national frame. Though fewer in number than those that sing of Zulian geography, *gaitas* about other parts of the country help to connect the music to Venezuela as a whole.

This expansion of geographical topics occurred around the same time as *gaita* groups began to be heard on the national stage. As mentioned earlier, Cardenales del Éxito's first album was entitled *A Venezuela* and pictured a drawing of the yet to be completed Rafael Urdaneta Bridge on the cover. The bridge effectively symbolized *gaita*'s planned market expansion to the rest of the country. In 1964, Ricardo Aguirre and Cardenales recorded "Canto a Caracas" to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the capital. Though it wasn't a major hit, it shows that composers—in this case Rixio Aguirre and José Luis Ferrer—were responding to their extra-regional attention. Clearly singing to market *gaita* to a national audience, José Socorro's "Canto a Venezuela," sung by Víctor Alvarado with the group San Isidro in 1965, talks of the pride of offering Zulian music to the nation.

- estribillo -		refrain-
Cantarle a mi venezuela Es un orgullo mi hermano Lago, su mar y su llano También a su cordillera Ofrecerles yo quisiera Este cantar del zuliano La gaita maracaibera		Singing to my Venezuela Is a source of pride, brother Lake, its sea and its plains And also to its mountain range I want to offer them This song of the Zulian The *gaita* of Maracaibo

In 1968, Raiza Portillo and the group Santanita had a hit with "La Bella del Tamunangue," which speaks of a folk music/dance tradition from Lara state, demonstrating the growing awareness of other regions' cultures. The geographical topics of *gaita* lyrics further expanded in the 1970s.

Rafael Rodríguez is perhaps the *gaita* composer most famous for his extra-Zulian geographical songs. Shortly before we met in 2001, Rafael had self-produced a CD compilation of his hits and entitled it *Canto a Venezuela*, making clear that his songs

spoke to the nation as a whole. As discussed earlier, two of Rafael's earliest hits mourned the destruction of the Saladillo neighborhood—"Gaita Entre Ruinas" and "Frente a Frente." But by the mid-1970s, Rafael's song topics began to include broader ideas and geographies. Because I lived with him for several months, I probably talked to him more than any other composer, and our conversation topics reflected Rafael's expansive worldview, including environmental preservation, international relations, human rights, and education. Any discussion could always lead to a global consideration of the bigger picture. Rafael's musical career began in *gaita*, but he also had success in the 1970s and 1980s singing other regional styles of Venezuelan folk music, marketed as "El Negro" Rodríguez, and his performances took him around the country, exposing him to other regional cultures. (In this context, "El Negro" is more like a term of affection rather than a term of Afro-Venezuelan identification, as Rafael is mixed race.)

To this day, one of his most celebrated hit *gaitas* is "Orinoco," a tribute to the natural splendor of Venezuela's largest river, which runs from the *llanos* in the central plains near the Colombian border to its enormous delta in the northeast of Venezuela near the island of Trinidad. This song, which was first recorded by Pablo Grey singing with the group Rincón Morales in 1976, contains several musical innovations for *gaita*, such as an amazingly rapid tempo and a stunning vocal cross-rhythm section in every chorus. Several older friends told me how they remembered the excitement over the song's initial release, and the song's sound is well known through the many cover versions that have been recorded—even as a *salsa* arrangement by Oscar de León. But it was not just the music that drew attention: the lyrics described an idyllic scene from the far eastern part of Venezuela, where most Zulians—including Rafael Rodríguez—had never visited. Rafael

was inspired to write the song after seeing a documentary film about the Orinoco and the natural wonders of the Gran Sabana, where enormous flat-topped mountains called *tepuis* created one of the world's wildest landscapes. Although the lyrics do not specifically mention environmental preservation, by the time Rafael wrote the song, the Orinoco belt had become Venezuela's second major area of oil exploration, so there was growing concern that the oil industry would damage the environment of eastern part of the country as it had in Lake Maracaibo. Rafael's poetry creates glorious magical images of the great river: "fishermen of fortune" splash in a river that "snakes" like a "sneaky animal" with a "silver-plated back" where "ripe fruit seem like gold ornaments" in a "vegetable paradise." To describe the Orinoco's environmental importance, the chorus compares the river to a "vital organ" that sustains all of Venezuela. (His original lyrics say "Venezuela en ti respira" [Venezuela breathes in you], but the recorded versions change "respira" to "suspira" [sigh].) The river's "guardian" is the Auyentepuy, the most famous of the *tepui* mountains. Musically and lyrically, "Orinoco" is one of the most dramatic *gaitas* of all time.

-estribillo-		-chorus-
Pasa la noche serpenteando el Orinoco Moviendo el lomo plateado Entre el paisaje más hermoso Con chapotear de pescadores de fortunas Se mueve por la espesura El animal mas sigiloso. Orinoco, (ya vas a llegar) Río hermoso (Para navegar) Venezuela en ti palpita, en ti respira/suspira Como un órgano vital Orinoco, (ya vas a llegar) Río loco (para navegar) Y el Auyantepuy es auténtico guardián		The Orinoco spends the night snaking around Moving its silver-plated back Through the most handsome landscape With the splashing of fishermen of fortune It moves through the jungle Like the sneakiest animal. Orinoco, (you're arriving already) Beautiful river (to sail) Venezuela throbs in you, breathes/sighs in you Like a vital organ Orinoco, (you're arriving already) Crazy river (to sail) And the Auyantepuy is the authentic guardian

-verso 1-		-first verse-
El Orinoco va rodeando contra el viento Y en su cayuco un pescador está contento En la plena noche se va guiando por la luna Y las estrellas va contando una por una		The Orinoco rolls along against the wind And in his canoe a fisherman is content In the middle of the night he's guided by the moon And he goes counting the stars one by one
-verso 2- Un paraíso vegetal lo enmarca todo Frutas maduras parecen adornos de oro Las aguas con un beso humedecen la arena Y aquél embrujo tiene encantos de sirenas		-second verse- A paradise of flora surrounds everything Ripe fruits seem like golden ornaments The waters moisten the sand with a kiss And the charm enchants like spells of sirens
-verso 3- Y cuando ya se acerca a su delta glorioso Se hace más lento, más oscuro y más grandioso El verso a puñaladas sobre el mar escribe Manchando las azules aguas del Caribe.		-third verse- And when it approaches its glorious delta It gets slower, darker and more splendid Writing poetry over the sea, it stabs like a knife, Staining the blue waters of the Caribbean.

"Orinoco" influenced other composers to celebrate Venezuela's natural resources in *gaitas*. "Auyantepuy" (1977) by Humberto "Mamaota" Rodríguez (no relation to Rafael) might be the most famous. Rafael Rodríguez continued to expand geographically in his lyrics with hits like "Caracas" (1977), which traces the capital's history from the local Indians' resistance of the Spanish conquest, and "América" (1979), calling it the "continent of the future," mentioning areas from Alaska to Argentina in an attempt to conceive of North and South America as one grand region.

Another hit from the late 1970s is noted for its nationalistic invocation of geography. Jesús Terán "Chavín" wrote and sang "Venezuela Galopante" with the group Rincón Morales, and in the early 2000s, he was performing it with Cardenales del Éxito. Chavín is still one of the most charismatic *gaita* singers, despite having had a stroke in the late 1990s. The refrain is a like cheer about Venezuela always progressing. Like so much Venezuelan nationalism, it invokes "the Liberator," Simón Bolívar.

- estribillo - Venezuela estrella Que vas galopante Por grandes caminos Vamos adelante Siempre pa' lante Buscando de corazón La fe y la enseñanza Del Libertador		chorus Venezuela, a star, You're going galloping On great paths Let's move forward Always ahead Searching for the soul, The faith and the teaching Of the Liberator

What makes the song unique is that in each verse, Chavín identifies with a different region of the country: the Andes, the central coast, Zulia, and Lara state, giving geographical details about each. As an example, the fourth verse speaks of Lara as the musical capital of the country, giving details of genres from the state. The *tamunangue* is a popular religious folk dance, Antonio Carrillo was a composer and folkloric bandleader, Carora, Duaca, and Cabudare are towns known for their devil-dancing festival on the feast of Corpus Christi, and El Tocuyo is known for its unique rhythm (*golpe*). In Venezuela, many of the best luthiers and violinmakers are from Lara. The last line references another important cultural institution, the Cardenales baseball team.

Soy tamunangue de Lara, Soy Carrillo y sus cantares, El diablo 'e Carora Duaca y Cabudare Soy el golpe tocuyano Soy capital musical, Soy el maestro Lucena, Violín de canela Rojo cardenal		I'm the *tamunangue* dance from Lara I'm Carrillo and his singers The devil dancer of Carora Duaca and Cabudare I'm the rhythm from El Tocuyo I'm the musical capital I'm the teacher Lucena Violin of cinnamon Red of the cardinal

By saying "I am" all of these things, Chavín is characterizing Venezuelan identity as encompassing all of these places and traditions from various parts of the country. While the chorus and the final verse base national identity in Bolívar's revolutionary ideals, the

rest of the verses make clear that it is the wide range of geographically varying cultures that make up Venezuela and will help the country gallop forward.

Not all geographical songs are so hopeful in spirit. As I will discuss in another chapter, many *gaitas* express clear opposition to national control of the Zulian region. Also, some *gaitas* reveal resentment towards their neighbor to the west, Colombia. The rivalry between Venezuela and Colombia dates to the post-revolutionary era, with historians on either side blaming the other country for the collapse of Bolívar's dream of a Gran Colombia, a republic that would have included most of Spanish-speaking South America. "The most fundamental bilateral issue concerns the actual location of the boundary, which remains a source of bilateral disagreement" (Martz 1992: 186). Since independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, Venezuela has disputed both its western border with Colombia and its eastern frontier with Guyana. In Zulia state, the western border is a point of contention for many reasons including the following: the influx of Colombians seeking refuge from economic difficulties or the violence of the long-standing guerilla movements there; difficulties in managing the Guajira peninsula when the international border is unclear; occasional border crossing by Colombian guerrilla fighters; access to shipping routes through the Gulf of Venezuela, which is fed by Lake Maracaibo; and the potential for oil drilling under the Gulf of Venezuela. Periodically, this border dispute leads to threats of military action on both sides. In 1987, political scientist John D. Martz conducted a survey that showed that "nearly two thirds (64 percent) [of Venezuelans] wanted total control of the gulf by Venezuela, even if the use of military force was necessary" (Martz 1992: 197). Composer Luis Ferrer expressed this sentiment in the powerful protest *gaita* "Dos Fronteras" (ca. 1980), performed by

Nerio Ríos with Cardenales del Éxito. The lyrics state that it is unacceptable to have "two borders," one recognized by Colombia and another by Venezuela. The chorus makes clear that if the upper-class (or those in governmental power) will not fight for Venezuela's territory, then the lower classes will.

-estribillo- Ni un pedazo más de tierra Daremos a otra región Me abro en dos el corazón Pa'que con sangre se escriba Si no luchan los de arriba Pelearemos los de abajo Y si hay que hacer una guerra La guerra haremos carajo.		-chorus- Not one more piece of land Will we give to another region I open my heart in two So it can be written in blood If the upper-class people won't fight, The common people will battle And if there has to be a war Hell, we'll make war.
-verso 3- La guerra mejor ganada Es le guerra que se evita Por eso no necesita Ver sus tierras masacradas Pero en actitud serena Quiero hacer valer mi orgullo De aquí ni un grano de arena Y del Golfo ni un marullo.		-third verse- The best war won Is the war that is avoided So that you don't need To see your lands massacred But with a serene attitude, I want to value my pride Not one grain of sand from here And from the Gulf, not one wave.

While the third verse expresses the desire to avoid the recourse to violence, the Venezuelan's pride is at stake. The border dispute is expressed in specifically topographical terms: neither one grain of sand (from the mostly dry Guajira Peninsula) nor one wave from the Gulf of Venezuela should be ceded to Colombia.

Conclusion

Gaita lyrics constantly invoke issues of geography in Venezuela, providing a discourse in which "places" are produced in the popular imagination. While some

cultural geographers might claim that all music is involved in producing place, the point of this chapter has been to show just how extensively and literally *gaita* lyrics are concerned with negotiating geographic issues. Usually, these songs deal with places specific to Maracaibo and the state of Zulia, poetically unifying the region, but some *gaitas* also address broader national and international geographies, providing frameworks in which listeners can locate themselves. Often, these geographies are idealized and romanticized, as in *gaitas* that celebrate Lake Maracaibo and other natural features like the Orinoco River and those that envision a state unified despite racial and class differences. Some of these songs commodify place by appealing to tourists. Other songs protest geographic issues, by complaining about environmental concerns, neighborhood destruction, or border disputes. But most simply sing the praises of the Zulian region, expressing pride of place in their land known for such things as high temperatures, petroleum production, historical stilt houses on the lake, a technologically-advanced bridge, and cheap corner beer joints where people like to hang out and sing *gaita*.

CHAPTER V: IMAGINING *LA GREY ZULIANA*: ZULIA AS A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION

Most Zulians conceive of their region as devoutly religious, and religious practice in Zulia is regionally distinctive. To adapt the phrase coined by Benedict Anderson (1983), Zulia is an "imagined religious community" in the sense that no Zulian could claim to know everyone in the state on a face-to-face basis, but one could imagine everyone behaving religiously in a particular Zulian way. *Gaita* songs and the performance events where they are sung continually reinforce this connection between popular religiosity and local identity in the Zulian imaginary.

This chapter examines *gaita* as an aspect of localized popular Catholicism. In order to better understand the regional style of Catholic practice in Maracaibo, I provide some history of the evangelization of Latin America that took place during colonization, and I connect the theology of saint devotion to broader issues of race and sociopolitical identity. I argue that the local religious calendar creates a shared experience of time and history that helps people imagine themselves as a community. In Zulia, *gaita* promotes localized, popular religious devotion and the sense that being Zulian entails sharing a calendar of dates of local religious significance.

Devotion to La Chinita

Like most of Latin America, the vast majority of Zulians are Roman Catholic, but the particularity of their religious identity is based on the devotional behavior toward several regional patron saints, and by far, the most important of these patrons is Nuestra Virgen del Rosario de Chiquinquirá, an image of the Virgin Mary, popularly referred to

as “La Chinita.” La Chinita is not only an object of religious devotion but also one of the most recognizable symbols of the city of Maracaibo and the state of Zulia. The Maracaibo airport is even named for her—Aeropuerto Internacional La Chinita. She is cited in thousands of *gaitas* as one of the pillars of the region, such as in the chorus of Ricardo Portillo’s 1990 hit gaita “La Ciudad Más Bella” (the most beautiful city).

Spanish	English
Esta es la ciudad más bella Que existe en la continente Tiene lago, China y puente Gaita y hospitalidad	This is the most beautiful city That exists on the continent It has the lake, China and bridge, Gaita and hospitality

As yet another example of this popular conception, I found a list of qualities entitled “Ser Zuliano” [Being Zulian] on a tourism website (www.zuliaturistica.com, accessed 3/25/08). The first of some thirty-one characteristic activities to “be Zulian” listed is “to adore La Chinita,” and further down the list is “to pray at the Basilica” (where the image of la Chinita resides). (Not coincidentally, “Vibrar con una gaita” [vibrate with a *gaita*] is the third item on the list.) Thus, the religious community of Zulia can be imagined as a congregation that prays to La Chinita at the Basilica in Maracaibo. Nearly every tourist postcard that I’ve ever seen of Maracaibo includes a picture of either the Basilica or La Chinita herself.

Catholics, in general, believe that the local appearance of an image of the Virgin Mary is highly significant and gives the community a particular holy status, i.e., the Holy Mother has chosen this particular place to bless with her presence. Official church recognition of a community’s saint means, in a sense, that the community itself is recognized as a place of significance by an outside power, in this case, the Vatican and the church hierarchy. This can give the residents of a region/nation/state a sense of a

divine right of existence as a legal entity, something like: “God has chosen to appear here, which means that our land is geopolitically significant.” In this manner, local devotion to La Chinita bolsters Zulian political regionalism, adding a strong spiritual component to the region’s sense of autonomy.

While many Zulians express their devotion to La Chinita year-round through prayer and by decorating altars in their homes, the focal point of the Zulian religious and festival calendar since the mid-1960s has been the weeklong Feria de la Chinita (Chinita’s Fair) that leads up to the *patrona*’s feast day on November 18th. At least since the eighteenth century, the celebration of La Chinita’s feast day has been the most important religious holiday for Maracaibo and the surrounding region (Bermúdez Briñez 2001: 201), and thousands have gathered on the city’s streets to party and celebrate the parading of the saint’s image through the city. In the mid-1960s, local business leaders helped to create the state-sponsored Feria to draw attention to the region. With its parades, open-air concerts, and other events, the Feria now takes over several neighborhoods far away from the Basilica. Regional dignitaries and politicians often introduce such public events, linking the once-religious holiday to agents of municipal and state power. Ever growing in scope, budget, and international attention, the Feria blurs the boundaries between religious and secular regional identity, reinforcing the idea that devotion to La Chinita is a characteristic of being Zulian.

It is in this devotional season that *gaita* music originated, perhaps centuries ago, providing the celebratory soundscape to a Christmas season that begins in early November and doesn’t end until the New Year. By the late nineteenth century (if not earlier), neighborhood *gaita* groups would signal the holiday season with performances at

homes and local businesses. In the past fifty years, *gaita* has changed from a primarily participatory, neighborhood party activity to a marketed, staged pop music genre, but it has maintained its "traditional" status, in part, by expressing Zulians' religious devotion to la Chinita and through its embeddedness in the annual Feria de la Chinita.

Gaita music, through song lyrics and performance events, serves as a medium to express and promote devotion to La Chinita in a relationship that mutually benefits the causes of regional identity and *gaita*'s popularity. Devotional *gaitas* retell the legend of the image of La Chinita, portray images of faithful Zulians, express the singer's own personal faith, and/or pray to La Chinita for intercession. Perhaps most importantly, these songs express the dramatic, emotional quality of Zulians' adoration. *Gaita* is performed at numerous events with religious connotation during the Feria, and its history is thoroughly interwoven with the local religious calendar, providing the soundtrack to the enthusiastic devotional holiday season in November and December. *Gaita* lyrics and festivity help to maintain the interpenetration of religious and regional identity through popular music, and the *gaita* music industry derives much of its socioeconomic vitality from this regional religious association. As *gaitas* constantly remind listeners to express their devotion to La Chinita and to recognize that devotion as an essential element of *zulianidad* (Zulian-ness), *gaita*'s popularity is reinforced as the music of this powerful regional-religious sense of identity.

The Study of Popular Catholicism

In studying the enormous diversity of religious practice in the Catholic diaspora, specifically in Latin America, scholars have increasingly shown that local practice varies

considerably from what is prescribed by the Vatican. One of the most influential, William Christian, coined the term “Catholicisms” to indicate the plurality of practices that comprise the supposedly unified “Church”. “Catholicism has become the prime example of catholicism. ... Because of the ideology of unity and centralization, most Catholics would say all Catholicism is the same, but in fact what they think is true Catholicism tends to be their own variety, not someone else’s” (Christian 2006: 259). As ethnomusicologist Suzel Ana Reily puts it in her study of a popular Catholic ritual practice in Brazil, “While popular Catholic practices are highly localized affairs with immediate links to the lives of devotees, the “official” church is hardly a unified institution, sheltering—as it does—a diversity of conflicting and contradictory orientations to theological doctrine, liturgical practice, and vernacular religiosity (2002: 8). Scholarly recognition of this diversity “on the ground” has led to a new emphasis on ethnography in the growing study of “popular religion”.

> The emergence of the subject of “popular religion” ... stems largely from the ascendancy of social history over intellectual history, and from the growing acceptance among historians of the perspectives offered by anthropologists, ethnographers, and folklorists. Instead of focusing on formal doctrines and the clerical elites who formulated them, as past generations had done, historians have steadily turned their attention to the way in which religion was actually lived out by individuals and societies, and especially by those who were not clerics. (Eire 2006: 2).

In Latin America, the study of popular religion is closely linked to the study of local identity. As summed up in the introduction to one collection of studies on religion in Spain and the Americas: “we aspire ... to valorize ... the role of popular beliefs, rites, and behaviors in the gestation of community and territorial identities; their current survivals and their evolution—in their forms, in their function, and their constant

readaptations—through the long course of time" (Mendoza 2000: 11, my translation). Through the particularity of localized Catholic practice, people can imagine their religious community as congruent with a bounded political entity. In this spirit, I aim to show how *gaita* music functions as a forceful and passionate promoter of local religious identity in Maracaibo, Zulia, Venezuela.

Origins of the Cults of Saints and Mary in Latin America

Throughout the world, saint worship is frequently the way that Catholicism (and other religions such as Sufi Islam and Buddhism) is localized and made important in the daily lives of people. While Catholic theology clearly emphasizes the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as the focal point of worship, a great deal of attention is placed on the intervention of the Virgin Mary and other saints, and in many communities, devotional energy would appear to be far more focused on patron saints than the Trinity. Regional patron saints are believed to have specific power in interceding for the local faithful. In many instances, relics, representations, or apparitions of saints, especially of the Virgin Mary, have become local, regional (or in some cases, global) pilgrimage points for Catholics. In particular, the "Roman Catholic emphasis upon Mary is one of the things that most distinguishes the Roman Catholic Church from other Christian groups" (Carroll, M. 1986: xi). Although some popular saints are not even recognized by the Vatican (yet), for Catholics of a given place, engaging in local, popular Catholic rituals may be more important than attending mass or following other prescribed core rituals of Catholic worship.

In Latin America, belief practices that emphasize localized patron saints can be traced to the Spanish Conquest. Evangelization was an essential element of Spanish colonialism, and the friars, priests, and other missionaries used the saints as a way to make the abstract religion more comprehensible to Native Americans. In his essay "Icons of Devotion", Antonio Rubial García explains that the actual images of saints were crucial to the spread of Christianity, both in Europe and later in Mexico and Latin America, and the saints offered specific examples of how to act like a Christian.

> For the church, saints were models of virtue that the faithful could imitate; for individuals, they were transformed into beings that could grant property, wealth and children. Cities and their inhabitants considered them, in addition to being protectors against plagues and disasters, their heroes; as such, saints offered social cohesion and a chance at collective identity. (Rubial García 2006: 38)

The iconography itself was crucial in bridging the language gap that existed between the evangelizers and the Indians. Obviously, an image of the Virgin or a saint conveyed much more information to Indians than an unreadable bible. Festivals for local patron saints quickly evolved into the most important holidays on the calendar, and the friars got the local chiefs to help organize these events. "It was important that organizing the fiestas of the patron saint ... was one of the principle functions of the indigenous authorities of the *cabildo* (town council)" (Rubial García 2006: 46). Thus it was through devotion to saints that the Native Americans came to accept the Roman calendar in the Latin American colonies.

While the patron saint of any community may be the recipient of intense local devotional practice, an appearance of the Virgin induces extra passion, for several reasons. For one, Mary is, theologically speaking, the holiest of all saints. In Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology, Mary is the *theotokos*, the "God-bearer," the one who birthed

Jesus (who is considered both God and human). As early as the fifth century at the Council of Ephesus, the Church recognized Mary's holiness, probably in reaction to popular devotion (Carroll, M. 1986: 5). Significantly, Mary was specifically chosen for her role as the "mother of God", according to biblical and contemporaneous sources. While other saints are often revered for their faithful actions, and Mary is revered in particular for her acceptance of the angel's message that she would bear a son who would redeem the world, in Catholic dogma, she stands apart as a human who was conceived without original sin—through an "Immaculate Conception"—for the purpose of mothering Christ. In this sense she is treated as the second holiest human of all time, after Jesus.

But more important than this theological explanation for Marian devotion may be the basic appeal of her character in contrast to other icons of Catholic worship. In his detailed history of the Church's struggle to evangelize colonial Guatemala, historian Adrian Van Oss explains Mary's attractiveness as a peaceful symbol.

> The first image that many Indians saw, associated with the Christian cult, was the Spanish patron *Santiago Matamoros*, the saint on horseback, brandishing a bloody sword, and presiding over a field of Moslem corpses. Seeing the veneration accorded to this image, anyone might reasonably conclude that the God of the Spanish was a cruel and angry one. On the other hand, paradoxically, the Spanish church also gave great weight to the seemingly opposed cult of humility and forgiveness embodied in the Virgin Mary, so much so that many neophytes came to baptize everything connected with the church with her name: 'the Mass, thing of Santa María; holy water, water of Santa María; the sermon, word of Santa María, all without any clear idea of what or who Santa María might be. (Van Oss 1986: 19)

So, to put it simply, Mary's character may be more appealing than any other offered by Christianity. She is the ultimate mother: humble, forgiving, nurturing. Additionally, most polytheistic belief systems of Native Americans included female divine figures, and these

could be syncretized with the Virgin Mary. This has been shown to the case for the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City, whose church was built on Tepeyac hill, which "had previously been the shrine of Tonantzin, an earth goddess, and one of the major divinities of the Aztec people (Rodríguez 1994: 41). While I have found no specific evidence of this kind of syncretism having happened with La Chinita in Maracaibo—her discovery came two centuries after the initiation of Spanish conquest in the region—it seems quite possible that Mary would have had a certain appeal to the local Wayú Indians who have a matrilineal family system.

Saints and Sovereignty: Imagining the state as a religious community

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson encouraged us to study "the style in which [communities] are imagined" (Anderson 1983: 6). But in his selective history of the development of nationalism in the new world, he downplays the role of religion. He argues that the nationalism that led to independence movements was an enlightenment concept that arose largely from consumption of print media like newspapers, as a secular alternative to the dynastic rule of the church.

While this may have been true in some situations, scholars of Latin American history have questioned Anderson's history's emphasis on print media and his downplaying of religion, in some cases even showing that his historical examples were hypothetical. To me, as a student of Venezuelan history, Anderson's most profound assertion about the importance of print in fomenting revolution is: "the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers" (Anderson 1983: 62). Curiously, Anderson offers

no reference to historical documentation of this assertion, and subsequent historical studies have shown that, in fact, no newspaper was published in Caracas prior to the revolution.

> The first printing press and the first newspaper of Caracas date only from 1808, the very same year in which the crisis of the Spanish monarchy began. How then—and how rapidly—did the consciousness of a new national "we" develop? Was the resulting imagined community Caracas or Venezuela? And the case of Chile is even more challenging to Anderson's assertions. There the first press and first newspaper did not begin to operate until 1812, when a local junta had already assumed power. (Guerra 2003: 6)

Thus, it seems unlikely that print media like newspapers preceded the rise of nationalism that would lead to independence movements in the Spanish new world, especially in Venezuela.

Just as suspect as Anderson's emphasis on print media in his history of independence movements is his belief in their supposed secular nature. Curiously, Anderson offers no analysis when he mentions "*nuestra santa revolución* [our holy revolution], the beautiful neologism created by José María Morelos y Pavón (proclaimer in 1813 of the Republic of Mexico)" (Anderson 1983: 193). In what way was it "holy"? He fails to recognize that "Mexico's wars of independence began with a massive insurrection of peasant armies that marched under the banner of Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe" (Chasteen 2003: xvi). In other words, Anderson downplayed—or even ignored—the fact that the Mexican revolution had significant religious connotations and that the medium that allowed for imagining Mexico as a community was likely not newspapers, but rather local religious practice, specifically, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Presumably, other Latin American independence movements also relied on religious symbols and fervor to rally people to revolution. In his critique of Anderson's

theory, historian François-Xavier Guerra (2003) suggests that religious media, such as paintings and other images of local patron saints, were more important than secular newspapers in new community imaginings in Latin America. Religious ceremonies were especially important in building community consciousness. “The processions integral to the feasts of patron saints and to important dates on the liturgical calendar, the prayers that responded to moments of particular need such as wars, epidemics, and natural disasters—these brought the community together both figuratively and physically” (Guerra 2003: 8).

In *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: an Anthropology of Nationalism* (2001), Claudio Lomnitz offers a thorough critique of Anderson’s history of nationalism in Latin America. One of his key points is that “A fundamental error in Anderson’s account of the history of nationalism is his insistence on associating it with secularization. In the case of Spain, whose formation as a nation is certainly one of the earliest, the opposite is the case: national consciousness emerges as an offshoot of religious expansionism” (Lomnitz 2001: 14–15). In essence, Spain itself rose as a national entity as a means of expanding the Roman Catholic Church and its influence over Europe, as the source of its royal family’s power was from the church. (At the time, in fact, what we now think of as “Europe” was more likely conceived of as “Christendom,” the area over which the Church had influence.)

As the Spanish crown grew in power through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the “nationalization of the church became much more significant with expansion to America” (Lomnitz 2001: 16). Historian Adrian Van Oss summarizes the relationship between the Church and Spain in the American colonies as follows.

> The terms were outlined in a series of papal bulls, the first of which appeared in 1493. [They granted] absolute power and jurisdiction over the new territories in return for their subjugation, or 'reduction', to the church. Since the bulls also effectively transferred ultimate control of the American church from the papacy to the Crown, Spain found these terms congenial. Under the provisions of royal patronage (*patronato real*), reduction to the church meant reduction to the Crown. (Van Oss 1986: 2)

Thus the political and economic colonization of the Spanish "new world" was so intertwined with evangelization that the Native Americans could draw little distinction between church and state. Van Oss goes so far as to entitle his study of early Guatemalan parish life *Catholic Colonialism*, and he argues, "Catholicism remains the principal colonial heritage of Spain in America" (p. xi).

Just as "Spanish nationalism was in fact based on the national appropriation of the true faith" (Lomnitz 2001: 14), Mexican nationalism grew along with a quest for local control of that faith. As an example, Lomnitz quotes the Mexican independence leader Morelos who in 1812 wrote "that our struggle comes down to defending and protecting in all of its rights our holy religion, which is the aim of our sights, and to extend the cult of Our Lady the Virgin Mary" (Lomnitz 2001: 29). Significantly, prior to his role as revolutionary leader, Morelos was a priest.

The key to the significance of the Virgin Mary in the independence struggle of Mexico (and perhaps in other Latin American nationalisms) is that she symbolized a local manifestation of God outside the control of the Spanish colonial power. That is, by appearing in the New World as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary gave the people a sense of independent divine authority that did not necessarily rely on the Spanish crown and its connection to Rome. The nationalism that grew in Mexico was linked with the appearance of Guadalupe and was somewhat different from the secular nationalisms that

would later emerge in Enlightenment-era Europe. According to historian D.A. Brading, "The Mexican creoles also lived in cities far removed from Rome and Madrid and were ignorant of the scientific discoveries and historical skepticism that threatened the baroque forms of post-Tridentine Catholicism. But thanks to Our Lady of Guadalupe, they lived close to the Virgin Mary, convinced that the Mother of God had chosen their country and nation for her particular protection" (Brading 2001: 168).

This sense that the Virgin Mary "chooses" where to appear is crucial to the way Catholics interpret her appearance in a certain place. Her appearance in a particular place is treated as a privileged expression of God's love for a particular group of people. The existence of a Virgin whom a community can claim as "their own" leads to the reification of the community's existence. Further, people come to treat the local appearance of the Virgin as "their" Virgin, complete with qualities, features, and powers that distinguish her both from images in other localities and from the general sense of who Mary was.

One reason that Mexicans identify with Guadalupe is that she is seen as a *mestiza* representation of the Virgin Mary, and Mexico is often imagined as a nation of *mestizos*. "To Western Christians accustomed to images of a blonde and blue-eyed Mary, this Lady must surely appear incongruous; her olive skin tells the indigenous people of Mexico that she, La Morenita, is one of them. It tells all Mexicans and, indeed, all Latinos that she is one of them" (Goizueta 2003: 145). Instead of looking like the icon of Renaissance Europe, her skin tone is dark enough that she appears to be of mixed race.

Returning to the importance of La Chinita in Zulia, in his theological history of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá, Brother Nectario María described the community's reaction

to the sudden appearance of the Virgin's image on a small board of wood found in Lake Maracaibo:

> El espíritu del pueblo maracaibero se sintió conmovido por la convicción íntima de que la Virgen María había bajado hasta él, con la milagrosa renovación del cuadro. El dedo de Dios estaba allí y parecía que una voz de lo alto hubiese dejado oír a la multitud este mandato: <<Creed y orad>>. [María: 19]
>
> The spirit of the Maracaibo people felt moved by the intimate conviction that the Virgin Mary had come right down to them, with the miraculous restoration of the [image on the] board. The finger of God was there, and it seemed that a voice from on high had been heard by the multitude giving this command: "Believe and pray."

While some Spanish speakers would read that holy command—"Creed y orad"—as the imperative verb conjugation for the pronoun *vosotros*, the informal second person plural used in Spain, this pronoun is not used in Maracaibo. Rather, I believe Brother Nectario was using the imperative form for the archaic pronoun *vos* (the informal, singular "you"), which is still used in informal Zulian dialect (instead of *tú*). It is this linguistic curiosity that most distinguishes Zulian Spanish from the rest of Venezuela (and much of Latin America, for that matter). In other words, Brother María goes so far as to suggest that the voice of God was heard in the local dialect, a distinctly localized holy commandment.

"La Devoción" is one example of a gaita that conveys this idea of God's local intervention in the appearance of La Chinita in Maracaibo. Beloved singer Jose "Bolita" Ríos sang the dramatic lead with the group Saladillo in 1967—a classic recording still heard today on the radio and CD compilations. The chorus makes clear that the Virgin in question is the Virgin of Chiquinquirá *of Zulia*. This is emphasized in the way that "del Zulia" sounds almost like a separate line of text. Then in the second verse, the singer describes how God "retouched" the image of La Chinita, and by doing so, made her the

queen of Zulia. (The retouching refers to how the image miraculously appeared on the wooden board—to be described in more detail later.)

-estribillo-	-chorus-
Que siga la devoción. Del Zulia siempre será Virgen de la Chiquinquirá Del Zulia. Echanos la bendición	May the devotion continue. She will always be from Zulia. Virgin of Chiquinquirá of Zulia, Cast your blessing upon us.
-verso II-	-2nd verse-
Dios te retoca de grana Con estilo y sencillez Y eso te da la altivez De ser la reina zuliana	God retouched you [the picture] Elegantly, with style and simplicity Giving you the pride Of being the Zulian Queen

Gaita lyrics frequently refer to La Chinita as a *reina* (queen) or *soberana* (sovereign). The second verse of "La Devoción" succinctly conveys the sense that it was God himself who gave her the royal title. Of course, having a queen—a sovereign leader whose power comes from God—suggests something about her royal subjects: that they are a sovereign people who exist as a community because of God's will. (Perhaps coincidentally, *gaiteros* and cultural promoters often refer to *gaita* as *la reina del folclor*, which also plays upon the idea of local sovereignty.)

Just as in Mexico where Our Lady of Guadalupe is seen as a *mestiza* Virgin, the brownness of the image of La Chinita gives her a locally racialized identity in Maracaibo. "Reina Morena" (Brown Queen) is one of her popular nicknames, and this is the title of one of the most popular *gaitas* ever written about her (to be discussed in more detail

later). Such a title combines two common nicknames that men use to address women in Maracaibo. Terms like *reina* and *princesa* are typical terms of endearment, and *mi negra* and *mi morena* are often used as substitutes for "wife" or "girlfriend". Thus to call La Chinita the Reina Morena elevates her to a royal status while simultaneously bringing her into the vocabulary that males use for their female partners—a blurring of formal and familiar that is common in Venezuelan speech. Such is the combination of reverence and intimacy that many *gaitas* convey. In the hymn to La Chinita, which is sung at masses and concerts during the Feria, there is even a racial reference to her. In the first verse, she is referred to as "Autóctono Virgen de rostro bronceado" (autochthonous Virgin with the bronzed face). In this phrase, the idea that she is autochthonous—native, of this place—is linked to her dark skin, just as most Venezuelans could be said to have a bronzed complexion.

In Venezuelan history, official government policies encouraged the celebration of regional saints as a way of drawing disparate local cultures into the national whole. In the 1950s, the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship promoted both sacred and secular folklore to unify the country. He created the annual Semana de la Patria [Week of the Fatherland] cultural celebration to use music, dance, and popular religion in propaganda to support the dictatorship.

> The sacralization of politics implied also the politicization of religion. In contrast to AD [the Acción Democrática party that had overthrown the previous dictatorship], which had alienated the Catholic Church when it tried to regulate Catholic educational institutions, Pérez Jiménez actively encouraged the Church's evangelizing efforts and promoted the establishment of regional patron saints throughout the country. The government promoted Catholicism and the cult of the Virgin Mary throughout the nation. Each year, a different Virgin was named patron saint of the Week of the Fatherland, and pilgrimages and masses were organized to worship her in cities throughout the country. (Coronil 1997: 170)

The propaganda that accompanied the Semana de la Patria was not subtle. In a folio introducing *gaita* music to the national stage, the author mentions the religious blessing that having a regional representation of the Virgin Mary would bring.

> Para apreciar cómo se motoriza la recuperación de la psiquis nacional, veamos los medios que el Gobierno emplea para lograrlo:
> ...
> Ese el marco de la gran fiesta nacionalista. Porque, simultáneamente, los actos religiosos en acción de gracias al Todopoderoso, Dios de nuestros mayores i de nosotros todos; la jira anual a Caracas de la Madre Celestial, en la reliquia de alguna de sus Advocaciones veneradas en la Repúublica, para que presida como Divina Patrona la "Semana de la Patira."
>
> In order to appreciate how the recuperation of the national psyche is motorized, we see these media that the Government employs to achieve this:
> ...
> It's the mark of a great nationalistic festival. Because, simultaneously, the religious ceremonies in thanksgiving to the All-powerful, God of the greatest and of us all; the annual tour to Caracas of the Heavenly Mother, in the form of the relic of her venerated invocations in the Republic, so that she can preside as the "Week of the Fatherland" Divine Patron. (Hernández-Yepes 1956: 2–3)

Since then, various levels of the Venezuelan government have used religious folklore in numerous ways to help maintain popular support. Most relevant to my study, the Feria de la Chinita enjoys considerable state and municipal (and probably federal) support in Maracaibo. This has become more obvious in the past decade as the Venezuelan political situation has become increasingly polarized under the presidency of Hugo Chávez. In Maracaibo, the two most important levels of government are the *alcaldía* (city mayor) and the *gobernación* (Zulian governor), whose offices sit on opposite sides of the Plaza Bolívar in the center of Maracaibo. Since the election of Chávez as president in 1998, the *alcaldía* and the *gobernación* have tended to filp-flop from *chavista* to *oposición*, i.e., in one term the mayor is *chavista* and the governor is

anti-Chávez, and in the next term, it is the other way around. So there has been a constant power struggle in the state as each side tries to win support among the people. This is on display in recent years at the Feria, where different events and stages are sponsored by either the city or the state, giving each side the chance to hang its banners and flags and have its officials appear to speak to the crowd. The result of this struggle has been an apparent increase in state support for the religiously themed Feria, as each side of the political spectrum aims to sway the faithful.

Imagining a Community with a Common Calendar

In his explanation for the birth of nationalism, borrowing ideas from Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson argues that people developed a new way of apprehending time that was different from that of the medieval period. Crucial to this argument is a change in the sense of "simultaneity" from the "Messianic" time of the middle ages—in which all history is, in a sense, simultaneously waiting for the second coming of Christ—to modern way of thinking by which people can imagine their fellow citizens engaged in activities separate but simultaneous to their own. This (supposedly) new way of conceiving of simultaneity created a sense of homogeneous, empty time that allowed people to think of their community as moving through history together. He credits secular print media, especially novels, for this (supposedly) new calendrical fashion of apprehending time (Anderson 1983: 22-36).

I agree that this sense of simultaneity can be an important element in a group's ability to imagine themselves as a community; however, I see little reason to credit print

media for the development of this understanding of time. Sharing a calendar of important dates helps people to imagine their community, and participating in mass activities on a more or less fixed schedule allows people to witness the community coming together. For example, my fellow residents of the United States and I can imagine our community, in part, because we share a calendar of holidays that are, more or less, particular to our nation, and we can imagine our peers celebrating in ways similar to our own. These include yard parties and fireworks on *our* Independence Day on July 4th and family turkey dinners on *our* Thanksgiving Day on the fourth Thursday of November. In a sense, we are a community because we share in these common activities and we expect that we will all be engaged in similar events on an annual basis.

In Latin America, people had been operating on a calendrical system for some time even during the colonial period, and this sense of a recurring annual pattern was created primarily by the schedule of holy days on the Catholic calendar. "Government policy making in the Spanish world was running on empty time long before the industrialization of print media" (Lomnitz 2001: 22). As mentioned in the previous section, the Catholic calendar of feast days of saints was adopted in the New World. Long before locally printed novels and newspapers promoted community synchrony, the church calendar of saints' feast days and other holidays organized time. And since different communities placed emphasis on different saints, the calendar of one city, region, or nation would be somewhat different from others. The religious calendar operates on both global and local levels. Thinking of the Church as a whole, dates such as Easter, Christmas, the Annunciation, and others are "holy days of obligation", days, like all Sundays, when all Catholics are expected to attend mass. But the feast days of various

saints are only important to those communities who recognize those saints as locally significant patrons. The feast day might be the namesake of a parish or a town, or, as in the case of La Chinita in modern Maracaibo, a unique regional holiday recognized by the Vatican only for its local significance to a particular community.

In the rest of Venezuela, the eighteenth of November holds no particular significance, and the people of Maracaibo know that. But in Maracaibo, it is the feast day of La Chinita, the biggest celebration (both secular and sacred) of the year. It is the early peak of the holiday season that ends with Christmas and New Years, but in terms of exuberant energy, no other holiday compares with La Chinita's day. Thus the calendrical focal point that helps Maracaibo imagine itself as a community is the knowledge that every year, mid-November will be celebrated with the Feria de la Chinita culminating with her feast day of the eighteenth. November 18th is sanctioned by the Church as the feast day of Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Chiquiniquirá for Maracaibo only, and the rest of the Church throughout the world would not recognize the date with any particular significance. (Or, in any given place, 18 November might be recognized as some other holy day of local significance.) The important thing is that the people of Maracaibo recognize it as *their* Catholic holiday, the celebration that localizes Catholicism for them and makes their religious practice distinct from others. Their local religious calendar revolves around that date and the Feria events that lead up to it.

Gaitas and the *gaita* music industry help create this calendrical sense of time. In Maracaibo, one speaks of *la temporada gaitera* (the *gaita* season) as the final three or four months of the year when groups put out their CDs and promote their songs on radio and TV and in live performances. For *gaiteros*, the rest of the year is the preparation

(composing, recording, rehearsing) for *la temporada*. People compare the songs of one year to another, which creates a sense of people moving through history together. This historicity is also seen as *gaiteros* speak of the groups with which they have performed: "I was with Saladillo last season, but now I'm in Cardenales del Pueblo."

Besides the fact that the *gaita* season follows the religious holidays of La Chinita's day into the Christmas season, numerous *gaitas* actually mention the date of the feast day, perhaps none more clearly than "18 de noviembre", a huge hit for the group Maracaibo 15 in 1983 that is still played and performed frequently. The song was written by an elder statesman of the *gaita* world, Euripides Romero, who is credited with dozens of hit *gaitas* since the 1960s. The chorus clearly tells what happens on November 18th.

-estribillo-	chorus
El 18 de noviembre A San Juan de Dios nos vamos Y con amor te adoramos Virgen de Chiquinquirá Porque vos con tu bondad, Milagrosa virgencita, Tenéis la gracia infinita De bendecir mi ciudad	On the 18th of November We go to San Juan de Dios [Basilica] And with fervor, we adore you, Virgin of Chiquinquirá Because you, with your kindness, Miraculous little Virgin, Have the infinite grace To bless my city.

This chorus, which is sung six times in the recorded version, reminds the listeners in Maracaibo of the time and place where it is easiest to imagine their community: November 18th every year when thousands gather at the Basilica of San Juan de Dios to express their adoration for the Virgin of Chiquinquirá. It is a date that means something to them because it marks the anniversary of this particular Virgin choosing to bless their

city with her presence. The city can be imagined as a community because they are all blessed by this Virgin, and they all gather as the "we" who adore their *patrona.*

Personal Encounters with La Chinita

I first arrived in Maracaibo on November 9, 2000. I had deliberately come at this time because of the popular celebration of the *Féria de la Chinita*, the Chinita's Fair, perhaps the most important popular festivity of the year and most active time of the religious (and *gaita*) calendar in Maracaibo, which culminates in the feast day of the patron saint on November 18th. I arrived on the flight from Caracas in mid-afternoon, and as I exited the Aeropuerto Internacional "La Chinita", I was immediately impressed by the blazing sun and stifling heat for which Maracaibo is famous. I was in *la tierra del sol amada*, the land of the beloved sun.

After checking into my hotel in one of the newer parts of town a few miles from the old city center, I walked about a half mile in the blazing heat to the U.S.-sponsored English language school. There, I met with Andreina Rangel, a young Venezuelan on the staff there to whom my contacts in the cultural section of the U.S. embassy in Caracas had referred me. After she helped me get oriented (and cooled off in the air conditioned office), Andreina offered to give me a short driving tour around Maracaibo and drop me at the Basilica, the large church in the old part of town that houses the sacred relic of La Chinita.

We drove from the newer part of town in the north toward the lakeshore, turning toward the old city center onto the broad Avenida El Milagro. I would later learn that the Avenue is named for the miracle (*milagro*) of the appearance of the image of La Chinita

in a house on that street.) The northern lake shore of Maracaibo is an odd string of tall condominiums, unfinished hotels, a great deal of undeveloped space, and El Paseo, a large barren-feeling park. As you head south toward the older part of town on El Milagro, you get a sense of the odd fits and starts of development and building that have occurred in Venezuela and particularly in Maracaibo. At one point some older, brightly colored houses appeared on the right hand side of the road, and Andreina turned us into the neighborhood of El Enlosa'o, the parish of Santa Lucía, where I would soon spend several nights a week hanging out at streetcorner *cervezarías* with *gaiteros*. We zig-zagged through the narrow streets trying to find our way to the other side, and I remember feeling nervous (thanks to the fear instilled in me from life in Caracas) but also thrilled at the thought that within only a few hours of landing in Maracaibo, I was already learning my way around an historic *barrio*. We then found our way down to the dock areas in the real downtown area, and I got a sense of what the old bustling port of Maracaibo must have been like some century earlier. (Now, as in most major seaports, most of the cargo ships dock in gated, industrial areas. Andreina pointed out the Lía Bermudez Contemporary Art Museum, which was once a public market (the Mercado de Buchones, which is the subject of a famous gaita by Astolfo Romero and will be discussed in another chapter). Finally, we wound up at the Basilica of San Juan de Dios, in the neighborhood once known as El Saladillo, named for the salting of fish that took place there, and Andreina left me on my own to explore.

Around 6 pm, as the evening rush hour bustled around the old part of town, with commuters fighting to get into buses, taxis, and especially *por puestos* (big, old, dilapidated sedans that you share with others, paying *por puesto*, "by the seat"), I escaped

the roar of rush hour into the calmer migration of the faithful walking across the huge concrete plaza to the Basilica, one of the most impressive churches in Venezuela. Its façade consists of two tall, domed bell towers on either side of a large, columned entablature; with a frieze intricately painted in *tromp l'oeil* style (painting designed to "trick the eye" by appearing to be three-dimensional sculpted plaster). This was the second day of the novena, nine days of prayer, that leads up November 18th, the feast day of Nuestra Virgen del Rosario de Chiquinquirá, La Chinita, and the Basilica was open extra hours for worshippers to come to pay their respects to their *patrona*. By this time of the late afternoon, the church was packed with hundreds of *marianos* and *marianas* (devotees of the Virgin Mary) who were being led in a public recitation of the Rosary, the Catholic prayer cycle of "Hail Marys" interspersed with the Lord's Prayer. Nuns took turns intoning the prayers over a PA system that echoed through the church and provided a steady drone amid the din of people moving about. There were already hundreds of people in the church, and more were coming every minute as people came to pay their respects on their way home from work. The large church has three main aisles, and the far right one led to an impressive gold-plated throne-like structure that housed the tiny painting of La Chinita.

As I entered the church, I crossed myself three times (I'd adapted to this custom in Venezuelan churches instead of the single sign of the cross that we do in U.S. churches), and got on the long line of worshippers on the right aisle. As the line slowly progressed, I looked all around the church at the intricate *trompe l'oeil* painting all over the walls and ceiling, the stained glass windows that depict aspects of the legend of La Chinita, and the near-life-size 3-D figures of Jesus, saints, and martyrs in recesses in the

walls. The church was not air conditioned, and the half dozen large electric fans provided little relief unless you were lucky enough to get a seat right in front of one, so it was quite hot, and I observed how everyone in Maracaibo carries a *pañuelo* (handkerchief or small washcloth) with them to wipe the perspiration off their brow throughout the day. (I would do the same starting the following day.) Standing on line, I noticed that I was taller than almost everyone in the church. Many of the people appeared to be fairly poor and of mixed race, especially Indian, background, though there were some seemingly upper class white people there, too. (I made that judgment based on the professional attire and the large bouquets of flowers that wealthier devotees bring to La Chinita.) As I'd read about in guide books, I even saw some Wayú Indian women dressed in their colorful *mantas*, shoulder-to-ankle wraps. While there were many elderly people who seemed to be there alone, entire families with children filled whole pews and the aisles. All but the most rambunctious kids wore pious, earnest expressions on their faces. Though the mood in the church was not somber or cold, I could sense the pious gravity of the moment. While some people stared a bit at me, the tall blond *gringo*, an obvious foreigner, most paid no attention to me as they were focused on their religious purpose.

After about half an hour, I finally arrived at the front of line to pay my respects to La Chinita. I genuflected, something that I was taught to do in churches in the United States, though done less in Venezuela, crossed myself, and gazed at the tiny painting at the center of the ornate golden display. I glanced at those around me. Some mumbled prayers like the "Hail Mary" to themselves, while others stared intently at the picture that seemed so far away. (At this point, no one seemed at all distracted by the *gringo* in their midst—they were busy focusing their prayers on the image.) Although my own religious

past was full of skepticism, especially for the Catholic devotion to saints that seemed so oddly superstitious when I recalled my grandmother doing it, I suddenly found myself ready to ask for mercy from this holy object. While I'd come mainly to observe, I found I was quickly overcome by the spirituality and devotion of the moment. I realized what it was that I had come for, and I offered a prayer: "Virgen de Chiquinquirá, I have come here to do research toward my thesis, and I ask for your help. I have come here because I love the music of your people, and I want to know more about it. Thank you for bringing me here safely. I promise to be true to the people I am studying, to represent them as best I can, and to treat them as well as I can. In exchange for my faithfulness to my purpose, I ask for your blessing and help with my work. Please keep me safe and help me to understand your people so that I can best represent them to all who read my words. Amen." It was a profound and largely unanticipated spiritual moment for me. Shortly thereafter, a choir of mostly young people on the opposite side of the altar from me began singing what would begin the evening mass. They sang one of the many *gaitas* for La Virgen de Chiquinquirá, though at the time I did not know the repertoire well enough to identify it. The choir was accompanied by *cuatros* and a *furro*, and the booming of the bass friction drum reverberated through the church creating such a furious drone that it drowned out almost everything. I felt very much at home and at peace, though I did not really know where I was or what I would do next. I stayed for part of the mass, but I left when it started to get dark, realizing that I needed to find a taxi back to my hotel. As it was my first day in Maracaibo, I did not yet know my way around.

In the coming months, my new friends in Maracaibo would be overjoyed when I described this anecdote to them. On the one hand, they appreciated my respect for their

local patron and my recognition of her power to help me. (I should add that most Venezuelans were pleasantly surprised to learn that I was Catholic and not Protestant, and this generally helped in my assimilation.) Others interpreted my story not so much as my action but as evidence of La Chinita's power in the way she drew me in spiritually and offered to help me. My friends would remind me on many occasions that La Chinita is very powerful and that she has earned all of our devotion through her intercessions. One even said directly that la Chinita must have compelled the *gaiteros* to help me with my research in answer to my prayer.

My friends in Maracaibo interpreted my prayer to La Chinita on my first day there as *pagar una promesa* (making a promise). The Catholic tradition of promising devotion to a saint in exchange for answered prayers is very strong among *marianos* in Maracaibo. Some *promesas* are as simple as promising to recite the "Hail Mary" daily. Some people make elaborate *promesas* when serious circumstances arise, most often the ill health of a family member. One friend told me of her coworker who promised La Chinita that for help in curing her daughter's serious illness, and in exchange she would walk to the Basilica twice a week for several months (quite a feat considering the heat and distance involved) to offer flowers and pray the Rosary. Another form of *promesa* that is frequently seen in the Basilica is for a devotee to walk on his or her knees from the back of the church up to the altar, while praying to La Chinita. A *promesa* may include cash or material offerings, especially flowers, to La Chinita. Of this sort, there is a display in the Basilica of military badges and medals that soldiers have offered to La Chinita as thanks for their survival in combat.

Several *gaita* lyrics speak of the tradition of making *promesas*, most obviously the 1987 hit "Mis Promesas." It was written by Heriberto Molina, one of the most sought after composers of the last thirty years. (As described in Chapter III, when I first met Heriberto in Santa Lucía, in a generous display of his spontaneous talent, he composed a *décima* in support of my research.) The singer is "El Colosal" Ricardo Cepeda, at the peak of his tenure with the group Cardenales del Éxito. In the serious minor-key introduction, the singer tells that La Chinita once answered a specific prayer, so now he will always attend her procession on November 18th.

En la tarde de tu día Esperando voy a estar Cuando la feligresía Te saque China a pasear Una vez te fui a implorar Y mi clamor fue atendido China lo he prometido Con fe te lo iré a pagar	In the afternoon of your feast day I will be waiting When the parishioners Take you out in procession. One time, I went to implore And my clamor was heard. China, I have promised With faith I will pay you for it.

The chorus then takes this common experience of attending the procession and firmly places the singer in "la grey", the imagined community of the congregation of Maracaibo and the neighborhood of Saladillo. (The choruses alternate between saying "la grey maracaibera" and "la grey saladillera".)

Spanish	English
Se me pondrá el corazon Del tamaño de este cielo Cuando te lleve con celo Cargada en tu procesión Y viviré la emoción De tu grey saladillera/maracaibera Parado sobre la acera Pidiendo tu bendición	It will make my heart As big as the heavens When you are lifted with zeal To be carried in procession, And I will live the emotion Of the Saladillo/Maracaibo flock Waiting in the street Praying for your blessing.

Another verse introduces the idea that one might make a *promesa por penitencia*, a way of making penance for some wrongdoing. The singer claims he carried La Chinita the entire length of Calle Ciencias (formerly Calle Derecha), the long street that begins at the Basilica's plaza and continues to the Cathedral on Plaza Bolívar. Presumably, the singer means he will be among the dozens of *marianos* in white uniforms who carry La Chinita in a massive gold display on top of a weighty platform. These *marianos* who carry the image spend months in preparation for the procession and have to earn the privilege of carrying the platform.

Spanish	English
Y una vez por penitencia Otra promesa pagué Y cargada te llevé Por toda la Calle Ciencias Te acompaño cada aurora De tu luz quiero ser digno Y como dice tu himno Gloria a tí casta señora	And one time, as penance I paid another promise That I would carry you All the way down Sciences Street. I'll be with you every dawn I want to be deserving of your light And as you hymn says, "Glory to you, chaste lady."

This verse ends with a reference to La Chinita's hymn, which begins, "Gloria a tí, casta señora." This hymn is sung at many events of the Feria, especially at masses and *gaita* concerts at the Basilica.

About a month after my first arrival in Maracaibo, after the Féria was over, I got myself into a situation where I really needed la Chinita's help. One Saturday night I

decided to return to the old part of town on my own, to see what was going on at the Basilica and look for live *gaita* singing on Calle Carabobo, a street of historically preserved houses and bars. It was an oddly quiet night. I went to the Basilica, paid my respects to la Chinita, and witnessed a wedding of a poor couple. Seeing that there was not much else going on at the Basilica, I walked the few blocks to Calle Carabobo, noticing the unusual lack of people on the street for a Saturday night. I arrived at the bar El Enlosa'o and found it closed for the night—I would find no live music on this night. Across the street, the restaurant El Zaguán was open, but without customers. There I discovered the reason for the lack of activity was that the following day was an election day, and because alcohol sales are prohibited on the eve of an election, there was no nightlife. I decided to return to the house where I was staying with a family, but I stupidly declined the offer from the restaurant to call a taxi for me, since in the past, I was used to finding taxis easily in that area. So I began walking around looking for a cab. While trying to hail a taxi in front of the Hotel El Milagro, a thin guy ran up behind me and ripped off my fannypack, which held my video camera and some other belongings. I gave brief chase until I realized it was not at all safe to pursue a thief down a dark alley in an unfamiliar part of Maracaibo. I eventually made it back home in a *por puesto* (shared fixed-route taxi) feeling quite shaken up and furious (at myself and the robbery). The next day I related my story to the family's housekeeper, and she asked if I had been roughed up at all. I replied that no, I was fine, and that la Chinita must have protected me. She suddenly got very serious, and explained that la Chinita is very powerful, and undoubtedly she was watching over me, since I had just paid respect to her at the Basilica before the mugging, and the spot where I was robbed was within a few blocks of the spot

where the miracle of her appearance had occurred some centuries prior. I had been on holy ground. While I felt quite violated by the crime, nearly everyone in Maracaibo is the victim of crime at some point, and to escape completely unscathed can be seen as a blessing. Numerous people assured me that given the situation I put myself in, I was fortunate, and clearly I would have been in much worse shape without the *patrona*'s protection.

The Origin Story of the Image of La Chinita

In addition to plaques in churches and newspaper articles printed every year around the feast day, numerous *gaitas* tell the origin story of La Chinita. It is a story that, I suspect, nearly every resident of Maracaibo could retell, and the story contains layers of local significance for them. In the early 1700s, a poor washerwoman was washing clothes on the shores of Lake Maracaibo. A small (about one square foot) wooden tablet floated to her, and she took it home, thinking it would make a good top for the water jug in her small house. Soon after she brought it home, she noticed an image appearing on the board, so she hung it on her wall. On November 18th, (1709 in most histories, though Brother Nectario offers evidence that it was decades earlier [Nectario 1970: 25–26]), the woman heard a banging noise coming from the wooden board, and it began to glow. Then the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus, flanked by Saints Andrés and Anthony, appeared on the board. Shrieking "Miracle!" in astonishment, she drew the attention of neighbors, and from that day, the picture became a center of popular religious devotion in Maracaibo.

While many songs refer to parts of this story, such as the board coming from the lake or the image miraculously appearing, a few *gaitas* recount it in detail. One example is “La Chinita” written and sung by Ricardo Aguirre with Cardenales del Éxito on their debut album in 1963. Although the recording sounds primitive by modern standards, the song is well known by its inclusion on numerous CD compilations of the great singer Aguirre, and it is frequently played on the radio and at public events during the Feria. Below are the first five of seven verses and the chorus.

<table>
<tr><td>Cuando iba la ancianita
a lavar ropa en el lago
encontró con gran halago
una preciosa tablita.</td><td>When the old woman went
to wash clothes in the lake,
with pleasure she found
a precious little wooden board.</td></tr>
<tr><td>(Estribillo)
Esta es la historia, señores
la que en el Zulia es verdad
La Virgen Chiquinquirá
con sus bellos resplandores
iluminó de colores
nuestra querida ciudad.</td><td>(Chorus)
This is the story, folks
of what’s true in Zulia
The Virgin of Chiquinquirá
with her beautiful radiance
colorfully illuminated
our cherished city.</td></tr>
<tr><td>El tiempo feliz pasó
y la anciana en un gran día
vio que un grabado tenía
la Tablita que encontró.</td><td>Happy time passed
and the old woman, one great day
saw a picture that she had
on the little board that she’d found.</td></tr>
<tr><td>El tiempo pasó gozosa
la anciana de su Tablita
y en una gris tardecita
vio una luz maravillosa.</td><td>The time passed joyfully
the old woman of her little board
and on a gray evening
she saw a marvelous light</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hacia la calle corrió
la anciana mientras gritaba
que estaba maravillada
de aquel milagro que vio</td><td>Into the street ran
the old woman while shouting
that she was marveled
by the miracle that she saw.</td></tr>
</table>

El pueblo se aglomeró Ante la casa dichosa Aquella acción milagrosa Todo el mundo la admiró	The people gathered Before that fortunate house; Everyone admired the Miraculous occurrence.

Two details of the story are worth emphasizing for their significance to Maracaiberos: the location of the board's discovery and the character of its discoverer. The miraculous board was discovered on the shores of Lake Maracaibo. For centuries, even since before the arrival of Europeans, the lake has been the geographical and economic focal point of the region. During the colonial era, Maracaibo grew into a major seaport for goods from Venezuela and Colombia. In the twentieth century, the lake became known as the generator of Venezuela's entire economy—the source of petroleum that is the country's main export. So while everyone from fisherman to oilman recognizes the lake as a source of economic wealth, the story of La Chinita's discovery identifies the lake as the source of spiritual wealth. One *gaitero* once compared how the pre-Hispanic Indians revered the lake as a place of spiritual power to how, post-contact, the lake was the place where God compelled La Chinita to be discovered. In his interpretation, the story provides a connection between modern local Catholic practice and pre-Columbian Indian spirituality. This location of the miraculous discovery is recognized on the modern street map: "El Milagro" (the miracle) is the name of the four-lane boulevard that forms the western border of Maracaibo, running north along the lakefront from the point of La Chinita's discovery. Thus, the border between the city and the lake is "the miracle", or, one might say, the lake and the city are linked by a miracle.

Perhaps most important is what is inferred about the socioeconomic status of the old woman who discovered the miraculous board. Her name is lost in time, making her an anonymous local heroine, presumably of such low status that her name went unrecorded. Many Zulians have pointed out to me how the story suggests that she was so poor that she didn't have a top for her hut's water jug, so she collected a piece of scrap wood from the lake. She was at the lake to wash clothes, and many have told me the story that that means she was poor, too poor to have enough water at her home to do laundry. In many versions of the story, she is described as a washerwoman, perhaps even a servant, for wealthier people. Being a member of the working or servile class implies that she was not a white Spaniard or Creole (most of whom would have formed the elite class in the eighteenth century), but more likely an Indian or a mixed-race Venezuelan. When the washerwoman is depicted in modern paintings, such as the one high above the altar in the Basilica, she appears to have dark skin. All of these characteristics of the woman support the popular belief that La Chinita is a patron of the poor, underprivileged, anonymous, disempowered, mixed-race working class because it was to a member of that class that the Virgin first appeared.

The belief in La Chinita's preference for the poor is further strengthened by the story of another miracle associated with the relic. The final two verses of Aguirre's "La Chinita" present that tale.

El Santo Obispo decía Que en hombros y entre oración En Divina Procesión A la catedral iría.	The Holy Bishop ordered That they would carry her On their shoulders to the cathedral Amid prayers in Divine Procession.

Pero la Virgen Bendita No quiso la Catedral Prefirió el modesto altar Donde hoy se le visita.	But the Blessed Virgin Didn't want the Cathedral She preferred the modest altar Where we visit her today.

According to the story, when the procession tried to move La Chinita to the cathedral, which was the church of the Bishop and the richest families in town, the board became immensely heavy and unmovable. But when the procession moved in the direction toward what is now the Basilica of San Juan de Dios, the board became light. (Numerous other relics throughout the Catholic world share a similar legend of becoming impossibly heavy when an attempt is made to move them to an inappropriate place.) The parish of San Juan de Dios, which occupied a much more modest chapel in the 1700s compared to the modern Basilica, was a church of the working class in the neighborhood of El Saladillo. The area is so named because it was where fish from the lake were salted to preserve them.

Thus, La Chinita is seen as having chosen the working class as the people she would protect. She chose to appear first to a poor washerwoman, and then to reside in the church of the working class people, not the Cathedral of the privileged. Her image is *morena* like the skin of her people. As Rodríguez says of the similar situation in Mexico: "The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a symbol of power for a population in a seemingly powerless situation" (Rodríguez 1994: 121). Likewise, La Chinita is a symbol of spiritual power for the poor of Zulia, a holy maternal figure to protect them and help them. The legends associated with her prove to Zulians that she chose to be amongst the poor working classes as a refuge and an advocate.

Visiting La Chinita on a "Historical Tour"

In February 2001, after a few months of hanging out in the bars of Santa Lucía frequented by *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans, I had become well known as the gringo who had come to study *gaita*. I spent a fair amount of time among the clientele of Pa'Que Diego (Diego's Place), one of several corner *cervezarías* that served beer in the afternoons and early evenings. There I came to know a group of men, mostly 40-60, who, in addition to appreciating the camaraderie of the corner bar, were particularly interested in local history and traditions and sharing their knowledge with me. This love of drinking and local culture led them to plan an historic bus tour for a Sunday afternoon, *la primera gira saladillera*, a tour of the old neighborhood of Saladillo, where several of them had been born. A school bus was loaded with cases of beer, and about a dozen of us chipped in to cover the cost of having a driver take us through the oldest parts of Maracaibo in a roaming party. I learned both details of local geographical history and also how it was nearly impossible for me to keep up with the locals' alcohol consumption. For the most part, the tour was a drunken nostalgia trip, as we went from one little *cervezaría* to another, pausing to have a few beers and sing a few *gaitas* along the way.

The tour took a turn for the serious when we got near the Basilica. Despite the fact that we had been drinking steadily for a couple hours, it was decided that a tour of Saladillo would not be complete without stopping to salute La Chinita in the Basilica. (Though a few men protested that it was inappropriate to go to church in our state, they could not deny that La Chinita was an essential element of Saladillo.) We parked the bus and walked across the plaza to take pictures with the statue of Ricardo Aguirre, the fallen singer of so many famous *gaitas*. Then we approached the Basilica. I remember one

member of the group nervously looking around for a garbage can to get rid of a beer bottle. As we entered, we removed the comical straw hats that we had been given for the tour and everyone crossed themselves three times. That day, La Chinita was not in her usual display high behind the altar, but rather in a more modest wooden structure on the main floor of the church. The masses were over for the day, so there were only a few dozen people in the Basilica, and we were able to get close to the picture very quickly without waiting in line. As if a switch had been turned, the mood of the group went from boisterous and rowdy to quiet and solemn. I was one of the first to approach La Chinita and offer a prayer, and when I turned around, I saw the rest of the group was struck with emotion. A few of the men had tears in their eyes. All were silent. Some looked uncomfortable and guilty, as if they were going to confession. A few left the Basilica quickly to wait on the plaza, but several stayed and prayed for several minutes. When we all regrouped on the plaza a while later, all were quiet and contemplative. One man, a famously gregarious *gaitero*, didn't speak for nearly fifteen minutes, even when we asked him something. It was clear to me that everyone in the group was profoundly affected emotionally by the visit to La Chinita. For these nostalgic, party-loving *maracaiberos*, visiting La Chinita was a religious experience that could not be taken lightly.

La Serenata a la Chinita: from imagined congregation to manifest chorus

During the Feria de la Chinita in the week leading up to November 18th, Maracaibo hosts numerous concerts that reestablish the connection between singing *gaita* and revering La Chinita. Some of these are small events, such as when a local business hires a group to perform in its parking lot for an hour. Then there are the huge outdoor

stages sponsored by the large beer companies Polar and Regional, where *gaita* frequently alternates with other genres like Colombian *vallenato* and Dominican *merengue* in shows that last for hours. Some shows are in posh nightclubs, where patrons enjoy up to five different groups performing and have liquor bottle service at their tables for hours on end—all night long, in fact, from the 17th to the 18th. At all the events, the singers and the announcers frequently engage the crowd in cheers of "¡Qué viva la Chinita! ¡Qué viva Maracaibo!" Occasionally they even lead the crowd in a prayer to La Chinita or offer personal thanks for some answered prayer. At some events, it all seems a bit incongruous as these religious statements may come in close proximity to a performance by go-go dancers in bikini tops and thongs, but the crowd never forgets that this is the Feria *de la Chinita*.

However, the event in which *gaita* is most profoundly linked to devotion to La Chinita is the Serenata a la Virgen, a concert that takes place in the plaza of the Basilica on the night of November 17th, the eve of La Chinita's feast day. Here, with the Basilica illuminated against the night sky and the enormous monument of La Chinita across the street (completed in 2004), there can be no doubt of the religious motivation for the Feria. Compared to the larger beer-sponsored stages, the Serenata is a family event. Entire families, some with three or four generations present, spend hours standing on the concrete plaza, singing along and dancing. Unlike most other events, there is no formal sale of alcohol. Some families bring coolers of refreshments, and there are some people who make a business of fighting through the crowd to sell beer, but overall, it is a more sober party than at other venues. Since I first attended in 2000, I have seen this event grow dramatically in scale and attendance, presumably as government sponsorship

increased. In 2000, the performance was fairly informal, with a makeshift stage and a group that seemed unrehearsed. Over the past decade, the stage has become more elaborate, and the line-up of bands more impressive—often including some of the most popular and polished groups. Still, the event retains a familial quality, and people move back and forth from the plaza to the Basilica to try to get close to La Chinita to offer a prayer or fulfill a *promesa*. The people who attend the Serenata come not only for a concert, but also for a religious experience—to be close to La Chinita as the clock strikes midnight, the beginning of her feast day.

No matter what *gaita* groups are performing at the Serenata on the night of the 17th, the event culminates just before midnight with the crowd singing along with the song “La Grey Zuliana”. Perhaps the most famous *gaita* of all time, “La Grey Zuliana” protests government corruption and official neglect of the economic difficulties of Maracaibo in the form of a prayer to La Chinita. I will address the substance of this protest more in the chapter dedicated to social commentary *gaitas*, but here it is necessary to look at how the strength of the song’s message is enhanced by the fact that it is a prayer. In its original iconic recording in 1968, “La Grey” conveys an earnest message from a pious devotee, Ricardo Aguirre, to the regional *patrona*. Because of its popular significance and because it is a prayer, “La Grey Zuliana” is commonly referred to as *el himno de los gaiteros* (the *gatieros’* hymn), a fitting anthem for the Serenata performance.

The song begins with an important musical innovation, using a non-gaita rhythm, the more upper class *danza* style, for the introduction. For this part, Aguirre sings solo,

accompanied by *cuatro* only. Without the percussion instruments, the sparse orchestration emphasizes the poetic sincerity of the words.

En todo tiempo cuando a la calle saléis mi reina Tu pueblo amado se ha confundido en un solo amor Amor inmenso, glorioso, excelso, sublime y tierno Amor celeste, divino, santo hacia tu bondad	Throughout time when you go out to the street, my queen Your beloved people get fused in a single love Immense, glorious, most high, sublime and tender love Heavenly, divine, holy love of your grace

I cannot overemphasize the musical drama of this unprecedented introduction. From the opening sustained dominant seventh chord, it is one of the most instantly recognizable *gaitas* of all time. By recording in a studio in Caracas, the sound quality maximizes the impact of Aguirre's powerful baritone as he introduces his prayer to the Virgin. The scene he describes is well known to everyone in Maracaibo: on November 18th, La Chinita's feast day, the saint's image is processed through the streets of the old neighborhoods of Maracaibo as thousands watch in adoration. As the image passes on its mammoth platform, people applaud, cheer, cross themselves, and ask for the *patrona*'s blessing, "fused in a single love". Note the use of the *vos* conjugation of *salir*: *saléis mi reina*. As mentioned previously, this archaic pronoun/verb form sets the scene firmly in Maracaibo with the use of the local dialect, giving the listener the sense of speaking to the Virgin in the most familiar, local mode of speech. The fact that the poetic scheme is not *gaita*'s four octosyllabic lines, but rather the looser structure of a *danza* draws even more attention to it. Further, the association of the *danza* rhythm with more upper class dancing and folklore lends a dignity to the subject of the "immense, glorious, sublime, tender love" that the people have for La Chinita. For a *gaita*, the melody of this

introduction is difficult with its melodic leaps that arpeggiate chords and its relatively huge tessitura of a major fifteenth, that is, an octave and a major sixth from G-flat in the second octave below middle C to E-flat above middle C. In sum, this introduction makes it clear to the listener that this is no "normal" gaita.

The verses and chorus that follow the *danza* introduction are in a more typical *gaita* poetic structure (e.g., octosyllabic lines in the verses), and they are no less dramatic in their meaning or melody. The first two verses and the chorus are specifically directed to La Chinita. (In the protest gaita chapter, I will discuss the final two verses.) While the song's introduction focuses on religious piety and love, the verses are fierce protest and imploration.

Madre mía, si el gobierno No ayuda al pueblo zuliano Tendreís que meter la mano Y mandarlo pa'l infierno	My mother, if the government Doesn't help the Zulian people You have to raise your hand And send them off to hell
Coro: La grey zuliana cual rosario popular De rodillas va a implorar a su patrona Y una montaña de oraciones quiere dar Esta gaita magistral que el Saladillo la entona	Chorus: The Zulian flock, as a popular rosary, From their knees are going to implore to their patron And a mountain of prayers are given by This magisterial *gaita* that Saladillo intones
Tu pueblo te pide ahora Madre mía le ayudéis Y que fortuna le déis Con mucho amor te lo implora	Your people ask you now My mother, help them And give them good fortune With such love they implore you
¡Chinita, Chinita!	¡Chinita, Chinita!

Although praying to a saint to send corrupt politicians off to hell may not seem very Christian, there is no denying the incredible power of this first verse. It is also the

first statement of the verse melody, which, like the *danza* introduction, is quite dramatic and difficult to sing because of its wide range. While it may not have been intentional, there is an interesting bit of "tone painting" where the line *mandarlos pa'l infierno*, "send them off to hell," descends to the lowest note of the verse. (Soloists will often point downward while singing this line to emphasize the connection.) As is customary in *gaita*, all the group's singers join in on the chorus in unison, which appropriately begins with "*La Grey Zuliana*"/"The Zulian flock," so it appears as though the people of Zulia have all joined in. The strong unison singing breaks into richer two-part harmony (frequently expanded to three or more parts in recent performance) on the line "*Y una montaña de oraciones quire dar*"/"and a mountain of prayers are given" as if to represent the multiplicity of prayers from the people.

"La Grey Zuliana" represents a powerful prayer to La Chinita. Perhaps most importantly, it introduces the lyrical imagining Zulia as a "flock" or a "congregation" to the vocabulary of *gaitas*. As sociologist Light Carruyo described the song: "'La grey zuliana' constructs a Catholic regional community that looks to the Virgen de Chiquinquirá for guidance and protection against an unjust state" (Carruyo 2005:103). By calling Zulia *la grey*, one can imagine a unified religious community—a pastor's flock—that appeals to its *patrona* for redress of failures of the government to provide for the people. Numerous subsequent *gaita* lyrics refer to Zulia as "*la grey*" or "*mi grey*", which simultaneously makes a connection to this song—the most famous of the genre—and reinforces the idea of the community having a religious foundation. When "La Grey Zuliana" is sung at the Serenata concert, the crowd of thousands gathered in the plaza embodies the lyrics. Standing outside the Basilica, they are, literally, the Zulian

congregation. The religious polity imagined in the lyrics is made manifest in the event of singing together in the plaza.

In one of the few ethnomusicologies of popular Catholic practices, Suzel Ana Reily (2002) uses the term “enchantment” to describe “the musical mode of ritual orchestration” (p. 3). Although Reily’s study concerns a more “folk” practice of groups going from house to house to sing in Sao Paolo, Brazil, I would argue that the use of amplified *gaita* in Maracaibo during the religious aspects of the Féria serves the same function, especially when the audience joins in singing. As Reily explains: “Enchantment creates a highly charged experiential realm in which devotees gain a momentary glimpse of the harmonious order that could reign in society, provided everyone agreed to adhere to the moral precepts outlined in religious discourse. By promoting such intense experiences, musical performance is, I contend, a powerful medium for forging religious conviction and commitment.” (p. 3). In Maracaibo, such religious intensity is intertwined with regional sociopolitical identity, of course, but this does not detract from the spiritual power of the experience—rather it enhances it. In other words, to a *zuliano* in the heat of singing along with “La Grey Zuliana” in the plaza as the Basilica’s clock strikes midnight, the experience is equally religious—in the expression of devotion to La Chinita—and political—in the demand for better living conditions for Zulians. The ideal “enchanted” world is one in which Zulians would—thanks to their faith in power of their *patrona*—have their political autonomy and a government that helped them, and they can “chant” this world into their imagination by singing this anthem together in front of the Basilica. Reily continues: “As an experiential realm, enchantment takes place in the here and now; its efficacy is predicated upon its emergent quality. Such experiences can be

promoted through music precisely because music making organizes collective action" (p. 4). In singing "La Grey Zuliana" the people gathered in the plaza are La Chinita's "beloved people, fused in a single love" as they participate in the musical collective. The imagined religious community of the Zulian congregation, *la grey zuliana*, emerges in the visible, audible crowd.

Songs of Devotion

When one speaks of *gaitas chiquinquireñas*—*gaitas* that deal with the Virgin of Chiquinquirá—the most obvious recurring theme is that of personal devotion. These *gaitas* express the singer's intense love for La Chinita in passionate faith poetry. In fact, numerous songs have the word "devotion" in the title or prominent in the lyrics. Such songs are not performed in public as much as other *gaitas*, mainly because performance events are festive events, so partying *gaitas* are more often heard. But these devotional *gaitas* are well known, mostly because they are played on the radio constantly during the weeks around La Chinita's feast day. These are also the songs that one would hear blasting from a sound system on a truck following a street procession of La Chinita's image, which is something that happens regularly leading up to the feast day. Both male and female singers sing intensely devotional *gaitas*, and by singing of their devotion to La Chinita, singers are credited as being good, true Zulians. That is, I have heard listeners comment about how a given singer is a great Zulian because of the passion of their performance of a song dedicated to the Virgin. Thus, an expression of one's undying love for La Chinita is akin to a local "pledge of allegiance" to Zulia. In this section, I will review—roughly in chronological order—some examples of the hundreds (perhaps

thousands) of *gaitas* that express profound devotion to La Chinita. I have tried to choose songs from a wide range of groups, but with an emphasis on those that remain popular and those that Zulians mentioned to me for their significance. But this collection is only a sample that represents my personal taste and experience, and there are many more that I could have included. These songs promote the image of the *gaita* singer as a religiously faithful Zulian, part of the throngs that gather at the Basilica or wait for the procession to go by. The community imagined in these songs is one filled with Zulians who are passionately devoted to La Chinita.

A *gaita* called "Virgen de Chiquinquirá" was one of the very first *gaitas* ever recorded. It was written by José Angel Mavárez and Ramón Bracho Lozano and performed by a group simply called Los Gaiteros del Zulia, released on 78 RPM disc around 1950. Not all Zulians would recognize this early recording today with its poor fidelity, screechy vocals, and lack of percussion instruments, but many people know a later version of the song recorded by Cardenales del Éxito in 1966. (Cardenales' version only uses three of the original five verses.) The first verse succinctly tells the origin story of the washerwoman finding the wooden board in Lake Maracaibo. The refrain and several of the other verses speak of La Chinita's status as *patrona*, and encourage religious faith in the Zulian people.

(Estribillo) Virgen de Chiquinquirá Patrona de los zulianos por ser vos la soberana nuestras vidas ampará y nuestras almas llevá por el sendero cristiano Patrona de los zulianos Virgen de Chiquinquirá.	(Chorus) Virgin of Chiquinquirá Patron of Zulians by being the sovereign you will protect our lives and carry our souls on the Christian path Patron of Zulians Virgin of Chiquinquirá.
Y con esta narración cantemos a la Patrona para que cualquier persona conozca su aparición.	And with this narration we sing to the Patron so that every person will know about her apparition.
Y siga la devoción de nuestra fe tan cristiana de todas la soberana y más sabia religion.	And the devotion continues Of our Christian faith of all the sovereign and wisest religion.
Un grano de fe embellece la vida del buen cristiano por eso te digo hermano sin fe el hombre se adormece.	A grain of faith brightens the life of a good Christian. This I tell you, brother: without faith, a man goes numb.
Y al Sabio se le aparece sin niguna orientación abrace esta religión que tu alma bien la merece.	And Wisdom appears with no other orientation embrace this religion, it's worth it to your soul.

These lyrics preach more than most devotional *gaitas*, even calling Christianity the "wisest religion". Significantly, it is La Chinita who leads her people "on the Christian path." It emphasizes La Chinita's status as the patron of Zulia. As the "sovereign" of her

land, she protects her people. To reinforce the local aspect of the message, La Chinita is referred to with the pronoun *vos* in the chorus.

One of the oldest *gaitas chiquinquireñas* that is still heard frequently on radio, and even in live performances, is “Reina Morena,” a hit for Cardenales del Éxito in 1966. I suspect that it is one of the most recognized *gaitas* of all time in Maracaibo. The singer is “the monumental” Ricardo Aguirre whose brother Renato co-wrote the song with Jairo Gil, the lyricist who would come to be known as “el poeta de la Chinita” in Maracaibo because he has written more than one hundred songs dedicated to La Chinita. Many *gaiteros* would cite this song as an example of Jairo Gil’s poetic talents. The first verse metaphorically equates the singer’s heart to a temple dedicated to adoration of La Chinita.

Mi corazón es un templo Donde una Virgen se adora Mi pecho más la atesora Si lejos de ella me encuentro	My heart is a temple Where a Virgin is adored. My chest treasures her more If I find myself far from her

The verses (sung solo) are in a minor key, which lends gravity to the subject, enhancing the sense of Aguirre’s intense personal conviction. One *gaitero* told me how this verse conveys the heartache that he feels when he has been away from Maracaibo and hasn’t visited La Chinita for some time. Notice that the verse refers to “una Virgen”, not “la Virgen”. Thus, the song is talking about a particular appearance of the Virgin, and not the Virgin Mary in general. But curiously, nowhere in the song’s lyrics is the name “La Chinita” mentioned. Instead, the local details make it clear to any Zulian listener whom the lyrics describe.

A chorus of men sings the following refrain in a cycle of major keys.

Entre una lluvia de flores Se pasea una princesa Y San Juan de Dios le reza Cánticos de poesía Yo la ví que sonreía Placentera y satisfecha Por la gran Calle Derecha A mi pueblo bendecía	In a cloudburst of flowers, A princess is passing by, And St. John of God is praying Poetic canticles to her. I saw that she was smiling— Pleasant and satisfied— Going down Main Street Blessing my people

This refrain describes the most public scenes associated with La Chinita—when she is carried through the streets on a platform surrounded by floral bouquets. St. John of God is the name of the Basilica, her congregation. Most of the refrain is sung in monophony, but on the lines, "*Y San Juan de Dios le reza / Cánticos de poesía*", the chorus breaks into three-part harmony, as a tone painting of La Chinita's congregation singing their prayers. So while the first verse compares the lead singer's chest as the temple dedicated to a Virgin, the refrain names the actual physical temple where her congregation gathers in prayer.

While the lyrics never mention La Chinita by name, rich local knowledge is embedded in the imagery to make the subject clear to Zulians. "Reina Morena" (Brown Queen), the title of the song, refers to the brown image of La Chinita on the small board. Her Basilica, San Juan de Dios, is named. Downtown Maracaibo's Calle Derecha (straight street/main street) is now named Calle 96, but every resident knows it was the old name of the street that lead from the Basilica, so this lyric invokes nostalgia for the old Saladillo neighborhood.

Another *gaita chiquinqireña* from the 1960s that remains popular is Saladillo's "La Devoción", mentioned earlier in this chapter. To add to my earlier comments, two

important images are used in this lyric that would come to be common in *gaitas* about La Chinita: the importance of family (especially one's mother) in faith practice and the mystery of the Catatumbo lightning.

-verso I-	-1st verse-
A mi me dijo mamá Hijo de mi corazón Quiero que tu devoción Sea la Chiquinquirá	My mother told me "Son of my heart, I want your devotion To be directed to Chiquiquinquirá."
-estribillo- Que siga la devoción. Del Zulia siempre será Virgen de la Chiquinquirá Del Zulia. Echanos la bendición	-chorus- May the devotion continue. She will always be from Zulia. Virgin of Chiquinquirá of Zulia, Cast your blessing upon us.
-verso III- Hoy tu pueblo esta de hinojo Reina de la excelcitud Porque tienes esa luz Del Catatumbo en tus ojos	-3rd verse- Today your people are on their knees, Queen on high, Because you have the light Of Catatumbo in your eyes.

In the first verse, singer José "Bolita" Ríos tells us how his mother instructed him to express devotion to the Virgin of Chiquinquirá. The idea that devotion to La Chinita is a familial imperative comes up many times in *gaita* lyrics. Zulian listeners can easily identify with the singer because most of them have had the experience of praying at the Basilica with their families. The common experience of hearing a mother's religious instruction binds the region and impels imagining the Zulian religious community as a congregation of faithful families.

In the final verse, La Chinita is linked with the "light of Catatumbo", a natural phenomenon well known to Zulians. *El relampago de Catatumbo* (the Catatumbo

lightening) is a unique natural phenomenon, and a symbol of Zulia. Where the Catatumbo river flows into the south end of Lake Maracaibo, there is nearly constant silent lightening every night, a natural phenomenon that can be seen as far away as Maracaibo. This unique visual display is a local wonder, and it is a symbol of Zulia, seen on the state flag and seal. Saying that La Chinita has "the light of Catatumbo in her eyes" links her spiritual nature with this mysterious, magical phenomenon that has had spiritual significance for centuries. Both the Catatumbo lightening and *la Virgen* evoke states of wonder in Zulians.

Renato Aguirre, one of the "monumental" Ricardo Aguirre's brothers, is one of the most significant *gaita* composers of the past forty years, and one of his famous compositions dedicated to the Virgin is "Celestina Aurora" (Heavenly Dawn), sung by Ricardo Cepeda with Cardenales del Éxito in 1979. I met Renato several times, and I had one opportunity to interview him at length. I asked him about his compositional process, and he revealed that he likes to get up in the wee hours of the morning around 3 or 4 a.m. and compose until dawn. He described that time of day as particularly quiet and somewhat magical—prefect for spurring his creativity. "Celestina Aurora" is but one of his lyrics that talks about this time of day.

- verso I –	First verse
Una bella aurora marabina Al altar de la reina amorosa Se encamina a la grey jubilosa A entregarle su amor a la china	In a beautiful Maracaibo dawn To the altar of the loving queen Heads the jubilant flock To surrender their love to la China

- estribillo –	Chorus
Lágrimas, versos y aplausos De la expresa muchedumbre Ella recibe en la cumbre Con dulce amor en sus brazos Canta pueblo canta Que la virgen bajará En la celestina aurora Se ilumina su silueta Rosas, orquídeas, violetas Le da el pueblo que la adora En la celestina aurora	Tears, verses, and applause From the purposeful crowd She receives in the summit With sweet love in her arms Sing, people, sing That the Virgin may come down In the heavenly dawn Her silhouette is iluminated Roses, orchids, violets, That the people give as they adore her In the heavenly dawn.
- verso II –	Second verse
Amorosa inspiración divina Yo consigo al contemplar tu rostro Con la luz que emana me conforto En la fresca aurora celestina	Loving, divine inspiration I contemplate your face and I'm Comforted by the light that emanates In the fresh air of the heavenly dawn

The scene described is of the early morning hours of La Chinita's feast day of November 18th. The Basilica is open around the clock from the 17th to the 18th for the faithful to come and pray. Some people make a *promesa* to stay in the Basilica all night to pray. Others (like myself in 2000) come and go through the night. Some make a point of stopping by the Basilica to say a prayer as they go from one all night party to another. Many bring flowers to decorate La Chinita and express their adoration. The idea of staying up all night and visiting the Basilica at some point in those early morning hours is a traditional aspect of the feast day. In reference to the beginning of the refrain, while I do not remember the congregation applauding in the Basilica (though they do during the street procession), it is not at all unusual to see people tearing up while they pray privately or recite "Ave Maria" in the Basilica. The first verse and chorus of "Celestina

Aurora" describes the intense emotion of the congregation—emotion that is heightened by exhaustion. The second verse puts the emotion into the first person, as the singer speaks of sitting and contemplating La Chinita's image. "The fresh air of the heavenly dawn" is a rather magical way of describing this time of day—the only time of day when the air in Maracaibo feels cool and fresh, since by 9 am most mornings the temperature is approaching 90 degrees. "Celestina Aurora" conveys the powerful emotions and liminal state that many Zulians know comes with the experience of denying oneself rest in order to pray to La Chinita through the night.

Guaco is a group that began playing *gaita* in the 1960s and 1970s and has since expanded their sound in a fusion with elements of salsa and other Latin popular musics. Many Zulians remember them for their early *gaitas*, and they still perform some of these songs, while they also refer to traditional lyrical themes in their fusion songs. One of these themes is the pride a *gaitero* feels when singing to La Chinita. Leader Gustavo Aguado talked about this feeling in an interview in a Maracaibo daily newspaper in 2007.

> Para nosotros los zulianos y los gaiteros es un privilegio y un honor cantarle a La Chinita, más yo que soy mariano por convicción y cercanía, y ella es el amor de mis amores, es la elevación total, el climax total de satisfacción, de espiritualidad y de gozo.
>
> For us Zulians and *gaiteros* it is a privilege and an honor to sing to La Chinita, more so for me since I'm a committed Marian, and she is the love of all my loves—it's a total high, a total climax of satisfaction of spirituality and joy. (*Versión Final* 16 November 2007, on the web at http://www.versionfinal.com.ve/wp/2007/11/16/bendecidos-por-la-chinita/)

"Pasión Indiana" is a classic song from 1972 that conveys Aguado's intense emotion in singing to La Chinita.

- estribillo -	-chorus –
A medida que te toco Brota mi pasión indiana Es mi sangre la que mana Y por ti me vuelvo loco Ahora yo quiero brindarte Mi canto hasta la mañana Mientras a mi china evoco Viva la gaita zuliana	As I play for you, It brings forth my Indian passion My blood flows And for you, I go crazy Now I want to bring you My singing until the morning That's what my China evokes Long live the Zulian gaita

Evoking the idea of this passion for singing to La Chinita as "Indian" is curiously charged. As in much of Latin America, Venezuela has been promoted as a "racial democracy, and Venezuelans like to think of themselves as a mixed race of Europeans, Indians, and Africans, though in practice, much racism still exists. Maracaibo is the one city in Venezuela where many Native Americans live and work, and many communities of the Wayú (or Guajira) Indians still exist in Zulia, so Zulians have a sense of connection to their Indian ancestry. However, the Wayú, like all Native Americans, have been victims of discrimination. Most who live in and around Maracaibo make their living as housekeepers or manual laborers for mixed-race employers. Still, most Venezuelans, I believe, would read Aguado's lyrics as a positive acknowledgment of his and their mixed racial ancestry—a way of saying that singing to La Chinita hits him in his deepest soul.

In another of Guaco's many songs to La Chinita, they relate how she is always with the group in spirit. Heriberto Molina and Sundín Galué wrote "Virgen Guaquera" for Guaco in 1986, and on the recording, the group is joined by two popular singers of Venezuelan romantic music (i.e., not *gaiteros*) in one of many examples of special "guest appearances" to broaden *gaita*'s appeal. The first verse uses the local *vos* verb

conjugation to localize the lyrics that speak of La Chinita's presence in Guaco's performances.

En los toques por doquiera A nosotros te sumáis Siempre nos acompañáis Sois una China guaquera Vivimos de tus encantos Y de una fe muy bonita Por eso es que yo te canto Todos los años Chinita	At our shows everywhere You join us You always accompany us You are a "Guaco China" We live from your charms And from a very beautiful faith Because of this I sing to you Every year, Chinita

By creating the adjective *guaquera* (of Guaco) to describe La Chinita, the group claims La Chinita as their own, as if she is their personal *patrona*. They express what so many *gaiteros* claim—that La Chinita inspires their performance of *gaita*. This has special significance when Guaco makes the claim because of how their music has changed over the years. Most of the songs that they have recorded in the past two decades are not *gaitas*—in the sense that that they do not limit themselves to the 6/8 rhythm nor the instruments typical of *gaita.* Rather, their sound fuses elements of *gaita* with many rock and Caribbean elements into a sound they call *ritmo guaco.* A song like "Virgen Guaqera" reconnects them to Zulian cultural tradition in two ways: it is a *gaita* (rhythmically and structurally), and the subject matter is devotion to the local *patrona* La Chinita. With a song like this, Guaco reminds their audience that even though they may stray far from conservative, traditional music forms, their foundation remains in *gaita*, and they are still emotionally connected to La Chinita.

While Guaco pushes the musical boundaries of what might be considered *gaita*, as mentioned in other chapters, the group Barrio Obrero de Cabimas (literally "working

class neighborhood of the town of Cabimas") prides and promotes itself on the basis of maintaining the most traditional sound and repertoire of any *gaita* group, mainly by choosing not to add any instruments beyond the *cuatro*, *furro*, *tambora*, *charrasca*, and maracas. Another aspect of their "traditional" stance that they explained to me in an interview in 2001 is that they have recorded a minimum of two *gaitas* per year dedicated to La Chinita, meaning their repertoire of *gaitas chiquinqireñas* numbers about one hundred. Here I will discuss two that are representative of their output: "Dos Regalos," which won the Virgilio Carruyo *gaita* of the year award in 1981, and "Vuelvo a Cantarte, Mi Chinita," which was popular during my first visit to Maracaibo in 2000.

"Dos Regalos" is still popular today and can be heard on the radio especially during the Feria in the days leading up to la Chinita's feast day of November 18th. Like all songs by Barrio Obrero, it is almost instantly recognizable by what is *not* present on the recording: no bass, keyboard or other electric instruments. The *furros*, *charrascas*, and the *cuatro* are the most prominent instruments on the track. The track begins with an introductory poem narrated—not sung—accompanied only by *cuatro*. Beginning with a spoken introduction stresses the high esteem in which *gaiteros* hold poetry, especially the words of this lyricist, Jairo Gil. Then the chorus of men and women sing the refrain twice (the co-ed nature of the sound is another tradition-marker). Both the introductory poem and the chorus use the *vos* conjugation of some verbs, stressing the local dialect. The lyrics of the chorus speak of a common theme: that by singing to la Chinita, the singer expresses her devotion. The "two presents" offered to la Chinita in this song are "My life to love you/And my soul to adore you," so the listener is left in doubt of the singer's sincere devotion. Because of Carmencita's long history of singing to la Chinita, she has

been dubbed “la Cantante de la Virgen” among *gaiteros*, and this popular title only reinforces the sincerity of the lyrics to Zulian listeners.

- estribillo -	Chorus
Hoy quiero tenerte Más cerca para cantarte Y quiero entregarte Dos regalos de gran suerte Permitidme que al verte Que esta ofrenda pueda darte Mi vida para quererte Y el alma para adorarte	Today I want to have you Closer to me so I can sing to you And I want to give you Two presents of good luck Allow me to see you That I may present this offering: My life to love you And my soul to adore you.

The first verse stresses the emotion of the singer’s devotion: looking into la Chinita’s eyes makes the singer cry. The second verse stresses the holiness of la Chinita, mentioning God’s painting her, and the singer’s intense love that borders on jealousy. The last two lines of the verse comprise an excellent example of using localisms for effect: “It was as if el Catatumbo /Were your guard.” Again, El Catatumbo refers to the unusual silent lightning that occurs at the mouth of the Catatumbo River as it feeds into Lake Maracaibo, a natural phenomenon that is revered with divine mystery in Zulia. And the word used for “guard” is a *guachimán*, the local Spanglish word derived from the English “watchman”. *Guachimán* came into usage in the oil camps in Zulia in the early twentieth century, and although it is a Spanification of an English word, its local history make it a clear marker of Zulian dialect.

Musically, the melody and harmony are fairly basic and old-fashioned for 1981, in keeping with Barrio Obrero’s emphasis on traditionalism. Its strength is its catchy tune, and the refrain is easy to sing along with. One of the most distinctive aspects of the tune is the way that Carmencita pauses between the final two lines of each verse. In contrast to the rest of the song’s rather rapid delivery, this pause allows the listener a

moment to anticipate the "punch line" of each verse, a phrasing technique that has been used occasionally since the 1960s (e.g., in "Ronda Antañona" written by Virgilio Carruyo and sung by Ricardo Aguirre with Saladillo in 1967).

During my stay in Maracaibo in 2000-01, Barrio Obrero's biggest hit was another song of devotion, "Vuelvo a Cantarte Mi China" ("I Return to Sing to You, My China"). I include it to show how Barrio Obrero references themselves in the lyrics, reminding listeners of who they are and their past songs. In the first verse, Carmencita reminds la Chinita of previous *gaitas* she has sung to her, mentioning the song "Dos Regalos" specifically, and how when she dies she will deliver a golden parchment inscribed with the lyrics of all the *gaitas* she has sung to La Chinita. In the refrain, the chorus sings the first few lines, but Carmencita sings two lines in the middle that carry the most emotion: "I despair / if I even think of not singing to you," conveying the singer's passion. The chorus returns for the last lines that stress devotion: "My soul exists to adore you / And adoring you is my path/purpose." Once again, the stress is on adoration and devotion. Most salient is the title lyric "I return to sing to you, my China". As most listeners instantly recognize Barrio Obrero's sound—the traditional instrumentation (nothing but *cuatro*, *furro*, *charrasca* and *tambora*), the mixed chorus, and Carmencita's delicate, pure voice—it is almost expected that the group would be *returning* to sing to la Chinita, as they have done every *gaita* season for over forty years. Although the chord changes are a bit more complex than in some of their songs (no doubt thanks to the musical sophistication of the song's composer Nano Silva), the absence of keyboards and bass allows the unadulterated sound of the *cuatro* to come through clearly.

In recent years, there has been no decline in *gaitas chiquinquireñas.* In fact, at least one group now *only* sings *gaitas* to La Chinita—Los Chiquinquireños. This group is very fluid in its membership, and in a sense, every album they have recorded is just a collection of songs by different soloists (including several already mentioned). What unites them is that nearly *every* song on every one of their albums is dedicated to La Chinita. The great singer Astolfo Romero first organized the group in the late 1990s shortly before his death in 2000. His 1998 hit "Amor Chiquinquireño" begins with an introduction that is typical of the dramatic devotion expressed in the group's lyrics.

Spanish	English
Desde niño voy al templo a rezarte una oración Y a llenarme de emoción cada vez que te contemplo Soy fiel a mi devoción que siento desde pequeño Y este amor chiquinquireño que llevo en mi corazón Destello de luz celeste admisión, divino es tú resplandor Madre de Jesús, lazos de la unión, ilusión grande de amor.	Since I was a boy, I've been going to the temple to say a prayer to you And I'm filled with emotion each time that I think about you I'm faithful in my devotion that I've felt since I was little and this love for La Chinita that I carry in my heart Sparkles with heavenly light, divine is your splendor Mother of Jesus, bonds of union, great illusion of love.

I estimate that Los Chiquinquireños have recorded over one hundred *gaitas* dedicated to La Chinita. In recent years, Romero's son Astolfo David Romero has become the main performer in live concerts, and his handsome looks guarantee that a group of teenage girls will be crowding the stage and screaming for him at concerts. The guest vocalists who contribute featured solos on the albums lend clout to the group. In Los Chiquinquireños's live performances during the Feria, the sense of religious community is constantly reinforced from the stage as the singers tell the crowd: "Todos son

chiquinquireños esta noche" [all are Chiquinquireños tonight]. The audience is simultaneously enveloped into the group, and all are united in the feeling of deovtion to La Chinita. In a sense, Los Chiquinquireños could be considered the most one-dimensional *gaita* group of all time—they only sing songs to La Chinita. But the fact that a group with such limited subject matter could find success is evidence of how important *gaitas chiquinquireñas* are in Zulia.

Recent Trends

Although it would be difficult to conduct a statistical survey, since I began my research on *gaita* over ten years ago, it appears that there has been an increase in the number of *gaitas* dedicated to La Chinita each year. I believe there are several possible reasons for this. For one, Evangelical Christian congregations have been growing in Venezuela, and I suspect that this has led to reactionary promotion of Catholic traditions, such as devotion to the Virgin, among the Catholic majority. Secondly, as governmental and other support of the Feria de la Chinita has grown, so has attention placed on the religious significance of the event.

I believe the most significant reason for the increase in *gaitas chiquinquireñas* is related, complexly, to the delicate political situation of the Chávez era and the decrease of political topics in *gaitas*. For the past decade, the Venezuelan political scene has been sharply divided between *chavistas* and *la oposición* of anti-*chavistas*, and this causes tension in many social situations, especially in Zulia where *la oposición* is strong. For *gaiteros*, there has been some effort to find non-divisive topics to sing about, and perhaps the most obvious common ground for the vast majority of the Zulian population lies in

religious devotion. Thus, La Chinita may be viewed as a "safe" topic for *gaita* lyrics. But another aspect of this situation is the political significance of La Chinita. While it may not be safe to sing about politics or the strength of Zulia's anti-*chavista* opposition, singing about La Chinita may be a sign of political resistance. She is the *patrona* of Zulia, and singing to her is a marker of Zulian identity. Since Zulian identity is frequently equated with opposition to the central Venezuelan government, singing to La Chinita can be seen as an act of resistance. Even though "La Grey Zuliana" was written to protest a government over forty years ago, singing it now expresses frustration with the current social situation. As overt political commentary has become less common in gaitas in recent seasons, the passionate expression of faith in the local *patrona* serves as a publicly safe way of expressing sociopolitical regionalism. In other words, since it is not permissible to sing of one's regionalistic opposition to the national government, passionately professing one's faith in the religious symbol of the state serves as a form of resistance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the profound interconnections between *gaita* music and local religious practice in Maracaibo, Zulia. *Gaitas* not only provide the festive soundscape of the holiday season, they help create the sense of *la grey zuliana*, the imagined community of the state of Zulia as a religious congregation. The annual cycle of composing, recording, and performing *gaitas* is based on the local religious calendar that climaxes with the novena to La Chinita every November. *Gaita* lyrics express the sense that devotion to La Chinita, the regional *patrona*, is an essential

element of *zulianidad.* In live performances, especially the annual Serenata a la Chinita on the night before La Chinita's feast day, audiences sing along with "La Grey Zuliana" and embody the meaning of the song's title, coming together in imploration to the flock's *patrona.* In a sense, having a patron saint to worship together creates the sense that Maracaibo is a community, and *gaitas* are essential to the imagining of this community. In Maracaibo, popular music and popular religion are deeply interconnected social practices.

CHAPTER VI: *GAITA* AS A MEDIUM OF POLITICAL COMMENTARY

Hay dos propositos de la gaita: alegrar y protestar.
-Wolfgang Romero

Gaita is party music, first and foremost, and Zulians primarily enjoy the music as entertainment, but as I have shown in the previous chapters, *gaita* lyrics often present serious topics and promote Zulian identity by documenting history, creating a sense of geographic place, and professing religious devotion. But Zulians take *gaita* seriously for one reason more than any other: its use as a medium of political commentary. As shown in previous chapters, *gaita* lyrics often make powerful political statements about living conditions in Zulia and in Venezuela as a whole. Wolfgang Romero is arguably the most successful *gaita* lyricist of the past twenty years, having penned hundreds of *gaitas* and numerous hits every year, and in one of our first conversations, he stressed that there are two purposes of *gaita*: to bring joy and to protest. Although *gaita* is entertainment, Romero stressed that *gaita* composers are responsible for addressing serious topics that matter to common people. In one way or another, every composer that I ever spoke to made this point. They understand that one's status as a composer is—at least partly—based on their ability to address important topics, to express poetically the frustrations of common Zulian people.

Songs that address social and political concerns are commonly referred to as *gaitas de protesta*, and every season, *gaita* fans anticipate the release of new songs that will address current social concerns and stir up controversy by criticizing whatever politicians are in power. Not every *gaita* group and every composer produce protest

songs, but most do create one or two songs per year that address serious topics. Over time, these *gaitas* create a repository of sociopolitical history, a "chronicle"—as composer Miguel Ordoñez put it—of important issues.

Many *gaitas de protesta* articulate a particular Zulian point of view in opposition to the centralized Venezuelan government, especially in regards to the centralized control of the oil industry for the past century. In one of the few English-language academic publications on *gaita*, sociologist Light Carruyo argues "that *gaitas* both emerge from and create an imagined oppositional community. In other words, *gaitas* invoke regional symbols and shared experiences to create a sense of community, and it is in this collective that they ground their discontent" (Carruyo 2005: 99). Carruyo locates the source of *gaitas de protesta* in the Zulian resentment of the oil industry: "Many protest *gaitas* are grounded in the outrage felt by [Zulian] residents over the amount of labor and wealth that they provide the country [through the oil industry] without seeing the benefits in their own lives" (Carruyo 2005: 100). As I described in Chapter Four of this dissertation, since the 1930s, Venezuela's national economy has been largely based on oil drilling and exportation, and while most of this oil has come from beneath Lake Maracaibo, most of the profits have not returned to the state of Zulia, but rather have been distributed throughout Venezuela by the central government. My research confirms Carruyo's claim that many protest *gaitas* are based on this perceived injustice in the economic treatment of Zulia. As mentioned in previous chapters, the first verse of the most famous protest *gaita* of all time, "La Grey Zuliana" (1968), rallies Zulians in the form of a prayer to their patron saint, seeking her divine intervention to correct the

perceived economic mistreatment of the region: “Mother of mine, if the government/ Doesn’t help the Zulian people/ You’ll have to reach down/ And send them off to hell.”

While it is absolutely true that the economic distribution of oil profits—along with the disgust over the industry’s destructive environmental impact—has been a source of resentment among Zulians, this feeling of political and economic marginalization has a much longer history. In this chapter, I will present a brief political history of Zulia that shows that the regional resentment of national authority precedes the centralized control of the oil industry. Zulians have “imagined” their state in opposition to the centralized Venezuelan national government at least as early as the era of the battles for independence from Spain, in which they did not initially participate. Even after the creation of Venezuela as an independent nation-state in the 1820s, Zulian resistance to centralized authority continued and peaked in the 1860s with secessionist efforts to create an autonomous Zulian state, a history that many Zulians are aware of and still invoke in discussions of politics. This sprit of independence and separateness from the rest of Venezuela is a foundation of Zulian identity and is expressed in many *gaitas*. Even in some songs without a specific sociopolitical argument, one can detect the veiled threat of secession that underlies Zulian political discourse.

Carruyo’s research focused on *gaitas* of the 1980s and early 1990s, a time when most Venezuelans were beginning to show their frustration with the politics that had been in place since the institution of democracy in 1958—a frustration that would lead to the presidential election of Hugo Chávez in 1999. Coincidentally, this was about the same time that I decided to research *gaita* for this dissertation when I made my first visit to Venezuela in August of 1999. Subsequently, Zulia became the geographic stronghold of

opposition to the socialist political movement of Hugo Chávez. Although there were accusations of censorship of protest *gaitas* during the Chávez presidency (1999–2013), many songs were recorded expressing frustration with Chávez's style of rule and his inability to solve the nation's problems. I will discuss these *gaitas* and the reasons for the perceived censorship of these protest messages.

Throughout this chapter, I will emphasize how aspects of the music and lyrical poetry—such as song structures, harmonies, and vocal sound—intensify the political argument of protest *gaitas*. I will also address how *gaitas de protesta* have come to be expected, almost institutionalized in the genre, as one way that *gaiteros* and composers establish their artistic authenticity within Zulia and in the whole of Venezuela. Finally, protest *gaitas* promote an important aspect of Zulian identity—that to be Zulian is to protest, to be at least somewhat opposed to the vision of Venezuela as a centrally controlled nation-state.

Zulian Independence: Remembering, Imagining, and Threatening

Protest *gaitas* are an important means by which Zulians imagine their region as an independently oppositional force in Venezuela, and the power of oppositional song lyrics is enhanced by knowledge of the region's political history. In our conversations, *gaita* fans frequently quoted protest *gaita* lyrics as proud statements of political autonomy, but many of them would also add details of secession and independence efforts in earlier Zulian history. Thus, 20th- and 21st-Century *gaitas de protesta* are viewed as part of a continuous anti-national political history that dates from the colonial era. Although few

Zulians actively campaign for an autonomous or independent Zulian nation, many are proud of the region's history of threatening to declare independence, and this veiled threat can be read in the content of many *gaita* lyrics. The discourse of *gaitas de protesta* is one medium through which Zulians negotiate their sometimes-strained allegiance to the Venezuelan nation-state. In this section, I will present a brief version of the convoluted political history of Zulia, much of which I first learned about through conversations with *gaita* fans.

Zulia's political separateness from the rest of Venezuela can be traced to disagreements over allegiance that began in the independence struggles in the early 19th century. When representatives of seven of the ten provinces of the Captaincy General of Venezuela met in Caracas and declared independence from Spain on July 5, 1811—a date intentionally chosen to be close to that of the United States' declaration of independence—Maracaibo Province (as Zulia was called then) was not among them. Because of Maracaibo's decision to remain loyal to Spain, the motto "muy noble y leal" was added to the Province's seal (where it remains and is alluded to in modern *gaitas*). Maracaibo did not fully join the independence movement until ten years later, by which time political elites in Caracas had twice established the "Republic of Venezuela" only to see it collapse. When Maracaibo did declare its independence from Spain on January 28, 1821, it was to join the Republic of Colombia (sometimes called New Granada), a federation of territories that included present-day Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. In modern historical discourse, this large federation is usually referred to as "Gran Colombia" to distinguish that political alliance from present-day Colombia. Maracaibo's Act of Independence is somewhat ambiguous as to the amount of power to be ceded to

the Republic of Colombia, as it seems like the local government intended to maintain its "sovereign liberty." Maracaibo's Act of Independence states:

> …acordó este Muy Ilustre Ayuntamiento: Que protestando como protesta ante el Ser Supremo la sinceridad y justicia de sus sentimientos, debe en su consecuencia declarar como declara al pueblo de Maracaibo, libre e independiente del gobierno español, cualesquiera sea su forma desde este momento en adelante; y en virtud de su soberana libertad se constituye en República de Colombia, defienden su libertad e independencia según las leyes imprescindibles de la naturaleza.
>
> This Very Illustrious Council agrees: That announcing the sincerity and justice of their feelings as a protest before the Supreme Being, the Council consequently declares the people of Maracaibo free and independent from the Spanish government, whatever it may be from this moment forward; and in virtue of its sovereign liberty, Maracaibo constitutes itself into the Republic of Colombia, defending its liberty and independence according to the essential laws of nature.

Although I do not believe that the specifics of this history are widely taught in Zulia, and certainly not in other states of Venezuela, several *gaiteros* mentioned Zulia's declaration of independence to me when we discussed history. For many Zulians, this act made it clear that their founding fathers did not declare independence from Spain to join Venezuela and subjugate themselves to centralized rule from Caracas, but rather to join Gran Colombia, which at the time was conceived of as a large federation of relatively autonomous states from the present-day countries of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. While exact borders were difficult to determine (and would be the subject of many later political struggles), during the nineteenth century, Maracaibo Province was at times much larger than present-day Zulia, encompassing parts of other modern Venezuelan states such as Mérida and Táchira and also areas of what is now eastern Colombia, called the Santander region at the time. Several *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans mentioned Zulia's earlier expanse with pride and with resentment of the subsequent reduction in the state's size,

which they blamed on the central government’s effort to curtail the region’s political influence.

The alliance of Gran Colombia did not last long, and by the late 1820s, various factions rebelled against the centralized power that President Simón Bolívar attempted to maintain. In 1830, Venezuela separated from Gran Colombia, and, though not without debate, Zulia became part of the new Republic of Venezuela. The Venezuelan constitution of 1830 was somewhat vague on how much power was to be given to the national government and how much was to be retained by state and local authorities, and so, throughout the nineteenth century, “the struggle between centralism and [regional] autonomies became a constant of political practice” (Urdaneta 1998: 13). In Venezuelan political discourse, those who favored a strong central government based in Caracas are known as “centralists,” while most of the outlying provincial governments—such as in Maracaibo—advocated for “federalism,” a system of government based on a federation of autonomous states. (Note how this definition of “federalism” is roughly the *opposite* of its usage in the early history of the United States of America, where Federalists led by Alexander Hamilton wanted a strong central government and Democratic-Republicans argued for states’ rights.)

This conflict over centralism vs. local autonomy continues in Venezuela, and is frequently addressed in *gaita* lyrics. In 1965, responding to the national government’s efforts to centralize the lottery and several other services, Renato Aguirre wrote the protest *gaita* “La Centralización,” which was recorded with his older brother Ricardo singing with the group Los Cardenales del Éxito.

-verso I- Con todo centralizado El Zulia que se ira hacer Nos tendremos que vender Todo está paralizado	First verse With everything centralized What is Zulia to do? We'll have to sell ourselves Everything is paralyzed
-estribillo- Que problema que problemón Existe en nuestra región Este tremendo dilema Nos quieren quitar la crema Con la centralización	Chorus What a problem, what a huge problem Exists in our region This tremendous dilemma They want us to give up the best stuff With centralization
-verso III- Mi petróleo, la riqueza El Zulia se han de llevar Y Juan cómo ira a llorar Al verse en esa pobreza	Third verse My oil, the riches That Zulia has carried And how Juan (de Dios) will cry At seeing this poverty
-verso IV- Ahora se quieren llevar Al centro la Lotería Eso es una grosería Que no se debe aceptar	Fourth verse Now they want to take over The Lottery and centralize it That's a vulgar offense That we cannot accept

During my time in Maracaibo, I recognized *centralización* as a political buzzword—residents use the term to express and provoke resentment of the national government, no matter who is in power. In Maracaibo, centralization—meaning giving control to the government in Caracas—of any service or industry has been viewed with suspicion or outright opposition since the nineteenth century. In an earlier chapter, I discussed how the song "La Flor de la Habana," which sings the praises of a defunct cigarette manufacturer, is sometimes interpreted as a political statement against the centralization of the tobacco industry that occurred during the dictatorship of Antonio Guzmán in the late 1800s. As historian Nilda Bermúdez Briñez put it, "for Zulia, the era of Guzmán's presidency in

particular represented an era of continuous attacks in which its basic economy suffered, with the closing of the customs house in Maracaibo and then the loss of political autonomy with the fusion of Zulia and Falcón into one state" (Briñez 2009: 81, my translation). In my experience, the song "La Centralización" is not remembered as much as Ricardo Aguirre's later protest *gaitas*, but *gaiteros* cite it as a powerful, perennial argument for Zulian autonomy, and it established Aguirre's fame as a singer who was not afraid to confront the government.

On November 12, 2007, I heard then-Zulian governor Manuel Rosales cite the song during a speech to *gaiteros* at Maracaibo's famous Teatro Baralt. The occasion was a ceremonial gathering where the governor, an opponent of President Hugo Chávez, recognized various *gaiteros'* achievements and announced new programs of the state *gaita* foundation. At the time, Chávez was campaigning to pass a popular referendum, nicknamed "La Reforma," that would have given the central government more power, among other changes. Governor Rosales cited the song "La Centralización" as evidence that Ricardo Aguirre, the Monumental *gaita* singer, would have opposed La Reforma, if he were alive. Most of the audience erupted in applause.

The lyrics of the third verse also foreshadow the linking of religious identity and regional protest that would resurface in "La Grey Zuliana"—they say that "Juan" will cry at seeing the poverty in which Zulia is left after the petroleum riches are taken away, and this Juan is short for Juan de Dios, the name of the Basilica in the heart of the old part of Maracaibo, home of the sacred image of the patron saint La Chinita. Thus "Juan" serves as a metonym for the people of Zulia as a religious community bound together in the congregation of the Basilica.

Venezuelan history has been written from a centralist point of view in order to legitimize and unify the nation under one government, but in recent academic discourse, regional historians are contesting this centralized view of the nation. Arlene Urdaneta de Cardoza, a history professor at the University of Zulia, criticizes "historiographical centralism, which ignores the participation of regions and localities in the struggle of political forces, [and] offers a unilateral analysis repeatedly reiterated generation by generation" (Urdaneta 1998: 19, my translation). She proposes reexamining Venezuelan history from the point of view of each *Región Histórica* ("Historic Region"). "Regional historiography, through the concept of the Historic Region, studies the formation of the Venezuelan nation while taking into account regional processes and local specifics" (p. 79). She argues that each region in Venezuela had its own economy and power structure that was justified in resisting central authority for the sake of the local population.

Urdaneta's research focuses on one of the most potent periods in Zulian history, when Governor Jorge Sutherland led a movement to create the Federal Republic of Zulia, independent of Venezuela. Subsequent to the Federal War of 1858–1863, which "pitted centralizing forces against supporters of a loose state organization," Sutherland declared Zulian independence (Minahan 2002: 2111), but after about four years, national military force reincorporated Zulia into Venezuela. Venezuelan history has tended to demonize regional leaders like Sutherland as *caudillos* (strongmen) who destabilized the nation out of selfishness, but Urdaneta argues that Sutherland and other Zulian leaders were merely acting in the best interests of their region, interests that rarely coincided with the national goals of the Caracas-based government. Because of the centralist bias in Venezuelan historiography, little is known or taught about Zulia's brief independence, but many *gaita*

fans mentioned the period to me with pride. Urdaneta and her colleagues at the University of Zulia, may change the way Venezuelan regional history is understood and taught.

Zulian historian Nilda Bermúdez Briñez (2009) has written about the Venezuelan national government's efforts in the nineteenth century to create the national imaginary by instituting holidays to celebrate historical events in the formation of Venezuela, but some of these holidays were met with resistance. On January 24, 1848, a conflict led by insurrection forces in Maracaibo was suppressed by the national government, and subsequently, the central government decided to make the date a national holiday, a particular affront to the people of Maracaibo. During my visits to Maracaibo, I saw how the celebrations of national political holidays are much more modest than the festivities for days of local importance, such as the feast days of regional patron saints.

Although the four years of the independent Republic of Zulia in the 1860s may represent the peak of regional autonomy, aspirations for Zulian independence continued into the twentieth century. The discovery of enormous oil reserves under Lake Maracaibo in the early twentieth century prompted a massive presence from international oil companies. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, the oil industry's impact on Zulia was dramatic in positive and negative ways. As Maracaibo expanded and grew into the oil capital of the country, petroleum extraction caused environmental disasters on the east coast of Lake Maracaibo. In his cultural history of the oil industry in Venezuela, Miguel Tinker-Salas shows how "beyond monopolizing the economy, oil shaped social values and class aspirations, cemented political alliances, and redefined concepts of citizenship for important segments of the population" (2009: 238). These changes only served to

strengthen the feeling that Zulia was different and separate from the rest of the country, and some in the oil industry "considered the possibility that the United States might want to support the independence of Zulia, much as it had fomented the separation of Panama from Colombia" (Tinker-Salas 2009: 63). There is some evidence that the international "oil companies supported the secession bid, in an effort to manipulate or dominate the government and its oil reserves…, but the plan was never implemented" (Minahan 2001: 2111). I spoke with several Zulians about this history, and though they often bemoan the oil profits that leave their state, most seemed to believe that secession at the behest of the oil companies would have merely subjected them to a different economic injustice.

Over the years, a few *gaitas* have explicitly called for Zulian independence. In 1970, anger about the policies of President Rafael Caldera provoked at least two secessionist *gaitas de protesta*, "Rebelión" and "Independencia Ya," and the government censored them. Both songs are now famous for their defiant messages that unequivocally call for secession. Firmo Segunda Rincón earned the title "el rey de la protesta" for writing songs like "Independencia Ya." Rubén Oliveros sang this song with Cardenales del Éxito for their album *Los Cardenales Protestan.* The chorus suggests that Zulians cannot tolerate any more suffering and must declare independence.

A la buena no lográis romper la infame cadena que a la muerte te condena de hambre y desesperación. ¿Hasta cuándo soportáis zuliano esta humillación? ¿Por qué no independizáis el Zulia de la Nación?	You won't get anything by being good, Break the infamous chain That condemns you to death From hunger and desperation. How long will you put up with This humiliation, Zulian? Why don't you declare Zulia Independent of the nation?

As several *gaita* fans with a concern for political history told me, after the album came out, the Interior Minister prohibited the sale of the album with this song, and the group complied by replacing it with a less provocative one. But they were unable to have the record covers reprinted, so the song title "Independencia Ya" is listed on all of the albums sold, even when the disc contained the replacement song. This packaging oddity and the notoriety of the government's ban only made the song more famous. (See http://lagaitadeldecano.blogspot.com/2011/10/el-rey-de-la-protesta.html.) In the case of the other prohibited protest *gaita* of 1970, the great lyricist Luis Ferrer wrote "Rebelión," which Venancio Fernández sang with the group Rincón Morales. It contains a list of abuses that Zulians have suffered and the chorus calls for God to "reach down and save your Zulian people from centralism." The final lines of the third and final verse led to the government's prohibition of the song:

No más es de suplicar Vamos a meterle el pecho Demostremoles con hechos Ya dejemos esta abulia Que aquí vamos a formar La República del Zulia	No more begging We're going to stick out our chest We've shown it all with facts Let's leave this apathy behind already So here let's form The Republic of Zulia

The story popular among *gaiteros* is that after the song's release, the government's political police came to arrest Ferrer, but since they didn't know what he looked like, when they encountered him in the street, he told them he wasn't from around there, and he was able to escape to a farm in western Zulia until the controversy has passed (Hernández Oquendo 1997: 200).

Although every Zulian I met expressed their pride in their Venezuelan identity and expressed no real interest in secession from Venezuela, apparently there are some

Zulians who do challenge their state's membership in the nation-state. At least two small movements for political autonomy have gained attention in the past decade in Zulia. One such effort is "País Zuliano" [Zulian Country]. Although no one in Maracaibo ever mentioned this organization to me, the birth of the World Wide Web has created new space for discussing politics, and paiszuliano.org offers a forum for Zulians to express political regionalism. The following is translated from their website:

> País Zuliano is an organization that promotes Zulian sovereignty, understanding Zulia as a state that has almost two hundred years of history and is currently a federal state of Venezuela. Our defense of sovereignty implies that the Zulian people seek a level of **self-government** that fits with their present and future capacities and necessities. It implies that Zulians can seek an **effective autonomy** that permits the existence of their own institutions and plans and projects that are necessary for our development and not to exercise a residual power as that exercised by the Government of Venezuela. [my translation, emphases in original] (http://www.paiszuliano.org/2012/01/quienes-somos.html)

País Zuliano argues for autonomy within the Venezuelan nation, but most of the website seems dedicated to cultural and historical regionalism, for example, proposing that Zulians celebrate the 28th of January as their independence day, since this was the day of the Act of Independence of Maracaibo. Rumbo Propio ("Our Own Course") is a more deliberately political Zulian autonomy campaign, one that received significant attention in 2006 when there was some effort in the Zulian legislature to propose a public referendum on Zulian autonomy. This proposal went nowhere, but President Chávez and his administration went out of their way to call the proposal treason and to accuse the Zulian state governor, Manuel Rosales, who would stand as an opposition candidate in the next presidential election, of conspiring with the Rumbo Propio campaign. The existence of País Zuliano and Rumbo Propio shows that there are modern, small

movements for autonomy in Zulian, and though only a minority of Zulians might support a true political bid for autonomy, the spirit of regional resistance lives on.

Protest *Gaitas* of the 1960s and the Rise of El Monumental, Ricardo Aguirre

As shown in earlier chapters, the *gaita* renaissance that started in the 1960s as recordings of *gaita* became popular was full of happy, party songs that, in one or more ways, projected images of Zulian identity—*zulianidad.* Songs celebrated various aspects of regional religious, geographic, historical, and cultural identity, sometimes in bold statements. By the middle and late 1960s, fans began to expect particularly argumentative *gaitas de protesta* in the new crop of songs released every fall, and singers and composers earned particular respect based on the force of their messages.

Even the first *gaita* hit of the 1960s, which is still used as a party jam song, makes powerful statements about Zulian identity. Though no one would characterize Moisés Martínez's "Gaita Zuliana" (1962) as a "*gaita de protesta*," many of its lyrics are particularly argumentative: its chorus boasts of Zulian cultural superiority, the second verse bemoans some Zulians' preference for foreign music over *gaita*, and the fourth verse brags that *gaita* will become popular again as a legacy of the great poets of Zulia.

Estribillo	Chorus
Vamos a cantar la gaita maracaibera Que en el Zulia es la primera En música popular Se puede imitar Pero no igualar Y sólo el zuliano Ese golpe sabe dar	We're going to sing The *gaita* of Maracaibo That in Zulia is the foremost In popular music It can be imitated But never equaled And only the Zulian Knows how to play the beat

Verso II Están acabando La gaita que es tradición Por estar cantando Música de otra nación	Verse II They're losing The gaita that's our tradition By singing music From another country
Verso IV Virgen de Chiquinquirá, En la tierra de Urdaneta Cuna de grandes poetas La gaita resurgirá	Verse IV Virgin of Chiquinquira In the land of Urdaneta Cradle of great poets Gaita will resurge

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this song by the group Saladillo became a huge hit in 1962 and became known as "La Campeona" (The Champion) by winning all of the major folklore contests that year. Although not a true "protest" song, from the beginning of *gaita*'s recorded era, it established a new tradition of making powerful statements about *zulianidad*.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the biggest figure in the history of modern *gaita* is Ricardo Aguirre, one of the founding members of the perpetually popular group Cardenales del Éxito, who died at the peak of his career in 1969. Aguirre is known for his rich baritone voice, his many compositions, his professed devotion to La Chinita, and his boisterous party songs. But most of all, he is regarded as *El Monumental de la Gaita* because of his powerful protest songs. In his short music career, he recorded the most forceful protest *gaitas* of each year and helped to establish the expectation of nearly every group including at least one song of social commentary on their annual release. By profession, Aguirre was a schoolteacher and administrator, and his protest *gaitas* frequently threatened his livelihood, because, in one way or another, he was on the public payroll. More than once, he lost his job by offending someone in the government with his

songs. Zulians now view this as an example of his commitment to *zulianidad*—that he would risk everything to speak the truth to power.

Nearly every year that he recorded, Aguirre included a protest *gaita* in his group's album. In 1964, "El Hambriento" [Hunger], written by Luis Ferrer, portrayed the desperation of a poor father considering selling his children to afford food. In 1965, as mentioned earlier, "La Centralización" (written by Renato Aguirre) complained about Zulia losing local control of public services. In 1966, "Imploración" (written by Marcial Valbuena) complained to the Virgen de Chiquinquirá that people were starving because of the cost of food, while politicians were getting paid three times what they should. Due to some personal disagreements, Aguirre switched groups from Cardenales del Éxito to Saladillo for the 1967 *gaita* season. While Saladillo's album contained no explicit protest songs that year, as described in an earlier chapter, many Zulians interpreted the adaptation of the old song "La Flor de la Habana" (written by Virgilio Carruyo in the late nineteenth century) as a complaint against the centralization of industry. Like an advertising jingle, the song praises a local cigarette company. Because the company had been forced to close when the dictator Gómez nationalized the tobacco industry, the song can be interpreted as a longing for yesteryear before centralized authority weakened regional prowess. Aguirre's stern baritone made all of these songs memorable and powerful statements about Zulian sociopolitical conditions.

In 1968, with the group Saladillo, Ricardo Aguirre recorded the song for which he will be most remembered. "La Grey Zuliana" [The Zulian Flock] has become an anthem of Zulian identity. In Aguirre's biography, Miguel Ordoñez summed up the song's status: "It became the HYMN of *gaiteros*, through the work and grace of popular will; no one

decreed it so" (Ordoñez 1998: 94, my translation, emphasis in original). As I discussed in a previous chapter, "La Grey" is both a religious song and a protest song, as it imagines Zulia as a congregation of devotees praying to their patron saint to banish ineffective and corrupt politicians who will not or cannot improve the lives of Zulians. Its popular status as *himno* [hymn] reflects this understanding that its protest is in the form of a prayer, a request for divine intervention for the Zulian people. Sociologist Light Carruyo emphasizes the song's importance in projecting a concept of Zulia as one community unified in their conflict against the central government.

> The song appears to have helped shape regional thought around a sense of marginality and opposition to the state. It unifies Zulians because it calls on common identity, regional symbols, and a sense of place—a cross-class sense of marginality is critical to the imagining of such a community. In other words, by focusing on regional commonalities, rather than internal differences or inequality, it builds an imagined cohesiveness among Zulians. (Carruyo 2005: 103)

Because, in an earlier chapter, I already described the importance of "La Grey Zuliana" in imagining Zulia as a religious community, here I will focus on the aspects of the song that make it such a powerful statement of political protest. Its lyrics are particularly potent in describing what Zulians see as their state's unfair contribution of wealth to the national economy without seeing enough development in their own region. More than any other song, it was through "La Grey" that "*gaita* became the vehicle for expressing … frustrations and criticizing the economy and the government's unfair distribution of wealth" (Berrios-Miranda 1999: 117).

After the dramatic introduction, which is an elegiac greeting to Maracaibo's patron saint La Virgen de Chiquinquirá using the more gentle rhythm of a Zulian *danza*,

the *gaita* rhythm kicks in, and the first verse asks the local apparition of the Virgin Mary to send ineffective government officials off to hell.

Madre mía, si el gobierno No ayuda al pueblo zuliano Tendreís que meter la mano Y mandarlo pa'l infierno	My mother, if the government Doesn't help the Zulian people You have to reach down And send them off to hell

After this verse is repeated, the chorus is sung twice, constantly reinforcing the idea of the Zulian people as a religious congregation who join in prayer to their *patrona.* Miguel Ordoñez, a respected composer as well as Ricardo Aguirre's biographer, stressed the distinctive compositional style of the song: "It broke schemes, above all in its metrical-literary construction" (1998: 94). Not only was it novel to have the song introduced with a non-*gaita* rhythm, but also the phrases of the chorus are not the usual octosyllabic lines, rather using five, seven, eight, and four syllables each. While this is an innovation that only *gaita* composers might notice—and it was influential—it helps to emphasize each line of text precisely because it is not the expected poetic form.

La grey zuliana (5 syllables) Cual rosario popular (7) De rodillas va a implorar (8) A su patrona (5) Y una montaña (5) De oraciones quiere dar (7) Esta gaita magistral (7) Que el Saladillo (5) La entona (4)	The Zulian flock, as a popular rosary, From their knees are going to implore to their patron And a mountain of prayers are given by This magisterial *gaita* that Saladillo intones

The third and final fourth verses make the most powerful protest statements. The third warns politicians that their corruption will be punished. The fourth argues that Maracaibo should have a better infrastructure since its oil wealth drives the national economy.

Acabaron con la plata Y se echaron a reír Pero les puede salir El tiro por la culata	They made off with the cash And let out a laugh But maybe The gun will backfire
Maracaibo ha dado tanto Que debiera de tener Carreterras a granel Con morocotas de canto	Maracaibo has given so much That it should have itself Plenty of paved roads Lined with gold coins (or with doubloons of song)

As an example of how well Zulians know these lyrics and how important they are to them, I once unintentionally provoked a debate about the meaning of the final line of the song while driving with two bilingual friends. *Morocotas* are ancient gold coins, which I like to translate with the archaic English word "doubloons." But my friends argued about the meaning of *de canto*, one saying it meant that the paved roads should be full of money and people singing, while the other argued that the roads should be so nice that their curbs would be made with gold coins. The debater promoting the "curbs of coins" translation actually jumped out of the slow-moving jeep to gesture to the curb and get us to imagine the streets lined with gold. I settled the dispute by arguing that Aguirre probably intended the ambiguous dual meaning.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, my most significant musical performances of *gaita* in Maracaibo were when I sang "La Grey Zuliana" in various informal settings and once on local television. It was somewhat by chance that one of the first *gaita* compact discs that I bought in Caracas was a collection of Ricardo Aguirre's hits. It was not by chance that "La Grey Zuliana" is the first cut on that CD, since it is such an important song. Based on conversations with the Aparicio family with whom I was staying in Caracas, I learned how important the song was, and I began to learn how to sing it and

play it on my *cuatro*. A few months later, when I was living in Maracaibo, I was able to surprise my new friends by singing the song at a bar, and subsequently, these friends would have me sing the song whenever new people showed up in social situations. It was a novel party trick to hear a *gringo* sing the most anthemic of *gaitas.* It was not the kind of song that people would usually sing at bars or parties, and having a foreigner sing a powerful protest song of local identity was a powerful experience for them and me. By singing "La Grey," I was aligning myself with a Zulian concept of regional political identity, in a particularly Zulian musical way.

Marginalized Maracaibo

While "La Grey Zuliana" is probably the best-known protest gaita of all time and certainly the one that people recognize as *el Himno de los Gaiteros*, many *gaita* aficionados told me that it was neither Aguirre's pinnacle nor his most important protest *gaita*. They named "Maracaibo Marginada," a song from the following year (1969) as the song that is most important to them in making Aguirre a true political hero and stating the regionalist political viewpoint. I remember speaking with one *gaita* fan specifically, someone who worked in local politics and was particularly knowledgeable about Zulian political history, who emphasized that "Maracaibo Marginada" best describes the way that Zulians feel excluded or marginalized from Venezuelan power. "Maracaibo Marginada" may sum up the Zulian feeling of resentment of centralized power better than any other song.

The lyrics' poetic force lies in the way Maracaibo's glory is repeatedly contrasted with the poverty and neglect that it suffers. The structure of "Maracaibo Marginada" is

very similar to “La Grey Zuliana:” there is a non-*gaita* introduction in a minor key that sets a somber mood with the sound of Aguirre’s voice and a *cuatro* strumming; this is followed by a typical quatrain of octosyllabic lines; and then the chorus uses lines of varied lengths. The introduction establishes that the people of Maracaibo, though noble and faithful, suffer the pain of poverty—so much so that they are “almost hidden from their sun,” a reference to the brutal heat of the region. The first verse states that, even though it is the capital of a prominent state, Maracaibo suffers due to the neglect of the national (central) government. The chorus is particularly powerful, portraying Maracaibo as “sacrificed” and “immolated” and left in poverty. This particular wording implies the environmental impact of the oil industry, which was just beginning to be understood in 1969. In reference to the motto on the old Maracaibo provincial seal, Aguirre worked in the descriptors *noble* (in the introduction) and *leal* (in the chorus), which adds historic weight to the song. The third verse makes it clear that Aguirre is not only blaming the central government for his city’s poverty, but he is also challenging local officials to improve the quality of life. In is position as a school administrator, Aguirre was well acquainted with the poverty of some sectors of Maracaibo, such as a school in the neighborhood Los Haticos where many of the students didn’t have changes of clothes and attended school barefoot (Ordóñez 1998: 125). Having taught classes for oil company workers and worked in various areas of the city, Aguirre knew the potential for prosperity that could come with the oil industry, and “Maracaibo Marginada” summed up his frustration with the gap between rich and poor in his region.

<table>
<tr><td>(Introito)
Un pueblo noble
Y creyente fe reclama
Y entristece
La penumbra
En su dolor.
Casi se esconde de su sol
Como apenado
Por el olvido
En que se encuentra su región</td><td>(Introduction)
A noble people
Of growing faith makes demands.
And they are so saddened
In the shadow
Of their pain that
They are almost hidden from their sun.
How they grieve
Due to the neglect
That their region suffers</td></tr>
<tr><td>(I)
Siendo la gran Capital
De un estado prominente
Sufre religiosamente
Del olvido nacional</td><td>(I)
Even though it's the great Capital
Of a prominent state
It suffers religiously
From national neglect</td></tr>
<tr><td>(Coro)
Tierra inmolada
Maracaibo señorial
Aun deberás continuar
Sacrificada
Maracaibo tierra mía
Idolatrada
Y olvidada por ser leal
Maracaibo marginada
Y sin un real
Que más te puede pasar
Que ya no te haya pasado?</td><td>(Chorus)
Immolated land
Majestic Maracaibo
Must you continue
To be sacrificed?
My land Maracaibo
Worshiped
Yet forgotten for being loyal
Excluded Maracaibo
And without a dime
What more could befall you
That hasn't already happened?</td></tr>
<tr><td>(II)
Siendo rica y colosal
Tu pobreza es elocuente
Porque tu riqueza es fuente
Para el progreso local.</td><td>(II)
Being rich and colossal
Your poverty is eloquent
Because your wealth should be a source
For local progress.</td></tr>
</table>

(III)	(III)
Si el gremio municipal No nos ampara hoy en día Sufriremos la agonía De una pobreza bestial.	If the municipal council Doesn't help us today We will suffer the agony Of a beastly poverty

"Maracaibo Marginada" solidified Aguirre's heroic status in *gaita* lore. It is unlikely that any other *gaitero* will ever displace him from the top of the hierarchy in *gaita* history. This particular song was released only a few months before his death in a drunk driving accident, and the suddenness of his passing only served to bolster his fame. As an example of the superlative reverence for Aguirre that Zulians often expressed to me, the following passage from Miguel Ordóñez' biography goes so far as to compare Aguirre to Jesus Christ, in terms of his commitment to his people.

> Just like in the songs "Imploración" and "Grey Zuliana", with "Maracaibo Marginada" he demonstrates that the solution to the people's problems lies not in the "formal" change from one governmental party to another, but rather in their effectiveness, in the interest and honesty that people need to have in order to govern and solve the basic problems of man; in paying attention, as one should, to being human; in the inescapable obligation of fighting the evils that man can face as a social being. Ricardo understood all of this despite his short time as a regional cultural leader, especially in how he adopted a musical genre of major significance as his weapon in the struggle, an argumentative song that was forged in the soul of his own people: *gaita*. …He worked simply, committed to everyone, to the people that remained close to his heart as his reason for being. It was his struggle, his tenacity; it was his unyielding mission: that *gaita* should become an expression of encouragement that resonated in his homeland against the evils inflicted on his people; his marginalized Maracaibo left without a dime. This final poetic reflection—immortalized in *gaita*—was the beautiful metaphoric culmination of a life dedicated to the elemental law of man: love one's neighbor. The divine teaching of Jesus… Solidarity with our fellow beings; love of Country; all of this goes through *gaita*—I mean, life—traveling through various lands with deep Christian faith. Similarly, other great men have left us without saying farewell. (Ordóñez 1998: 116–117, my translation)

Aguirre's death in car accident before dawn on November 8, 1969 was the only front-page story in Maracaibo's daily newspaper *Panorama* the following day. His funeral attracted nearly 100,000 people. In 1983, the date was declared *El Día del Gaitero* in Zulia state in Aguirre's memory. By chance, the date neatly coincides with the beginning of the novena for the patron saint, La Virgen de Chiquinquirá and the beginning of the Feria de la Chinita, so every Feria begins with remembrances of Aguirre on radio and in live *gaita* shows. The date of the Gaiteros' Day reinforces the connection between regionalism and religion discussed in Chapter Five. Ricardo Aguirre, who was recognized during his life as an avid devotee of La Chinita because of his many songs dedicated to her, is celebrated as the ultimate proponent of regional political song. Through the idealized figure of Aguirre, *gaitero*, Marian devotion is fused with political regionalism.

Destruction of Saladillo

Numerous protest *gaitas* were recorded in the 1970s, many of which were particularly critical of the national government. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 1970, two gaitas went so far as to suggest that Zulia should secede from Venezuela ("Independencia Ya" and "Rebelión"). Later in the decade, Cardenales del Éxito recorded two *gaitas* by Astolfo Romero that called the president of Venezuela the devil, and in the second, "El Gabinete del Diablo," the verses go so far as to specifically criticize various cabinet members. Most of these and other protest songs seem driven by anger and frustration with living conditions.

As discussed in chapter four, a number of *gaitas de protesta* of the early 1970s expressed the profound sadness in Maracaibo over the government's decision to level most of the Saladillo neighborhood in an urban development effort. Saladillo was the neighborhood surrounding the Basilica, and it was thought of as the heart of old Maracaibo. By the late 1960s, many of the buildings around the Basilica were run down, and the streets were too narrow to allow much vehicular traffic to pass, so the area was razed to create a new park, a larger plaza in front of the Basilica, and wider streets. Area residents were moved to suburbs around the city or into several new high-rise buildings on the cleared land. Numerous *gaitas* mourned the loss of this historic neighborhood. In chapter four, I explained how Rafael Rodríguez's song "Frente a Frente" spoke in spatial terms of how the Basilica and the church of Santa Bárbara, which had been two separate parishes divided by several blocks of dense housing, now stood "face to face," with thousands of their former congregants removed. Composer Ramón Rincón expressed sorrow over the "renovation" in Lágrimas de un Barrio" [tears of a neighborhood], as sung by José Ríos with the group Saladillo. In this song, the lyrics ask for forgiveness from La Chinita for breaking the patron saint's heart by destroying her neighborhood.

In an email conversation with my friend Gerardo Ardín, a professional gaita singer and local television host, he described the destruction of Saladillo like this.

> Así es como muchos historiadores califican a este momento como un gran zarpazo a la memoria colectiva de la ciudad, al desarraigo identitario de mi pueblo, que se vio forzado a vivir en otra parte que no era su espacio natural. Es insólito, puesto que maracaibo poseía para entonces enormes extenciones de tierras para los desarrollos urbanos requeridos.
>
> Many historians consider this moment a huge cleft in the city's collective memory, to the uprooted identitary of my people, that we saw forced to live in

> another area that wasn't their natural space. It's strange, as Maracaibo possessed enormous tracts of land for the required urban development.

Gerardo poetically invented the word *identitario* to stress the point about how the destruction of Saladillo and the relocation of that population created an uprootedness among Maracaiberos. The people were removed from their "natural" habitat near the Basilica and the lakefront.

As with many urban renewal projects, Saladillo was razed, but the rebuilding plan was never completed. When I first arrived in Maracaibo in 2000, the park that had been built, the Paseo de Ciencias, which was designed to be a tribute to scientific progress, was a desolate landscape of non-working concrete fountains with peeling paint. Entire blocks were empty and unused, and several areas contained the remains of houses whose demolition was never completed. Rafael Rodríguez's "Gaita Entre Ruinas" (sung by Germán Ávila with the group Saladillo de RQ in 1972) describes the heartbreak of the ruinous destruction.

Coro	Chorus
Hoy todo en ruinas Así, sencillo: Ya la Basilica queda sola en el Saladillo, Señor, Mudo testigo Aquella generación. Con gran dolor Dando paso al futuro Porque allí entre viejos muros La gaita nació.	Today everything's in ruins To put it simply: Now the Basilica remains alone in Saladillo, Sir, A mute witness To that old generation With tremendous pain Plodding toward the future Because there, among the old walls *Gaita* was born

I	I
Cómo te están transformando Mi querido barrio viejo Ya no eres sino el reflejo De lo que voy recordando Y si salgo caminando A ver qué recuerdo cojo Sólo me encuentro despojos De lo que están derribando	How transformed you are! My dear old neighborhood Now you're nothing but a reflection Of what I remember And if I go out walking To see what I remember crippled I only find the rubble Of what's been demolished
II En la tarde agonizante Por entre las ruinas viejas Un anciano que se aleja Solitario y vacilante Me hizo pensar un instante En aquellos años idos De poetas esclarecidos Y de la gaita elegante	II In the agonizing afternoon Among the old ruins An old man moves away Solitary and hesitating It made me think for an instant Of those past years Of illustrious poets Of the elegant *gaita*
III Aquel arbol solitario Presenció tantas mañanas El tañir de las campanas De tu sagrado santuario Hoy el templo es lapidario Y aún recuerdo las carrozas En brazos la China hermosa De zulianos legendarios	III That solitary tree Witnessed on so many mornings The ringing of the bells Of your sacred sanctuary Today the temple is a tombstone And I even remember the carriages In the arms of the beautiful China Of legendary Zulians

Rafael and I talked about these *gaitas* several times. He grew up in the Saladillo neighborhood and had many fond memories of the *gaita* parties that occurred in the narrow streets. Though rundown, to him the area was full of life and, in his mind, was the birthplace of *gaita* music. While most protest *gaitas* express anger, these songs about the razing of Saladillo convey sadness and heartbreak.

Protest Gaitas in the Chávez Era

Quite by chance, the research for this thesis neatly coincides with the tremendous political changes that took place in Venezuela during the presidency of Hugo Chávez Frías, a socialist who broke the two-party system that had ruled since 1958. I first learned about *gaita* while studying *cuatro* with Euclides Aparicio in 1997 at the University of Washington, just as Chávez began his rise to power with the founding of his MVR party (Movimiento V^{ta} República/ Fifth Republic Movement). I first visited Venezuela to conduct preliminary archival research in 1999, the year Chávez was first inaugurated president. He was reelected several times before dying of cancer in early 2013 (the year of the completion of this dissertation). Before presenting some *gaitas de protesta* that were addressed to Chávez, in this section I will offer some context of Venezuela's recent political history.

Political discourse during the Chávez era was particularly polarized, and I sometimes found it difficult to maintain a neutral political stance during my research. I made friends with both fervent *chavistas* and die-hard members of the *oposición.* Some of the former saw Chávez as the savior of Venezuela, and some of the latter openly admitted to wishing someone would assassinate him. Middle ground was hard to find, and given the widespread belief in the United States' government's support of those opposed to Chávez, some were suspicious of me. (See Golinger 2006 for detailed reporting on U.S. involvement in Venezuela leading up to the 2002 coup against Chávez.) Personally, I saw many of Chávez's reforms as positive for the country and his resistance to United States' hemispheric domination a healthy correction to the balance of power, but I also found his style of rule to be demagogic and headed toward dictatorship. While

many of his political reforms seemed simply designed to consolidate his power, with time, I have come to understand and respect what a challenge it was for Chávez to undermine Venezuela's entrenched power structure and create real reforms that benefitted people who had historically been excluded from power. I have also seen economic improvement in the livelihoods of nearly every one of my Venezuelan friends, even those who opposed Chávez's changes.

From the overthrow of the military dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958 until the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, Venezuela had a history of democratically elected governments, through recent scholarship has questioned how democratic the system really was. Not unlike the two-party system in the United States, Venezuelan politics were dominated by two major parties, AD (Acción Democrática—Social Democrats) and COPEI (Comité de Organización Political Electoral Independiente—Christian Democrats). The era of 1958–98 was known as "Punto Fijo Democracy" and is now critically referred to as a "pacted democracy" because, after the overthrow of the dictator, the two major parties made a pact to peacefully share power (meeting at a house named "Punto Fijo"), while deliberately excluding other parties, such as the Communists (Ellner 2008: 53). Because this political system resembled that of the United States, because Venezuela rejected communism during the cold war, and because the U.S. increasingly depended on foreign oil, Washington supported and promoted Venezuela as a kind of "model democracy." During this period, political science on Venezuela was dominated by the "exceptionalism" theory: that Venezuela was the "exception" in Latin America for the latter half of the twentieth century when most Latin American countries experienced either military *coups d'etat* (e.g., Chile, Argentina, Brazil) or violent socialist revolutions

(e.g., Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador). "Three basic formulations underpinned exceptionalism writing: that Venezuela was privileged with respect to the rest of Latin America, that it remained free of acute class and racial conflict and cleavages that threatened political stability elsewhere, and that its democratic system and political culture were healthy and solid" (Ellner and Tinker Salas 2007: 5). Several political historians have revised this idealized view of Venezuelan "exceptionalism" in recent years.

This political theory of "exceptionalism" held up well in the 1970s but eroded by the 1980s and 1990s as Venezuela's economy shrunk and violent crime took over the country. As the government instituted various neoliberal economic reforms, the quality of life of most Venezuelans went down considerably. "Whereas in 1978 Venezuela boasted one of Latin America's largest middle classes, at the close of [Rafael] Caldera's government (February 1999) [when Chávez took office] more than 80 percent of all Venezuelans lived below the poverty line" (Ellner and Myers 2002: 109). Light Carruyo (2005) has documented how protest *gaitas* fiercely responded to the economic downturn. The group Pillopo responded to the situation with a scathingly ironic song by Neguito Borjas called "El Paquetazo," which roughly translates as "the horrible bill of goods," to criticize the government's neoliberal reforms that allowed prices for food, medicine, gasoline, and utilities to rise suddenly. At the beginning of the song, the singer sarcastically exclaims, "¡Qué tremendo paquete, hermano!" Carruyo translates the first verse as: "For the first time in history / we see that in a country / they make the masses suffer / to pay for what others steal … By means of mega-packages / this government punishes / the pockets and bellies / of the Venezuelan people" (Carruyo 2005: 105). The

song's sarcasm is accentuated by the happy, major-key sound. The chorus jokes about how the people love the "blessed package."

By 1998, Venezuelans were ready to change their political system in hope of improving their quality of life, and Hugo Chávez's presidential candidacy offered a dramatic alternative to the entrenched power of the AD and COPEI parties. As a military colonel, in 1992 Chávez had attempted a coup that failed and landed him in prison for several years. After President Rafael Caldera pardoned Chávez in 1994, his desire for political change grew into a political movement toward "Bolivarian socialism." Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia, had long served as a national hero of independence and the father of the country. Chávez skillfully recast his version of socialism with Bolívar's idea of a strong central government and a South American alliance of nations that could function as a world power and challenge the United States. As the AD and COPEI parties lost their popular support, Chávez won the 1998 presidential election.

A few months after his inauguration in 1999, Chávez began implementing his revolutionary changes for Venezuela's government and economy. He proposed and succeeded with a popular referendum to elect a Constitutional assembly to write a new constitution for Venezuela. The assembly dissolved the old legislature and created a new constitution. Under the new rules, Chávez again ran for president and won in 2001. Gradually, his administration rolled back the neoliberal privatization of various industries and rewrote the laws governing petroleum profits so that more money would go toward projects to help the poor, which helped solidify Chávez's popularity among those hardest hit by the economic downturn while antagonizing the rich who had succeeded under the

old power structure. Most Venezuelans favored Chávez's reforms and seemed to believe that a radical change to the Venezuelan sociopolitical system was in order after decades of increasing hardship.

While most Venezuelans initially backed Chávez's policies, his leadership style drew criticism. "Ever since the election of Hugo Chávez as president in December 1998, political analysts and many Venezuelans in general have tended to focus on his style, discourse, and personality and pass over issues of substance and the long-term implications of the changes under way. ... Part of it has to do with Chávez himself. Chávez is a charismatic and romantic figure and a didactic leader who thoroughly dominates his movement" (Ellner 2008: 109). In trying to make his government appear more responsive to the people, Chávez made more public appearances than any previous president, and increasingly he dominated the airwaves with broadcasts called *cadenas.*

> *Cadenas*, literally chains, are free-of-charge, mandatory transmissions of official messages by all private and government channels. These live national chains [simulcasts] have no time limit and may extend as long as the duration of the message or speech. Furthermore, commercials are prohibited during the transmission of a *cadena*…. *Cadenas* are not new to the Chávez government. They have existed since the arrival of television in Venezuela decades ago. Nevertheless, since 1999 the frequency of their use has grown exponentially from twice a year to twice a week. What used to be a Christmas greeting or an emergency address by the president has now turned to the transmittal of virtually every speech made by the president. (Soto 2008: 439–440)

During my first visit to Caracas in 1999, I found that many Venezuelans enjoyed tuning into the *cadenas.* Clearly, working class, i.e., struggling, Venezuelans appreciated the attention their new president gave them, and they gave it back by listening to him.

As Chávez's *cadenas* became more frequent and intrusive, some Venezuelans treated them as evidence that their new president was a blowhard who never knew when

to stop talking. The broadcasts started unannounced at any time of day and lasted for several hours, interrupting whatever programming people were hoping to watch. Chávez's broadcasts were often unfocused, and after an initial policy announcement, he would continue repeating himself or simply speak about any topic that came to his mind. This provoked satirical responses from humorists and one very popular *gaita* that could be thought of as a protest, though a joking one. In 2000, the first *gaita* season that I spent in Venezuela, one of the big hits was Happy Gaita's "Las Cadenas de Chávez," written by the group's singer, Jesús "Chuchi" Bermúdez, and keyboardist, Amador "Chicho" Bermúdez. The chorus mocks the president, suggesting that he's trying to make himself appear strong by talking all night long. The verses describe the television viewer's frustration with having three of the most popular kinds of shows interrupted. In the first verse, a *telenovela*, or soap opera, is interrupted during its final episode, and the soap opera writer (Delia Fiallo) and actress (Lupita Ferrer) will have to adjust to interruptions. In the second verse, a baseball game between the crosstown rivals Caracas Leones and Magallanes is interrupted in the ninth inning with the winning run on third base. (A legacy of the oil industry, baseball is the most popular sport in Venezuela.) In the final verse, the judge is about to read the winners of the Miss Venezuela beauty contest when Chávez's *cadena* breaks in. (Beauty pageants are one of the biggest aspects of Venezuela's entertainment industry.) In between the verses are short spoken jokes, one saying that if the *cadenas* were made of gold, the country could pay off its foreign debt, and the second saying they don't have to watch the *cadena* because the electricity went out, a frequent problem throughout Venezuela.

(Coro) Con las cadenas de Chávez no puede ni Superman, ¿será que se cree galán pa'estar en televisión, adornando a la nación hasta el horario estelar?	Chours With the simulcasts of Chavez You'd think he was Superman Is it that we should believe he's handsome If he's on television Decorating the nation Until the stars fall [all night long]
I El capítulo final de la novela del día no la pudo ver María porque el hombre empezó a hablar. Delia Fiallo va a tener que hacer algo diferente, el galán sea el Presidente junto a Lupita Ferrer.	I The final episode Of the current soap opera Maria couldn't see Because the man Started to talk. Delia Fiallo is going to have to Do something different The star is the President Along with Lupita Ferrer
(Hablando 1) Si las cadenas fueran de oro y las vendemos, pagamos la deuda extrerna.	(spoken) If the simulcasts were made of gold And we sold them, We could pay off the national debt!
II El noveno inning llegó, un Caracas Magallanes, y la carrera del gane en tercera se montó; ya se prepara al lanzar el relevista más diestro, y en este mismo momento... ¡Chávez volvió a encadenar!	II It's the ninth inning Between rivals Caracas and Magallanes And the winning run Just made it to third base; And ready to pitch is The right-handed reliever, And just at that moment… Chavez returns in a simulcast!
(Hablando 2) Mira, chico, gracias a Dios que nos salvamos... ¡Sí, pero porque se fue la luz!	(Spoken) Hey, man, look, thank God, we're spared (from watching it)… Yeah, but it's only because the electricity went out!

III El Miss Venezuela está en su fase culminante, sabremos en un instante cuál de todas ganará; ya el jurado decidió, tiene en sus manos la lista, "La primera finalista…" ¿qué es?... ¡Otra vez se encadenó!	III The Miss Venezuela pageant Is in its final phase We will learn in an instant Who will win it all; The judge has decided, He has the list of names in his hands, "In first place…" What's this? Another simulcast!

"Las Cadenas de Chávez" is tame compared to earlier protest *gaitas* that called previous presidents the devil, and many *gaiteros* would consider it more of a humor piece than a true *gaita de protesta*. The only real political commentary is made in the spoken jokes between verses—complaints about the national debt and the unreliability of electricity, both of which are problems that long preceded Chávez's rise to power. It is an example of how Chávez's opponents tend to criticize his style more than the substance of his policies, but at a time when some entertainers feared censorship if they openly criticized the new president, it uses humor to jab at one of his tactics that increasingly annoyed many Venezuelans—the interruption of their banal television programs.

Political Polarization and the Decline of *Gaitas de Protesta* under Chávez

Considering the contentiousness of the political discourse during Chávez's tenure, and the fact that Zulia state was one of the least *chavista* regions of the country, I initially found it strange that there weren't more protest *gaitas* directed against him. Many of the *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans with whom I socialized in Santa Lucía during my trips to Maracaibo in 2001, 2003 and 2007 were ferociously anti-Chávez, yet relatively few *gaita* songs explicitly protested his rule. In this section, I offer some explanations for this lack

of protest *gaitas* and an explanation of why one group, Barrio Obrero, did express their opposition to Chávez in song.

Market forces are the simplest explanation for why few groups recorded anti-Chávez *gaitas.* Although Zulia was one of the strongholds of the *oposición*, many Zulians, especially those of lower socio-economic status, supported Chávez. Zulians were split fairly evenly between *chavista* and *oposición* for most of the 2000s. As evidence of this even division, the two most important political offices in the state, Zulia governor and Maracaibo mayor, essentially alternated between pro- and anti-Chávez politicians. For example, when *chavista* Gian Carlo di Martino was mayor, anti-Chávez Manuel Rosales was governor. As one *gaitero* told me, no group would want to completely alienate half of the local audience by taking a public stand on either side. Also, many groups had members on both sides of the political spectrum, so one group could not speak with a unified opinion. Considering the national market that many *gaita* groups seek to gain, because Chávez was very popular throughout the country, singing songs against him would limit considerably their group's potential audience. As another reason, one *gaitero* told me that with all the contentious political debate in the media, *gaita* should just be a fun escape from the tension, a way to celebrate the holiday season, as it had always been.

Another reason for the lack of *gaitas de protesta* since 2004 was the fear of censorship under a new media law that Chávez pushed for after his brief ouster in a coup d'etat. In April 2002, business leaders backed by some military officers removed Chávez from power after a confrontation of massive pro- and anti-Chávez street protests. The coup would not have been possible without considerable help from the broadcast media.

According to a legal scholar, "The media's coverage of the plot against Chávez was so skewed against him that people began to view it as the first "media coup" of the twenty-first century" (Soto 2008: 408). In an award-winning video *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (2002), an Irish film crew documented the one-sided, anti-Chávez nature of the media's coverage of the events that lead up to the coup and the president's return to power a few days later. (For an analysis of how the United States probably supported the coup, see Golinger 2006. For a detailed description of the street clashes and the coup that expresses the views of the anti-Chávez protesters and credits certain military officers for restoring Chávez to power, see Nelson 2008.)

Partly in response to the media's support of the coup against him, in 2004, Chávez succeeded in passing a new law to regulate broadcast content. The Social Responsibility in Radio and Television Law (RESORTE) imposed many new requirements and limitations on the broadcast media and gave the government the power to revoke broadcast licenses of stations that did not comply. Legal scholar Angel Soto has published a lengthy critique of the law that "concludes that various provisions of RESORTE severely limit freedom of speech," but "due to Venezuela's contemporary political situation, most of the restrictions contained in RESORTE are justified on the grounds of national security, protection of children, and public health" (Soto 2008: 402). Soto shows how the law's "provisions suggest that the real objective behind this legislation is to strictly regulate the content of all messages transmitted by radio and television, which in conjunction with its vague language and excessive sanctions, results in the establishment of prior restraints and self-censorship" (Soto 2008: 430). During my visit to Maracaibo in 2007, several *gaiteros* and my Venezuelan friends in the media

cited RESORTE to explain the lack of protest *gaitas*. Broadcasters feared punishment for broadcasting songs that criticized the government, as regulators could interpret these as threatening public security. Many groups decided not to record any protest *gaitas* because they knew that no radio stations would risk playing them. In an article in the national newspaper *El Universal* on December 3, 2009 (Gómez 2009), various *gaiteros* and broadcasters offered their explanations for their self-censorship under RESORTE. One broadcaster, Nelson Belfort, added another factor—that since many of the biggest *gaita* shows are sponsored, in one way or another, by some government entity, no group would want to offend the government in a song and risk losing performance opportunities. Indirectly or directly, the RESORTE law resulted in *gaita* groups' decision not to record protest songs.

One of the few *gaita* groups that continuously and openly sang of their opposition to Chávez was Barrio Obrero de Cabimas, and in part, they did this because they were not subject to the same market forces as other groups. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Barrio Obrero, which was organized in the 1950s, distinguishes itself from other groups by refusing to use any but the "traditional" *gaita* instruments of *furro*, *charrasca*, *cuatro*, *tambora*, and *maracas*, and their songs tend to strictly follow the poetic structure of old *gaitas.* The key members of the group are all part of one extended family, the Silvas, and they feature female and male singers almost equally, in contrast to the male-dominated vocals of most groups. They are particularly known for their songs in devotion to La Chinita, the patron saint. Because of these reasons, most *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans view Barrio Obrero as a kind of throwback, folkloric group, and few expect their songs to be clever hits, although their conservative orchestration helps to emphasize their lyrics, so

some fans pay more attention to the words of their songs than those of other groups. By the 1990s, the state of Zulia recognized the group as an institution of cultural heritage, and so, with some local government support, and with their members all employed in various professions, the group did not seem to attempt to make a profit through performances or by selling recordings. These factors allowed Barrio Obrero to be the most outspoken *gaita* group in their opposition to Chávez. Nearly every year of Chávez's rule, Barrio Obrero released at least one scathing *gaita de protesta* that targeted the president or his allies and lodged specific complaints about the country's situation. Some examples are: "¿Donde Queda Eso?" [Where is That?], which rhetorically asks pointed questions about Venezuela's problems, such as food shortages; "¿Hasta Cuando, Presidente?" [Until When, President?], which asks how long Venezuelans need to suffer in poverty; "Apagar el Televisor" encourages Venezuelans to simply turn off the TV when Chávez appears *en cadena*; and "Cobres No Hay" [No pennies left] suggests that Maracaibo Mayor Gian Carlo di Martino, of Chávez's party, ran off with Maracaibo's money when he left office in 2008.

In 2003, Barrio Obrero released "La Bolivariana," a particularly sharply worded *gaita* that criticized Chávez's constant invocation of the national hero, Simón Bolívar. To solidify his association with the symbolic power of El Libertador, Chávez renamed the country the *República Bolivariana de Venezuela.* The lyrics (written by Nano Silva) complain that despite all of Chávez's rhetoric about Bolívar, the country is still a mess. In the second verse, they also mention how the 1970s political singer Alí Primera, another of Chávez's heroes, would be ashamed at the state of the country. The third verse imagines that if Chávez actually met Bolívar, it would be as embarrassing as an enema.

The fourth verse particularly criticizes Chávez's political discourse, as he frequently complained about the tyranny of the United States. "La Bolivariana" sums up many of the criticisms of those opposed to Chávez.

CORO	Chorus
Tanto que habláis de Bolívar Del sueño Bolivariano El pueblo te dió su mano Para ponerte allá arriba Pero cómo ésta condena de pobreza es lo que impera Si Bolívar reviviera se moriría de la pena	You speak so much of Bolivar, Of the Bolivarian dream. The people gave you their hand To put you up on high. But this condemnation To poverty is what prevails. If Bolivar were to come back to life He'd die from the pain of it
II Bolívar fue rectitud Humildad e inteligencia En cambio la negligencia Es dueña de tu actitud Hasta el mismo Alí Primera Que presumes de tu lado Estaría avergonzado De ver hoy a Venezuela	II Bolivar represented uprightness Humility and intelligence. On the other hand, negligence Is your main attitude. Even Ali Primera, Whom you presume is by your side. Would be ashamed To see Venezuela today
III Qué le dirías a Bolívar Si se te parara al frente Hable señor Presidente Explique ésta lavativa Ahi te grabaría la prensa Pa' ver la transformación De tu rostro de bribón En un rostro de vergüenza.	III What would you say to Bolivar If he were to face you? Speak, Mr. President Explain this enema. Here, I will record the event for you: We'd see the transformation Of your dishonest face To a face of shame

IV Argumentos de tirano Junto al delirio de gloria Te alejan en nuestra historia De ser un bolivariano Has moldeado un ciudadano Que hoy ante el mundo se calla Te queda grande de talla Llamarte Venezolano	IV Arguments of tyranny Together with delusions of glory Lead you away from our history Of being a Bolivarian. You have cast a citizen [???] That today before the world quiets It's way too large for you Calling yourself Venezuelan
V El pueblo ya despertó De ésta humillante condena Hoy a todos nos dá pena Tu gobierno fracasó Pa' que más nadie denuncie Y se termine lo malo DIOSITO ILUMINALO !!! Y PERMITI QUE RENUNCIE !!!	V The people already woke up From this humiliating condemnation. Today everyone feels the pain Of your messed up government So that more than anything they denounce And call for an end of the bad. God, illuminate him And may he renounce himself!

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how *gaiteros* connect their genre's history of protest songs to the beginnings of Zulian history during the independence era. Some *gaitas*, like some Zulian leaders in the nineteenth century, propose that Zulia secede from the Venezuelan nation-state, but usually, this secessionist urge is (usually) maintained as a vague threat without real intention. Still, Zulians' knowledge of their state's history of potential autonomy informs their protest songs and their interpretation of these songs.

Ricardo Aguirre, the most revered *gaitero* in history, is remembered particularly for singing some of the most famous *gaitas de protesta* of the 1960s. "La Grey Zuliana" now functions as the *gaiteros'* hymn, a song that projects an image of Zulians praying to

their patron saint to save them from corrupt officials. Many *gaita* aficionados cite his other protest songs, especially "Maracaibo Marginada," as the reason for his continued fame. While his party songs and his songs of religious devotion are still among the most popular classics, it is Aguirre's protest *gaitas* that make him such a powerful figure in the history of *gaita.* Besides securing his place in history, his singing of protest songs established a precedent that *gaiteros* have followed for decades—that to be taken seriously as a composer or singer requires singing songs of serious political commentary. Zulians love many songs written by Rafael Rodríguez, Renato Aguirre, Neguito Borjas, Luis Ferrer, Firmo Segunda Rincón, and others, but it is because of those composers' *gaitas de protesta* that they are revered as regional heroes.

Despite the fact that Zulia was one of the strongholds of the *oposición* during the era of Hugo Chávez' presidency from 1998–2013, market forces and the RESORTE media law dissuaded *gaiteros* from expressing opposition to Chávez in song. During the period of my research, I expected that the contentious nature of Venezuelan political discourse would have fueled the demand for protest *gaitas*, but because of self-censorship to avoid offending the *chavista* portion of the audience and the government itself, relatively few protest *gaitas* were recorded. I suspect market forces—not wanting to lose audience members or opportunities for performing at government-funded shows—are the main cause for *gaiteros'* self-censorship, but fear of reprisals under the RESORTE law is also a factor.

As I write this, Chávez's successor Nicolas Maduro is in his first year in office as President, having narrowly defeated opposition candidate Capriles. Maduro does not seem to have the same charisma as Chávez, so it is not clear how Venezuelans will

respond to his presidency and how they will tolerate the country's continued hardships including poverty, food shortages, inconsistent utility service, and, most of all, the ever growing insecurity of street violence. I look forward to see how *gaita* composers respond to this situation in their songs.

Conclusion: The Importance of *Gaita*

In simple terms, one of the most common concerns of the field of ethnomusicology is the study of music's importance to some group of people. While some ethnomusicologists may focus more on sound or music theory and others on history and social context, underlying all of our work is the explanation of music's social significance. For many of us, including myself, this work involves showing the role of music in constructing and negotiating social identity.

For most Venezuelans, especially residents of Caracas, *gaita* is simply party music for the Christmas season, but in Maracaibo and much of Zulia state, where *gaita* originated, the music serves as a key medium through which regional identity is defined, promoted, negotiated, celebrated, and even marketed. Crucial to this regional identity-making is showing how Zulians differ culturally from the rest of the country. The mere sound of *gaita*—with its unique beat—is recognized as distinctly Zulian. Based on my discussions with musicians, composers, academics, and *gaita* fans, I learned that *gaita* song lyrics are taken quite seriously as they document, promote, and re-create important aspects of Zulian identity. I chose to structure my arguments around five broad vectors of *gaita*'s expression of *Zulianidad*: sound, history, geography, religion and politics.

In Chapter Two, I explained how *gaita* is instantly recognizable as a local sound, a *ritmo* with deep roots in Zulia. In most recordings and performances, before the singing begins, the characteristic instruments play the typical *gaita* rhythm. Most Zulians (and many Venezuelans) would instantly recognize a song as a *gaita* from just the first few strums of the *cuatro*, the four-stringed guitar. After the *cuatro* establishes the tonality and tempo, the percussion instruments of *furro*, *charrasca*, and *tambora* join in to create the

6/8 *gaita* rhythm in which, unlike most rhythms, the bass sounds of the *furro* and *tambora* avoid playing on the strong beats (first and fourth eighth notes of each measure). Each of these percussion instruments contributes a unique sound to *gaita*—the "vroom-vroom" of the *furro*, the "tack-boom-boom" of the *tambora*, and the clanging scrape of the *charrasca*—and together, the ensemble produces the genre's unique composite rhythm. If a listener had any doubt about whether this sound was *gaita*, the confusion would be brief because so many *gaita* lyrics speak explicitly about the rhythm, sound, and instrumentation. While most *gaiteros* present this rhythm as traditional and so old that it is, in a sense, prehistoric, I believe that this tradition was codified through the advent of commercial recordings in the early 1960s. As such, the sound that is considered "traditional *gaita*" is really the sound of the first hit records of the early- to mid-1960s. In the subsequent decades, innovative musicians have pushed the boundaries of *gaita*'s sound, creating a popular discourse about what is and is not *gaita*.

In Chapter Three, I showed how *gaita* is embedded in local history while song lyrics also serve as documents of broader social history. Here two *gaita* composers and historians, Víctor Hugo Márquez and Miguel Ordóñez, profoundly influenced my understanding of the history of *gaita* and *gaita* as history. As the greatest living *gaita repentista* [poetic improviser], Márquez' history of *gaita* (2006) emphasizes its origins in parties where Zulians gathered in a circle to spontaneously improvise verses to a song. According to oral history, most of this versification spoke about the party itself, but undoubtedly, some singers took the opportunity to comment about current events and express political protest in song, not unlike other improvisational genres such as blues and calypso. One important legacy of this oral practice is that most *gaitas* still use verses

of four octosyllabic lines with an ABBA rhyme scheme; such a fixed structure facilitated improvisation in the nineteenth century, and it still provides a format for current composers to use or modify for creative effect. Another legacy was the reinvigoration of *gaita* as protest song that began in the mid-1960s and culminated in the *gaitas de protesta* of Ricardo Aguirre, such as "La Grey Zuliana" (1968) and "Maracaibo Marginada" (1969). Aguirre's biographer, journalist and composer Miguel Ordóñez, stresses *gaita*'s role as a historical chronicle, that is that *gaita* lyrics function as a popular history of Zulia. When discussing local history, Zulians that I met frequently quoted or referred to *gaita* lyrics—songs about old neighborhoods, businesses, markets, and important events. *Gaita* documents local history, and it is one of the most important aspects of local cultural history.

In Chapter Four, I drew on the theoretical framing of some recent cultural geographers to show how *gaita* "produces place." Songs that describe and celebrate local places constantly reinforce *gaita*'s connection to its place of origin in Maracaibo, literally singing geography into the popular imagination. Many of these songs are unequivocally positive, to the point where they function as tourism advertisements for Zulia, a place with relatively little tourist economy outside of the cultural festivities of the annual Feria de la Chinita. Most of these songs present fantasy-like images of a beautiful, welcoming place, citing the hospitality of the people and the beauty of Lake Maracaibo. Many songs negotiate larger geographical issues such as citing and incorporating various small Zulian towns into the sense of a regional "we." Other songs connect Zulia to the rest of Venezuela by singing of distant places and landmarks. Recently, some songs have expressed political commentary of a geographical nature, such as those that bemoan the

environmental damage done to Lake Maracaibo by nearly a century of oil extraction. Even as *gaita*'s popularity has expanded throughout Venezuela, it remains deeply connected to Maracaibo because of how songs sing of local places and negotiate Zulians' relationships with broader geographies.

My purpose in Chapter Five was to show how *gaita* promotes localized Catholic religious identity as a key component of Zulian regional identity. While I drew heavily on Anderson's idea of the nation (or, in this case, the region) as an "imagined community," I was expanding on his theory, since, as several Latin Americanist scholars have criticized, he discounted the role of religion in the imagining of nations. I was also drawing on recent ethnographic studies of "popular Catholicism" that show how localized religious practice frequently differs from what might be considered the normative dictates from Rome. Devotion to patron saints is one important way that Catholicism is localized, and through this devotion, even a seemingly global religion can play a huge role in regional identity. *Gaita* music originated as the party music of the holiday season, which, in Maracaibo, begins in the week leading up to November 18th, the feast day of the local *patrona*, La Virgen del Rosario de Chiquinquirá, popularly referred to as La Chinita. Some *gaitas* retell the origin story of La Chinita, and every year, new songs express a singer's devotion to her. This expression of devotion is often portrayed as one aspect of being a "good Zulian," thus conflating religious and sociopolitical identity in the imagining of the region. Suzel Ana Reilly's theory of "enchantment" helped me to explain how, as thousands sing along with a *gaita* group outside the Basilica as the clock strikes midnight to mark the beginning of La Chinita's feast day, one can imagine Zulia as a religious congregation, "La Grey Zuliana," or the Zulian "flock."

Finally, Chapter Six addressed how, especially since the 1960s, *gaita* has served as a medium of expressing political protest. Very often, this dissent has taken the point of view of a Zulian criticizing the centralized power of the national government. I connect this sentiment to the earliest political history of Zulia when the regional government decided against joining those in Caracas in the original declaration of independence. A few years later, when Zulia did join the independence movement, it was not clear that the local elite wanted to be part of a centrally controlled Venezuela, but rather a loose federation of autonomous states. Throughout the nineteenth century, the regional government in Maracaibo resisted national control, even declaring independence more than once. *Gaitas* remind Zulians of this history, and occasionally, even suggest that Zulia should secede from Venezuela. This discourse promotes another essential component of regional identity: the resentment of and resistance to centralized political authority. Although, as far as I can tell, few Zulians presently would support an act of secession, the veiled threat of Zulian independence is a crucial component to regional identity. Based on *gaita*'s function as a medium of protest against the national government, during the time of my study, which coincided with the presidency of Hugo Chávez, I would have expected more politically charged songs than I found. I concluded that market forces explain the lack of anti-Chávez *gaitas.* Because the political situation was so polarized and so evenly divided, to sing either anti- or pro-Chávez songs would have immediately alienated half of the potential audience. Further, since most *gaita* groups are hired by various governmental entities to perform during the Feria and other events, blatant protest against one side or another would severely limit one's performance opportunities.

One theme that carries through many of these chapters is how ideas about race play out through *gaita.* Like many places in Latin America, in Venezuela, there is a widely held belief that, due to the racially mixed majority population, there is no racism. Many scholars and some Venezuelans have critiqued this belief in a "racial democracy" and how this ideology, in fact, obscures much social inequity. *Gaita* may play a role in this by reinforcing this trope of racial equality. The instruments themselves are credited to the different racial components, so the ensemble is viewed as an example of harmonious racial mixing. Many songs try to incorporate Indians and Afro-Venezuelans into the broader sense of a Zulian or Venezuelan "we" without actually denouncing current inequality. A few *gaita* performers vaguely identify as Indians or Afro-Venezuelan, but for the most part, *gaita* is sung by the mixed-race middle and lower classes, and it serves to reinforce an ideology of color blindness that may really be a desire to not see injustice. Honestly, I believe I have only scratched the surface of this enormous topic, and I hope that others will pursue it further.

The most important theme that carries through this study is how music can promote a regional identity in resistance to broader nationalism, even as the music is commercialized and promoted nationwide. Given that Venezuela—with its enormous petroleum reserves—is a strategically important country, it is remarkable how little scholarly energy has been spent on trying to understand its culture. Part of the blame for this may lie with the oil industry itself, which forcefully exported American modes of sport, recreation, architecture, and lifestyle to Venezuela, especially to the oil-producing regions like Zulia. However, despite the cultural changes created by the oil industry, autochthonous Zulian culture has survived and thrived, and *gaita* has been one of the

main media to celebrate this local culture. I believe that a better understanding of Venezuelan regional diversity and regionalist political thought could impact how the United States and other powerful oil-consuming nations relate to Venezuela. Understanding regionalism within countries offers a much more nuanced idea of the complexities that are negotiated to create nationalism. Up until now, I believe there have been many more ethnomusicological studies of music's role in nationalism, and not enough attention to music's power to articulate a sense of regional difference.

Understanding *gaita* entails understanding Zulian regional sentiment and the political, religious, historical, and geographic components of regionalism. Zulian political history suggests a permanent suspicion of centralized national governance, and protest *gaitas* have reinforced this stance for decades. In Zulia, localized religious practice is a major component of regionalism, and I hope I have demonstrated that we must consider the role of religion in the imagining of the region as a community. *Gaita* is not only closely connected to its place of origin, but by constantly singing about towns, landmarks, and other geographical features, song lyrics create a cognitive map of the region in the popular imaginary.

As much as I have emphasized the importance of *gaita* in its social function of regional identity formation, I have also tried to celebrate it *as music.* For *gaiteros* and *gaita* fans, the music is only successful in promoting *zulianidad* because it is great music played by incredible musicians. I learned to revere *gaita* composers as great poets and public intellectuals who are capable of distilling complex social commentary into beautifully rhymed quatrains. In the studio and on stage, I witnessed incredible musicianship. I have boundless respect for *gaiteros* and tremendous appreciation that so

many of them shared their knowledge and talents with me. I hope that my emphasis on *gaita*'s cultural function has not eclipsed my respect for *gaiteros* as gifted musicians who combine complex harmonies and cross rhythms in support of difficult and expressive melodies. Above all, *gaita* is intended to be enjoyed at a party, and I hope my readers will listen to it and sing along in order to truly appreciate it as beautiful, complex music.

ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY OF *GAITA* RECORDINGS CITED

As described in the introduction, as of late 2013, all of these songs can be heard on Youtube, and the most complete channel there is gaitaszulianas.

Because it is very difficult to find CDs of *gaita* outside of Venezuela, I have also noted below which songs are available for purchase on iTunes, and I encourage my readers to do so whenever possible. Generally, I refer to the original recorded version in my text, but because several songs have been recorded multiple times, I list the running time to indicate which recorded version is cited.

As of now, few *gaita* groups have substantial websites of their own. One of the few is Barrio Obrero, and many of their songs can be heard there at:

barrioobrero.wordpress.com

Songs are listed according to the following format, whenever possible:

"Song title." year of release, (composer[s]), vocal soloist(s)/group.

Songs are listed in order of their appearance in the text.

"Sentir Zuliano." 1972, (Norberto Pirela and José Rodríguez), Ricardo Cepeda/ Cardenales del Éxito.

Available on iTunes on the album *Recordando a … Los Cardenales del Éxito*. This original version has a running time of 3:11.

This sentimental song about returning to Maracaibo by crossing the Rafael Urdaneta Bridge is sometimes referred to by the opening line of its chorus: "Cuando voy a Maracaibo." Composer Norberto Pirela (cousin of the internationally famous bolero singer Felipe Pirela) originally recorded the song with the group Los Caracuchos, but this version by Cepeda and Cardenales is the iconic hit, and it has been covered numerous times since. This version is distinguished by the addition of mandolins—tremolo-picked during the verses, arpeggiating chords in the choruses.

"Sin Rencor." 1978, (Negito Borjas), Neguito Borjas/Gran Coquivacoa.

Several versions by Gran Coquivacoa are available on iTunes, but not the original from 1978.

This is probably the most popular sing-along *gaita* of all time. It is a touching, sentimental post-breakup song in which the singer remembers a past relationship fondly and tells his former lover in the chorus that she'll think of him whenever she hears a *gaita.*

"La Grey Zuliana." 1968, (Ricardo Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Saladillo.

The original Saladillo version (running time 4:08) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*

This is the most famous protest *gaita*, popularly referred to as the "hymn of *gaiteros*." After helping form the group Cardenales del Éxito in the early 1960s, Ricardo Aguirre and some of his brothers had a falling out with the group's manager and switched to the group Saladillo for the 1967 and 1968 seasons. Some *gaita* aficionados point out that "La Grey" was composed by several members of the group at rehearsal, but only Aguirre is given writing credit, perhaps because the others were afraid of the repercussions of recording such a bold protest song.

"Golpe Tradicional." 1963, (Rixio Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.

The original version (running time 5:29) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*

Ricardo Aguirre's brother composed this song for the first album by Cardenales in 1963. According to biographer Miguel Ordoñez, Ricardo was reluctant to join the group at first, but his brothers convinced him that they needed his characteristic baritone to lead them. This song identifies the traditional instruments that are needed to play *gaita*.

"¿Es o No Es?" 2000, (Wolfgang Romero and Oscar González), Oscar González / Koquimba

Koquimba is one of the most commercially successful *gaita* groups since the late 1980s, known for their flashy stage presence and modern-sounding recordings. Using musical demonstrations, this song warns that a song isn't *gaita* if it goes too far in its use of sounds from other genres, e.g., salsa-style horns and timbales.

"Historia de la Gaita." 1979, (Luis Oquendo Delgado), Moisés Medina / Gran Sinamaica

Medina's dramatic baritone introduces this song that credits an Afro-Venezuelan slave for inventing *gaita*—as a way of expressing his frustration with his suffering—and then bringing the music from the south of Lake Maracaibo to the city.

"El Zaguán."1998, (Neguito Borjas), Danelo Badell / Gran Coquivacoa.

Badell has one of the higher tenor voices among *gaita* singers. This song describes the happy anxiety as a host hurriedly prepares for a *gaita* party in the nineteenth century.

"Ronda Antañona." 1967, (Virgilio Carruyo) Ricardo Aguirre / Saladillo.

The original version (running time 2:47) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*

Legendary composer Virgilio Carruyo (1879–1937) is so revered that for many years, the annual prize for "*gaita* of the year" was named for him. Presumably, this song is an adaptation of a song credited to Carruyo, though without recordings or notation, it is impossible to say what it sounded like during the composer's lifetime. The song describes the fun atmosphere of drinking and improvising *gaitas* in a singing circle at a party.

"La Flor de la Habana, No. 1." 1967, (Virgilio Carruyo), Ricardo Aguirre / Saladillo.

The original version (running time 3:36) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*

Another resurrection of a song by Carruyo, this song is an example of his advertising *gaitas*—in this case promoting a local cigarette company. But it can also be heard as a statement against the late nineteenth-century dictator who nationalized the tobacco industry and closed regional manufacturers in pursuit of centralism.

"Gaita Zuliana [La Campeona]." 1962, (Moisés Martínez), Nerio Ríos and others / Saladillo

Folklore contests in the early 1960s prompted *gaita* groups to take on names and become more organized. This song became known as "the champion" because it won all of the contests in 1962.

"Aquel Zuliano." 1980, (Renato Aguirre), Ricardo Cepeda / Cardenales del Éxito

The plaintive violin that introduces the song sets the tone for this emotional tribute to the late Monumental Ricardo Aguirre written by his brother Renato.

"De la Vida Real." 2000, (Rafael Rodríguez), Ricardo Cepeda / Los Colosales

Rodríguez documents the sad night of 7 November 1969, when *furrero* Douglas Soto went looking for his bandmate Ricardo Aguirre, who eluded him, going from bar to bar until the wee hours of 8 November, when he was killed in a drunk driving accident.

"La Retreta." 2000, (Neguito Borjas), Javier González / Gran Coquivacoa.

The original version (running time 4:23) is available on iTunes on the album *Energía Universal-2000.*

One of the biggest hits of 2000, this song imagines being a kid getting ready for the big street festivals that would take place around the feast day of La Chinita.

"La Esquina Roja." 2000, (Nestor Guerra), Dennys Daguin / Cardenales del Éxito.
Cardenales' big hit from 2000 celebrates the backyard patio/bar of the house currently occupied by the family of Alves Aguirre, one of the group's founding members. In between stanzas, singer Dennys Daguin offers shout-outs to several past members of the group, like Simón García, connecting himself to the group's long lineage.

"Lago Ideal." 1973, (Luis Ferrer), Nerio Rios / Cardenales del Éxito.
"The poet of gaita" Luis Ferrer composed this tribute to Lake Maracaibo, the central geographic feature of Zulia.

"La Chinita." 1963, (Ricardo Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.
The original version (running time 4:37) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*
This is one of many songs that tell the story of the miraculous finding of the painting of patron saint La Chinita floating in Lake Maracaibo.

"Lago de Maracaibo." 1965, (Rafael Rincón González), Deyanira Enmanuells / Los Compadres del Éxito.
This celebration of Lake Maracaibo lists La Chinita and petroleum among the riches found in the lake. This recording was one of the first *gaitas* to feature electric organ.

"Sí Fuera Petróleo, Sí." 2004, (Nano Silva?), Barrio Obrero de Cabimas.
In this protest *gaita*, Barrio Obrero bemoans the environmental destruction of oil extraction from Lake Maracaibo.

"Así es Maracaibo." 1965, (José "Chinco" Rodríguez), Bernardo Bracho / Barrio Obrero.
One of Barrio Obrero's first hits, and now a classic, this song describes an imagined tourist's encounter with the seaport and the culture of the city. The moody sound of the recording contributes to the sentiment in the last verse, which promises that the visitor will leave "bewitched" by his encounter with Maracaibo.

"Frente a Frente." 1973, (Rafael Rodríguez), German Ávila / Saladillo de RQ.
This is one of many *gaitas* that laments the destruction and (attempted) urban renewal of the Saladillo neighborhood, which was the spiritual center of old Maracaibo. After razing hundreds of residential buildings, the Basilica and Santa Bárbara church stand "face to face," whereas they were once surrounded by dense neighborhoods of parishioners.

"Venite pa'Maracaibo." 1979, (Ricardo Portillo), Guaco.

The original version (running time 4:25) is available on iTunes on the album *La Mejores Gaitas Vol. 1.*

Portillo's hit reads like a tourist advertisement inviting people to come to Maracaibo to experience the city's hospitality during the fair of La Chinita, the biggest celebration of the year.

"La Ciudad Más Bella." 1990, (Ricardo Portillo), Cardenales del Éxito.

This song won the "*gaita* of the year" contest in 1990 with its superlative description of Maracaibo.

"Paraguaipoa." 1965, (Saúl Sulbarán), Rafael Barreto / Sorpresa.

A similar version (running time 3:19) by the group Los Turpiales is available on iTunes on the album *Explosión de Gaitas.*

This classic from the 1960s celebrates a town on the Guajira peninsula and incorporates the Guajira (Wayú) Indians into the Zulian imaginary by saying that they can sing *gaita*, too.

"Bobures." 1967, (José Chiquinquirá Rodríguez), Bernardo Bracho / Barrio Obrero.

"Bobures" is a town at the south end of Lake Maracaibo with a majority Afro-Venezuelan population that particularly reveres the black San Benito.

"Ceuta." 1986, (Ricardo Cepeda?), Ricardo Cepeda / Cardenales del Éxito.

The original version (running time 2:59) is available on iTunes on the album *La Mejores Gaitas Vol. 1.*

This song protests how a small village on the eastern shore of Lake Maracaibo was removed from the official map.

"Canto a mi Venezuela." 1965, (José Socorro), Víctor Alvarado / San Isidro.

Here the singer speaks of wanting to sing *gaita* for all of Venezuela.

"Orinoco." 1976, (Rafael Rodríguez), Pablo Grey / Rincón Morales.

A similar but later version with synthesizers added (running time 3:51) is available on iTunes on several albums.

This is probably the biggest hit for composer Rafael Rodríguez. Its rapid tempo and daring cross-rhythmic break in the chorus made it sonically distinctive, and its lyrics, a beautiful poem about the large river on the other side of the country from Maracaibo, distinguish it from most *gaitas*, which speak about Zulia. Pablo Grey's unique vocal timbre also contributes to the song's sound and success.

“Venezuela Galopante.” 1977? (Jesús Terán “Chavín”), Chavín / Rincón Morales.
This nationalistic, patriotic song celebrates different regions of Venezuela in each verse.

“Dos Fronteras.” 1980, (Luis Ferrer), Nerio Rios / Cardenales del Éxito.
The original version (running time 4:25) is available on iTunes on the album *Los Cardenales del Éxito Protestan Vol. 2.*
This *gaita* protests a dispute over the location of the Venezuelan/Colombian border and suggests that if the Venezuelan government won’t fight for Zulian territory, then the people will rise up to do so themselves.

“La Devoción.” 1967, (Jario Gil?), Jose “Bolita” Ríos / Saladillo
This song speaks of regional devotion to the Virgen de Chiquinquirá (La Chinita) and stresses that she is “from Zulia.”

“18 de noviembre.” 1983, (Euripides Romero), Bertulio Medina / Maracaibo 15.
The original version (running time 2:51) is available on iTunes on the album *Super Éxitos de Maracaibo 15.*
The chorus speaks of how the Zulian “we” goes to the Basilica of San Juan de Dios on the 18th of November, La Chinita’s feast day.

“Mis Promesas.” 1987, (Heriberto Molina), Ricardo Cepeda / Cardenales del Éxito.
In local religious vocabulary, a “promesa” is a promise to perform certain prayers or other devotional activities to a saint, in exchange for the saint’s spiritual intervention. Every November, thousands of Zulians go to the Basilica to make *promesas* to La Chinita.

“Virgen de Chiquinquirá.” 1966, (José Angel Mavárez & Ramón Bracho Lozano), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito
This is one of the more strictly religious songs about La Chinita.

“Reina Morena.” 1966, (Jario Gil & Renato Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.
A later (but similar) version sung by Ricardo Cepeda with Cardenales is available on iTunes (running time 2:56) is available on iTunes.
One of the most popular devotional *gaitas* of all time, most Zulians would recognize the song from the opening lines: “My heart is a temple / Where a Virgin [La Chinita] is adored.” The title—“Brown Queen”—refers to the color of the painting of La Chinita and the fact that many perceive her as a mixed-race

apparition of the Holy Mother. Some refer to the song as "Lluvia de flores" for the words of the first line of the chorus that describes the procession of La Chinita's image in a "cloudburst of flowers." Jairo Gil has written hundreds of *gaitas* for La Chinita.

"Celestina Aurora." 1979, (Renato Aguirre), Ricardo Cepeda / Cardenales del Éxito.
This song describes the most dedicated *marianos* who spend almost the entire night of the 17th–18th of November praying to La Chinita in the Basilica.

"Pasión Indiana." 1972, (Gustavo Aguado), Guaco.
Here the singer's "Indian passion" comes out in his enthusiastic devotion to La Chinita.

"Virgen Guaquera." 1986, (Heriberto Molina & Sundín Galué), Guaco.
The original version (running time 3:46) is available on iTunes on the album *Gaitas Platinum.*
"Guaquera" means "of Guaco," the group that sings this song, so the title strongly connects the group with La Chinita.

"Dos Regalos." 1981, (Jairo Gil), Carmencita Silva / Barrio Obrero.
The original version (running time 3:44) is available on iTunes on the album *Barrio Obero–40 Años de Gaita Pura.*
Barrio Obrero singer Carmencita Silva is particularly known for her devotion to La Chinita, and she tries to record at least one song per year dedicated to the *patrona.* This song won the Virgilio Carruyo *gaita* of the year award in 1981 and remains one of group's most popular.

"Vuelvo a Cantarte, Mi Chinita." 2000, (Nano Silva), Carmencita Silva / Barrio Obrero.
Here, Carmencita sings of how she returns to sing to La Chinita.

"Amor Chiquinquireño." 1998, (Astolfo Romero), Astolfo Romero / Los Chiquinquireños.
A few years before he died suddenly of a heart attack, Astolfo Romero formed a new group, Los Chiquinquireños, just to sing *gaitas* to la Virgen de Chiquinquirá. His son Astolfo David keeps the group going.

"La Centralización." 1965, (Renato Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.
Here, Aguirre protests the national government's efforts to centralize the lottery and several other services.

"Independencia Ya." 1970, (Firmo Segunda Rincón), Rubén Oliveros / Cardenales del Éxito.
The original version (running time 2:41) is available on iTunes on the album *Los Cardenales del Éxito Protestan Vol. 2.*
Rincón earned the title "el rey de la protesta" for writing songs like this that encourage Zulia to secede from Venezuela. This song was banned by the national government.

"Rebelión." 1970, (Luis Ferrer), Venancio Fernández / Rincón Morales.
This secessionist *gaita* was also banned, and supposedly, the national political police attempted to arrest Ferrer for writing this song.

"Imploracíon." 1966, (Marcial Valbuena), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.
Two years before "La Grey Zuliana," Ricardo Aguirre complained to the Virgen de Chiquinquirá in this protest *gaita.*

"Maracaibo Marginada." 1969, (Ricardo Aguirre), Ricardo Aguirre / Cardenales del Éxito.
The original version (running time 4:30) is available on iTunes on the album *Lo Mejor del Monumental.*
Shortly before his death, Aguirre returned to the group Cardenales del Éxito and recorded this protest *gaita*, which many *gaiteros* consider his finest work.

"Gaita Entre Ruinas." 1972, (Rafael Rodríguez), Germán Ávila / Saladillo de RQ.
Another of Rafael Rodríguez' laments about the destruction of the Saladillo neighborhood, this song offers a more personal and emotional take on the event.

"El Paquetazo." 1990, (Neguito Borjas), Astolfo Romero / Pillopo.
The happy, major-key sound highlights the sarcastic nature of this protest against the government's package of neo-liberal economic reforms.

“Las Cadenas de Chávez.” 2000, (Jesús “Chuchi” Bermúdez & Amador “Chicho” Bermúdez), Jesús “Chuchi” Bermúdez / Happy Gaita.

This hit *gaita* jokingly complained about how President Chávez’ longwinded televised speeches would interrupt Venezuelans’ favorite shows.

“La Bolivariana.” 2003, (Nano Silva), Barrio Obrero.

Barrio Obrero was one of the few *gaita* groups that ignored potential censorship and continued to release anti-government protest *gaitas* during the Chávez era. This one pokes fun at how Chávez constantly invoked the memory of Simón Bolívar, the liberator of Venezuela.

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