

Before Their Time:
Tracing the Emergence of the Figure of La Pachuca, 1910-1930s

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Abstract

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The emergence of *la pachuca*, as an agent in Chicana cultural production, directs attention to the process of meaning making which draw from elements of the past. The period between 1910 and the 1930s, which span the Mexican Revolution, the interwar period, to the Great Depression provide social and economic contexts to understand the formation subjectivity and identity formation. This essay underscores the role of gender as critical in an analysis of emergent nationalisms; the steady pull of industrialized labor; migration and settler expansion; to consider these as arenas in which historical agents negotiated subject formation amid ideologies of citizenship, belonging, and modernity. By exploring the relationship between these histories of gender, sexuality and identity formation, in relation to overlapping, often competing, nationalisms and the legacies of settler colonialism, we may better understand pachucos as well.

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See you in the movies!

Michelle Kritz Morado



Tula Salazar, 23 years old. Santa Clara County, California. 1948. Courtesy of Author's Collection.

Stories Unfold in Images – Photographs Fill the Gaps

In a palm-sized black and white photograph Gertrudis (Tula) Salazar, stands confidently, but casually upright, facing the camera with a wide, welcoming smile. She wears a floral print dress. The deep shade of the dress and its high neckline highlight the presence of a necklace with a small oval medallion. A slight wedge heel of her white open toed sandals give inch to her stature, while accenting the dress hemline at just above her ankle. She smiles broadly, clasping her hands, gently, casually, at her waist. Her black hair, pinned at the sides, reveals care crafting her curls into a pompadour hairstyle -- curls swoop above her forehead and cascading almost to her shoulders. Her smile, accentuated by lipstick, leaves me to wonder which shade of red she has chosen. One might imagine the setting of this photograph is a studio portrait, yet the setting offers clues of time, place, labor, and class, framing a negotiation with and expression of gender. She stands outside, feet firmly planted on light earth, smooth and hard. Linens hung to dry on a small clothesline behind her stand out brightly against an evenly planked fence. Lumber and building materials stack neatly beside her along the perimeter of the fence. At her feet, a long rubber hose rests, loosely coiled atop a tire. Behind the fence, the angle of a roof slopes sharply downward. Her easy expression affirms familiarity with the space and its material objects. These objects suggest utility and function. Taken as a whole, this image captures a location where wage labor and the home meet. The handwritten caption on the back of this photograph, declares an age of twenty-three in the year 1948.

This snapshot of my grandmother captures a facet of transnational history that reaches back into previous decades, stretching across cultural, geographical and political borders. Tula lived her childhood five miles from north bank of the Rio Grande River in the town of Del Río. The run of the Río Grande moved through what was, at one time, the joint Mexican state,

Coahuila y Tejas. However, by the time of my grandmother's life, this river represented the political border splitting states into separate nations. Born in the state of Texas, November 16, 1924, Tula was the youngest child, and only surviving daughter, of Mexican immigrant parents Josefina Ríos and Enrique Salazar. Enrique labored as a ranch hand until his death in January of 1942. In 1943, the family would endure the loss of Tula's eldest brother. Her two surviving brothers both served draft tours in the Second World War, leaving behind their wives and young children. Once returned from the war, Tula's brothers journeyed westward in search of work, eventually settling in Santa Clara, County California. Tula followed soon after, laboring in California's booming agricultural industry to harvest seasonal produce. Ultimately, Tula would move from agricultural fields to factory work. She, like many Mexican-American women of her generation, labored in canneries, eventually working in a cannery owned by Del Monte Corporation, in the city of San José.

My grandmother in this photograph offers an entry point into the cultural, social, political, and economic terrains of the early twentieth century. As I contemplated the untold stories and conditions of their young adulthood, in turn these questions shaped my research. How did she, and women like her, navigate family and community life born out of histories of labor and migration? How did she contextualize place amid contested territories? How did she adjust to the move from a small, rural, ranching community, to a growing city, shaped first by agriculture and soon after by the rapid rise of high tech industry? What were her experiences adapting to new technologies, and forms of work, in the rapidly modernizing the landscape surrounding her? How did these factors interact with media and media representation? How did this influence her sense of self, community, and expressions of identity? Ultimately, I ask: in

what ways could these questions inform a better understanding gender formation in order to trace the emergence of the figure of *la pachuca*?

This thesis explores the conditions contributing to the formation of the figure of *la pachuca* prior to her emergence in 1940s California. This essay examines the conditions in which the formations of *identity*, how one perceives oneself, and *subjectivity*, how one imagines oneself in relation to others, contribute to the emergence of recognizable cultural icons. Michelle Habell-Pallán argues, “the production of cultural identity is dynamic and subject to historical, geographical, and political change.”¹ As such, the process of *becoming*—the active engagement in which identity and subjectivity take shape—does not rely on a “fixed self” but instead reflects the “subject in process.”² Identities and subjectivities emerge through continued engagement with geographic, political, and social histories through processes of re-articulation. These histories, and the stories we tell about them, contribute to processes of cultural formation.

The timeline, migration, and labor of my grandmother’s generation, signal a coming of age amid forms of cultural identity formation, in a process imbued with meaning. For Mexican Americans, and in particular, Mexican-American women, my grandmother would exist in the liminal spaces between citizenship and belonging, wherein changing political landscapes altered these terms and their meaning. Moreover, my grandmother shared time and space with the pachucos and pachucas of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, who remain iconic in Chicano/a cultural memory. Although, I cannot say for certain whether or not my grandmother identified with pachucas, I am nevertheless drawn to the question of proximity. I consider how degrees of closeness (similarities and differences) contribute to understandings and expressions of identity.

¹ Michelle Habell-Pallán, *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture* (New York: New York University, 2005), 7.

² Habell-Pallán, 7.

Interestingly, though, perhaps not surprisingly, my own family's migration followed well-worn routes from Mexico to Texas to California, a pattern of movement which nourished the emergent youth-centered subculture of *pachuquismo*.

Pachuquismo and the Significance of La Pachuca

Pachuquismo emerged out of histories in common, coalescing in the form of a collective cultural formation. Pachucos and Pachucas of the 1940s were, as Catherine Ramírez explains, “Mexican Americans who produced and took part in ... a youth subculture ... [many] were working-class and second-generation Americans whose parents emigrated from Mexico to urban centers in California and the southwest.”³ One might immediately recognize the fashion of *pachuquismo*—the zoot suit. Though not limited to *pachuquismo* culture, the zoot suit represents a strong visual signifier of this Mexican American youth-focused subculture. The zoot suit look included *el tacuche*, the zoot suit, sometimes referred to as “drapes” which consisted of a fingertip coat, cinched at the waist, extending to the knee, and billowing pants, tapered at the ankle. Accented by high pompadour hairstyles and thick soled *calcos* (dress shoes), variations of the zoot suit fostered a range of gender expression. Feminized versions of the zoot look generally consisted of a cardigan, a knee-length, pleated skirt, fishnet stockings or bobby socks, platform heels, saddle shoes, or *huarache* sandals, hair worn in a high bouffant, and dramatically dark lipstick.⁴ The influential zoot suit stands the test of time, symbolizing the visual cues of subcultural creative process.

³ Catherine S. Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Duke University Press, 2010), xiii.

⁴ Ramírez, xiii.

The presentation of the zoot suit, defied austerity measures during World War II, which included the rationing of fabrics. The zoot suit, therefore, signaled a rejection of nationalism coded as social responsibility; an important refusal when adherence to civic duty offered citizenship only nominally. Citizenship, as a legal category, bestowed upon an individual by the state, either by virtue or birth contextualize the legislative foundations of national belonging, however, the framework of cultural citizenship creates an opportunity to critique the relationship between the modernity and the nation state. As a “dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state,” cultural citizenship refers to the “cultural practices and beliefs” born out of negotiations with the often “ambivalent and contested” relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging.”⁵

Pachuco and pachuca stylings laid bare these tensions within citizenship tensions. The racialized component to citizenship rose to the surface when clashes between Mexican-American youth and white military service officers spilled out onto the streets of Los Angeles. Clothing marked the target of the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 as the zoot suit featured as the central identifier to define Mexican-American youth as pachucos in these attacks. These riots brought into sharp focus the tensions of patriotism on disenfranchised populations revealing legacies of the subjugation of Mexican and Mexican Americans within the United States.

In the United States, Mexican Americans “slip in and out of” categories of “race, ethnicity, and nationality, in one time declared legally white yet viewed as a race of their own.”⁶

To consider this abstractly, this slippage denaturalizes the categories of race, ethnicity and

⁵ Aihwa Ong et al., “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States [and Comments and Reply],” *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (1996): 737–62.

⁶ Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, American Crossroads ; 38 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 6, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1463630>.

nationality, however, in lived experience these negotiations with these slippery categories bear the weight of being always at risk for *unbelonging* in the nation. Natalia Molina provides a useful methodological tool for recognizing the connections among racialized groups, termed *racial scripts*. Racial scripts, Molina suggests, “are the attitudes, practices customs, and laws, directed a given group ... linked across time and space” which “thereby affect one another, even when they do not directly cross paths.”⁷ Racial scripts demonstrate “how racialized groups are acted upon by a range of principals, from institutional actors to ordinary citizens.”⁸ Though some groups are racially marked, all are racialized, which necessitates the study of race in comparative racial terms to see how these scripts draw on the experiences of other groups. The reformulations and re-articulations of race reveal that “what once served to marginalize and disenfranchise one group can be revived and recycled to marginalize other groups,” which therefore function to maintain a racial hierarchy that goes beyond a singular, or even binary framing of racialized groups.

Molina also offers *counterscripts*, as a term to recognize the alternatives and direct challenges to dominant racial scripts.⁹ Counterscripts may be applied to thinking through the visual/sonic landscape of *pachuquismo* which included movement and musical collaborations which combined elements of Mexican corridos, Latin Caribbean dance music, blues, and jazz,” all of which nurtured a landscape in which to “transform the painful ‘in-between’ experience of Mexican Americans ... bringing together Chicanos, African Americans, Filipinos, Japanese Americans and Anglos on the dance floor.”¹⁰ Counterscripts signal attention to the acts of

⁷ Molina, 7.

⁸ Molina, 8.

⁹ Molina, 8.

¹⁰ Marisol Berríos-Miranda, Shannon Dudley, and Michelle Habell-Pallán, *American Sabor: Latinos y Latinas en la Música Popular Estadounidense = Latinos and Latinas in US Popular Music*, trans. Angie Berríos-Miranda (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 79.

resistance to hegemonic power structures, which when navigating a racial/ethnic/gender/sexual class caste system, cut across multiple lines. In the instance of *pachuquismo*, a counterscript emerges through visual technologies, collaborative arts, bodily movement and claims to public space, to cultivate new and alternative forms of belonging. Pachucos and pachucas, like other marginalized communities, “created new collectives ... new articulations, new sensibilities and new visions about the place of Black, Brown, and working-class people on the local and national landscape.”¹¹

While the significance of pachucos has been widely regarded as formative to Chicano identity, the turn toward pachucas has only recently captured the attention of scholars. Catherine Ramírez centers “pachucas as agents and *la pachuca* as an icon” to demonstrate that this figure “has much to teach us about nationalisms, citizenship, and about resistant cultural, gender, and sexual identities and their contradictions” as well as “exposing new social relationships and subjects.”¹² Ramírez’s analysis of news, print media, and social welfare reports of the World War II era, demonstrates a unique vilification, condemnation and sexualization of pachuca women as they “seemed to betray the United States during wartime middle-class standards of feminine respectability,” and in addition, “working-class expectations of the dutiful daughter.”¹³ As such, pachucas’ claims to space, expressions of gender, and sexuality elicited fear, through the disruption and destabilization of racial rubrics revealing inter and intra community tensions. The values ascribed onto the bodies of pachucas (and pachucos) were imprinted through markedly classed, racialized, and sexualized constructions of meaning. Ramírez, therefore,

¹¹ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2013), x.

¹² Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, xiv.

¹³ Catherine S. Ramírez, “Crimes of Fashion: The Pachuca and Chicana Style Politics,” *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 12.

demonstrate the particular ways in which constructions of identity, expression, and belonging, whether to the self, family, community or nation, take shape in relation to race, class, sexuality and gender.

The emergence of *la pachuca*, as an agent in Chicana cultural production, directs attention to the process of meaning making which draw from elements of the past. This is true in the recognition of *la pachuca* as an icon of the contemporary moment, and in and as an active agent in history. This project expands upon Ramírez's study by reaching farther back in time and place. The period between 1910 and the 1930s, which span the Mexican Revolution, the interwar period, to the Great Depression provide social and economic contexts to understand the formation of *la pachuca*. This work underscores the role of gender as critical in an analysis of emergent nationalisms; the steady pull of industrialized labor; migration and settler expansion; to consider these as arenas in which historical agents negotiated subject formation amid ideologies of citizenship, belonging, and modernity. To understand the influence of modernity from 1910-1930s, this considers the gendered transformations that icons of modernity, such as the Modern Girl, allude to. The ideals of modernity, as it encompassed settler expansion; the adoption of new technologies in labor and leisure; and commodity culture, contributed to the development of racialized, class based, constructions of gender and sexuality, offer an important contextual understanding of power.

The degree to which one may be able to represent or emulate the idealized modern woman hinges on the ideals of national presentation and cultural belonging. The social landscape of modernity offers guide posts for developing a genealogy for the figure of *la pachuca*, providing also, a clearer view of her subversive power. I consider "visual economies, nationalisms, commodities, and consumption" of modernity as one avenues through which

nation building, and the formation of a national body-politic take shape, and in so doing, recognize these projects as uneven in their progression.¹⁴ In exploring forms and expressions of Chicana gender and sexuality, my project necessarily revisits the meaning of “modernity” to consider “how global commodity and cultural flows shaped modern femininity across geopolitical locations” and to signal in the influence in the formations of identity and expression.¹⁵

Methods and Progress

To approach these questions I conducted archival research, engaging with sources to illuminate and contextualize social life at multiple levels. *La Prensa*, a Spanish language newspaper, operated in the early twentieth century as a news source for the expatriate Mexican community in the United States. Lauded for cultivating a coalescent Mexican consciousness within the United States, *La Prensa*, established in 1913 and distributed out of San Antonio, Texas, and its sister publication, *La Opinión*, established in 1926, in Los Angeles, informed a nascent (self-defined) Mexican American political and social identity. Selected films starring Lupe Vélez, and Dolores del Río, two internationally known stars who, having started their careers in the era of silent film, successfully transitioned into the “talkies” of the Hollywood’s Golden era. Romance was a common theme; their films emphasize love and tragedy in the borderlands. These narratives of fantasy shed light onto the real anxieties playing out in the borderlands. In oral histories archived by the University of Texas El Paso’s Oral History Institute, narrators’ recount childhood experiences of migration in a journey through memory to

¹⁴ Alys Eve Weinbaum et al., eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 2.

¹⁵ Weinbaum et al., 5.

reflect on political events, and labor, within a framework of family life. Audio recordings over transcripts offered the ability to connect with voice, its pitches and changes, in narration. Family histories, however flawed they may be, prove important in making up for the gaps in extant archival sources. Oral histories, in such cases, are often dependent upon narrative accounts passed down through generations. Although I focus on only one narrative for this essay, the narrative reflection of Margarita Rodríguez Mendoza reveals the richness of oral histories as an archive. These films and the oral histories are some of the only sources to offer voice to Mexican American women.

Migration, Movement and Forms of Labor

Vicki Ruiz, a historian of Mexican American women's history, affirms the significance of the first waves of Mexican migration in reshaping the *colonias* throughout the Southwest in the early part of the century. Several important, interrelated factors undergird this early twentieth century migration to *el otro lado*: the political and economic relationship between the Mexico and the United States; the Mexican Revolution; the nation's relational economies; large industries of agriculture, smelting and garment production in the United States reliant on a migrant/immigrant labor force; Southwest and Midwest expansion of railways in the United States which connected to the north-south lines in Mexico, ultimately reshaped the social and economic landscape in the borderland regions of this during this period.

Margarita Rodríguez Mendoza, recalls her family's movement between Mexico and the United States. Mendoza draws from childhood memory as well as well as stories passed down, across generations. Speaking to interviewer Barbara Dent, in 2001, she recounts each narrative account with equal measure of authority, infusing life into each narration. Mendoza begins with

an account of her father, Juan Rodríguez to explain his decision to emigrate from the town of Parral, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. She states the impact of the Mexican Revolution. “When the Revolution started, everybody, my father’s brothers, went to join the Revolution ... on the Revolutionist side, of course. But my father was not the fighting type. He didn’t like what he saw of the Revolution, so in 1910 he decided to come to the United States instead.”¹⁶ Mendoza’s narrative of her father’s decision to immigrate continues on to illustrate the push/pull factors of migration, as she notes the turbulence of the Mexican Revolution contrasted with the employment opportunities to the north. Further, Mendoza’s account captures the circular movements of migration, both domestically and across borders – as her family ultimately returns to Parral during the Great Depression. The movement of Mexican laborers and their families, working in the United States, returned frequently to visit friends and family in Mexico, reflected ease in traveling across a relatively porous border. This movement aided in the recruitment of Mexicano laborers to work in the United States.

The labor of Mexican railroad workers, *traqueros*, not only established railway connections to support the transport of industry goods, but also influenced the development of cities and towns along railroad lines in the movement of people. As “American-built, and financed” railways spanned north and south through Mexico, these lines offered new forms of mass transportation, wherein “hopping a train to the border was a realistic and accessible option” an option more appealing to some, amidst the turbulence of the Mexican Revolution.”¹⁷ Further, as in the case of other industries, railroad companies, began to look to Mexico as a source of

¹⁶ Margarita Mendoza, Interview No. 1638, interview by Barbara Dent, January 28, 2011, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas, El Paso, <https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/interviews/1638>.

¹⁷ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

cheap labor leading United States based employers to hire Mexican immigrants to “fill the steadily increasing demand for low-skilled, low-wage jobs in the southwestern economy.”¹⁸ In addition to the active recruitment of Mexican workers by railway companies, news of employment opportunities traveled great distances by word of mouth.

Tracking her father’s employment in the United States, Mendoza begins by telling of his work for the Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad company. He took the job on the advice of a friend and, working for the railroad told him about the employment opportunities available in the company working for the line:

[My father] had a friend that was working in Kansas and he told him, you know they would go back and forth to visit their friends in Mexico, so this boy would come over. So, he told my father that they were hiring people in a town named Wilder, that actually the Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad were hiring people. ... He took a freight train because the passenger trains (were) impossible to get a ticket on, he took a freight train and went to Juarez, and he went to the bridge, and the only thing at the bridge, they asked him his name where he was going to, and to sign a small card ... then he went on a train to Wilder, Kansas where he was hired, making the wood for the tracks.¹⁹

In terms of the labor landscape for Mexicano laborers, railroad work came in third among common occupations, behind agricultural and manufacturing. More than half of the track crews on major western lines were composed of Mexican male immigrant labor.²⁰ Migrant laborers and their families formed boxcar settlements along track lines, resulting in the establishment of community hubs for migrant workers that were simultaneously stable, yet somewhat transient. Workers and their families could choose to settle in a given community, or maintain employment by moving in accordance to the railroad’s expanding line. In the case of Mendoza’s father, he

¹⁸ David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 44.

¹⁹ Mendoza, Interview No. 1638.

²⁰ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 10.

followed the expansion of railway as it stretched on, and in his case, his family grew with the line. Margarita Mendoza recalls the courtship and early marriage of her parents as framed by the railways.

Juan Rodríguez and María Luisa Herrera married after correspondence courtship, highlighted by his return visits to the city of Parral, in Chihuahua, México. Mendoza recounts the story of her parent's migration with great enthusiasm. Pausing at intervals to laugh:

In one of those visits he asked my mother to be his girlfriend and my mother said yes ... they would write back and forth. In 1914, my father wrote my mother that he was coming to visit and that he would like to marry ... if she was willing to. Of course she wanted to! She wanted to escape the Revolution! You know she was so lucky that she said that my father wanted to marry her and take her to the United States so she grabbed the proposition and they were married. ... They got married in Parral, June 14, 1914. ... One week after they got married they wanted to come over [to the United States]. My father had to come over because he had to report for work in Wilder. So they came and they took a train in Parral, but there was no train, the trains were full, so the only thing they could find was a freight train. That took them, on the top of the train, that was coming to Juarez ... my father told my mother, let's grab [the train], because you don't have very many opportunities ... they came on ... on top of a freight train to Juarez.²¹

Mae Ngai's study of immigration policy in the United States unveils the fluctuations in legislature policies and attitudes toward Mexican laborers in the United States. As industries to the north relied heavily on the labor a migrant labor force from the south, "immigration inspectors ignored Mexicans coming into the southwestern United States during the 1900s and 1910s to work in railroad, construction, mining and agriculture. The immigration bureau did not seriously consider Mexican immigration within its purview, but rather as something that was regulated by labor market demands."²² Mendoza's narrative affirms Ngai's study, recalling that once due to the impossibility of getting a ticket on a passenger train, her father took a freight

²¹ Mendoza, Interview No. 1638.

²² Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Updated edition with a New Foreword edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90.

train to Juarez where he then crossed the bridge to El Paso by foot. “He went to the bridge, and the only thing ... they asked him was his name, where he was going ... and to sign a small card.”²³ Rodríguez continued, catching a train to Wilder, Kansas where the Topeka Santa Fe Railroad Company hired him to make wood for the railway tracks. Rodríguez, the eighth child of ten, accounted for the years preceding her birth with great clarity, tracking her family moves from town to town as her father worked the line.

To consider forces of migration more broadly, the rise in a Mexican migrant labor force in the United States emerged out of a “virulent anti-Chinese movement,” which by 1882 culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act.²⁴ Incidentally, for a period of time Mexico welcomed Chinese immigrants, who, in order to circumvent federal exclusion increasingly migrated to the borderland region first, prior to attempts to enter into the United States. Sonora offered opportunities to enter into the United States as well as business and labor “opportunities in the developing border economy.”²⁵ Though not without racial underpinnings, at least one aspect of this welcoming of Chinese immigrants into Mexico revolved around the failed efforts to recruit Eastern European immigrants as a means to both “whiten and modernize Mexico.”²⁶ The national project to modernize and the inextricable role of race, class, gender and labor, resulted in a tenuous welcoming of Chinese immigrants. Chinese inclusion, as long as it lasted, operating vis-à-vis adaptive racial logics hinged on an existing racial caste system which subjugated Indigenous and African lineages.

²³ Mendoza, Interview No. 1638.

²⁴ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 43.

²⁵ Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 23, <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781469601786/>.

²⁶ Schiavone Camacho, 12.

In a familiar rhetoric of scapegoating and resentment, anti-Chinese sentiments rose to the surface in Mexico, running parallel to anti-Chinese hostilities brewing in the United States. A 1914 presidential decree declared, “the Chinese constitute a national threat ... entry into our country [Mexico] must be prohibited, as the United States has done” and “whose immigration laws we intend to imitate.”²⁷ *La Prensa*, which I will discuss in greater detail later, reported this statement, adding, the “animosity that reigns” in the Mexican state of Sonora, “is due in large part to the mercantile domination they exercise there,” as “virtually all small branches of commerce and industry are in their hands.” Reflecting a common theme underpinning anti-Immigrant movements, access to jobs and resources, these sentiments intensified further when policies of exclusion in the United States expanded, to expel Mexican laborers; giving rise to waves of mass deportation.²⁸ Termed “repatriation,” this expulsion of Mexican laborers included United States citizens of Mexican descent. In the influx of Mexicans returning to Mexico, Anti-Chinese sentiments echoed in familiar refrain of stolen resources and jobs from “real” Mexicans, in an “ironic mirror of the sentiment used against Mexicans in the United States.”²⁹

Despite what may *appear* as gender neutral in this project of modernization, labor and citizenship, women bore these burdens, exclusions, and sentiments in distinct ways. In the United States, sexual and reproductive labor come under close scrutiny when the federal enforcement of immigration took into consideration “categories ... constructed out of modern ideas about social desirability, in particular with regard to ... sexual morality, and esteemed

²⁷ *La Prensa*, “Carranza Persigue a Los Chinos,” *La Prensa*, January 29, 1914, Microfilm, on Loan Courtesy of University of Texas, Arlington.

²⁸ *La Prensa*, “Suscribirse a La Prensa (Advertisement),” 1913, Microfilm, on Loan Courtesy of University of Texas, Arlington.

²⁹ Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*, 40.

family preservation.”³⁰ In a provision aimed at barring Chinese women from entering the United States, congress legislated restrictions on immigration in the case of “crimes involving moral turpitude,” operating under the presumed assumption that Chinese women immigrants engaged in sex work.³¹ The threat posed by Mexican women, manifested somewhat differently, as campaigns to restrict immigration centered the fecundity of Mexican women. Not only did “Mexican women [have] too many children ... both mothers and their offspring were likely to end up needing charity ... dependent on free birthing and medical services and reliant on charity to support their newly expanded families.”³² The claim that the birthrates of Mexican women would overtax social welfare programs operated as a thinly veiled ruse, obscuring the “anxieties over the potential for ‘race’ suicide,” in which racialized groups would surpass white populations, threatening “especially the middle and upper class.”³³ The implementation and enforcement of immigration policy operates in relation to wage earning labor and reproductive labor, and as well as operating in the service of defining a national body politic. Immigration policy, therefore bears uneven weight when applied to gender, nationality, classed and racialized groups.

Margarita Mendoza’s recollection of her parent’s early married life offers insights into the visual clues marking class to suggest the ways in which these afford social mobility, but as well as how class operates among racial ethnic/immigrant communities. After an uneventful border crossing in 1914, the newly married couple settled into their boxcar home.

In the beginning, the company gave them a freight car, an empty car to live in. They did with most workers that were married. ... You know my mother was a wealthy lady from a very wealthy

³⁰ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 91.

³¹ Ngai, 93.

³² Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*, 82.

³³ Molina, 82.

family, but she said that with my father, she loved my father so much, [in] any place she was very happy. So the first thing she did with the [box]car, she put some pots and flowers, she went to the store, and ... made some curtains, they only last[ed] four months in that car. Because when my [father's boss] went by and saw my mother's car, [he said] 'You're not supposed to be living here. I can tell that you're a lady...I'm going give your husband a little house, not much, but it's a house.' So the company just because my mother had decorated the freight car, they gave them a little house. And that's where they lived... because as he was working on the tracks, they moved him around... from then on they never lived in a car again.

Mendoza rearticulates her mother's middle-class aspirations, as she recalls her father's decision to move from railroad work into the steel industry, following the advice of his brother to join him at Inland Steel of East Chicago, Indiana, in 1924. Throughout their family upbringing, Mendoza's mother María engaged in forms of economic labor to support the family. Primarily working as a seamstress, María sewed for the communities of women around her. Now, in East Chicago, without the housing provision offered by the railroad company, Mendoza's mother took in boarders to make ends meet.

They had to rent a house. And my mother says that my father's salary, they could afford only to rent a two-room house, but we were ten. But my mother didn't like to live in the apartments, with a super. She liked to live in the Italian section, or the Polish section, where the houses were nicer. That's when she became the seamstress of the town ... Also she said she will rent a big house with six rooms, and we will rent two rooms. There were a lot of workers from Mexico, that were single, and they wanted somebody to make food and to give them a boarding house. So, my mother rented out two rooms and board the men, imagine, with ten children, and my father and my mother, and she still board two men, and cook for them, and put them lunch and everything. ... with the money that she got from those two boarding men, she would pay their rent for everybody, and she would live in a nice section of town. So that's where they lived.³⁴

Race and the racialization of ethnic communities undergird María's negotiations with class. This account also reflects the continuation of movement and migration related to labor, and class, as

³⁴ Mendoza, Interview No. 1638.

“there were a lot of workers from Mexico, that were single, and they wanted somebody to make food.” This gives insight into the dynamics of gender, and the continued negotiations with communities shaped by recurring immigration. However, because racial acknowledgement is largely absent in Mendoza’s narrative one may only speculate about the ways in which Rodríguez’s navigated these racial terrains how they understood themselves as racialized subjects.

Due to the continuation of immigration, Mexican American communities not only negotiated place among other racial and ethnic communities, these negotiations persisted within, ever shifting, heterogeneous communities of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American people. These negotiations unveil the challenges to cultivating a unified Mexican/Mexican American consciousness. As a racialized ethnic group in the United States, the spaces of these negotiations unfolded in racialization of Mexicans, in ways that did not uniformly apply to communities and its members, resulting in racial ambiguities. As the “first racialized group to be granted citizenship,” this figured in a destabilizing the preconditions of citizenship as predicated on whiteness.³⁵ Yet, people of Mexican ancestry occupied “in-between status” in which they may be recognized as legally white, yet “socially ... a distinct racial group.”³⁶ These contentious categorization of Mexicans as “legally white, but racially other, codified their position as unequal citizens for generations to come.”³⁷

³⁵ Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*, 29.

³⁶ Molina, 28.

³⁷ Molina, 27.

The Press Shapes a Body Politic – Gender, Race, Class and the Nation

La Prensa, a weekly turned daily newspaper distributed out of San Antonio, Texas, aimed to cultivate a unified Mexican patriotism, addressing a growing community of Mexican expatriates entering the United States following the Mexican Revolution. *La Prensa* explicitly addressed *México de afuera*, to speak directly to the growing Mexican expatriate communities in United States. Declaring itself a “genuinely Mexican newspaper ... a periodical written for the people,” *La Prensa* asserted its position as of a truly independent publication, claiming truthfulness that is “real, absolute and unquestionable.”³⁸ Strong efforts to cultivate a unified Mexican patriotism appears not only in the content and organizational layout of the publication, but also linguistically, through uses of possessive pronouns, claiming Mexico as “our” country and “homeland.” However, given the directive and audience of *La Prensa*, the cultivation of this consciousness is decidedly masculinist and classist.

It's its first issue, February 13, 1913, established a run of approximately six pages per issue. Its headlining pages focused almost exclusively on political events in Mexico interspersed with reporting of the United States' involvement in international politics. Subsequent pages addressed political and social realms of Mexicans in United States, while the final pages of editorials and advertisements included regional reporting of events relevant to Texas and the greater Southwest.

Journalism historian Melita Garza situates *La Prensa* as formative to the shaping of a Mexican American identity and political awareness. At an historical moment during which the United States sought to classify and govern Mexican immigrant, and descendant and immigrant populations; primarily through the deployment of pejorative racializing narratives, Garza posits,

³⁸ Ignacio E. Lozano, “Suscribirse a *La Prensa*,” *La Prensa*, 1913.

“Lozano became one of several émigré editors who helped shape a Mexican American consciousness.”³⁹ . In my review of the first two years of *La Prensa* publication, the content and focus largely excluded women, except in the case of nationalist projections, wherein patriotic expression extols the virtues of femininity through the feminization of the nation. Publishing the writing of poet, José Juan Tablada, *La Prensa* echoes affection for mother country through an idealized female form, marked by religious virtue.

La poesía de nuestras ciudades colonias tendidas a la sombra de los campanarios, vibrantes de repiques matutinos, todos júbilo y de angelus crepusculares todos melancolía, hace contrastar en el ánimo la simetría utilitaria y la atmósfera fría de las ciudades protestantes. ¿Qué es junto a la gracia intensa, cálida y mimosa de la mujer mexicana, que nos ama hasta el sacrificio, la gracia fascinadora, pero artificial de la mujer francesa, la impecable, pero fría perfección de la sajona; el misterio caprichoso y desconcertante de la rusa?⁴⁰

The poetry of our colonial cities, lies in the shadow of bell towers morning chimes, vibrating joyfully, and the twilight prayers, full of melancholy, is contrasted by the utilitarian symmetry and cold atmosphere of Protestant cities. What juxtaposition is the impassioned grace, and warm affection of the Mexican woman, who loves through sacrifice, to the fascinating but artificial grace of the French woman; the impecable, but cold perfection of the Saxon; the disconcerting and temperamental mysteriousness of the Russian?

Although *La Prensa* facilitated a collective consciousness by addressing issues of civil rights, it did so from the perspective and “political needs of middle-class Mexican immigrants in the United States.”⁴¹ In turn, this framing “reinforced a Mexican outlook that was simultaneously elitist and intellectual.”⁴² To better understand the orientation of this publication, and its readership one may consider the touchstones in the life of Ignacio Lozano, *La Prensa*’s founder and director.

³⁹ Melita M. Garza, *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 44.

⁴⁰ José Juan Tablada, “El amor de la patria,” *La Prensa*, April 2, 1914, Microfilm, on Loan Courtesy of University of Texas, El Paso.

⁴¹ Garza, *They Came to Toil*, 30.

⁴² Garza, *They Came to Toil*, 30.

The son of a business man, Ignacio Lozano earned a formal business education from Instituto de Beldén of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. He held the title of bookkeeper/accountant. Following the death of his father, Lazano accompanied by his mother, and five unmarried sisters traveled by train to San Antonio in 1908. Lazano was twenty-two years old at the time. Family legend asserts that they arrived “virtually penniless,” as they were robbed of their savings en route to San Antonio.⁴³ However, as a formally educated member of Mexico’s business class, Lozano quickly found work in publishing and print media sales. Some of Lozano’s sisters took employment as store clerks, another nod to the family’s social capital and mobility.⁴⁴ The social positioning of the Lozano family, prior to their arrival in the United States, afforded enough economic and social mobility to facilitate a seemingly smooth transition into middle class occupations in the United States. With enough discretionary income to set aside for investment, only five years after arriving *virtually* penniless, Lozano founded *La Prensa*, signifying a swift move from middle class to owning class. The use of “virtually” makes an important gesture, as a reminder that the economic, social, and cultural capital of class privilege persists despite temporary economic hardship. In addition, due to the racial scripts in Mexico, and the legacies of the racial caste system, class is not the only privilege to persist.

Within the United States, systemic discrimination against Mexican immigrant and Mexican descendant communities certainly limited mobility and access to resources, however

⁴³ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, “Ignacio E. Lozano: The Mexican Exile Publisher Who Conquered San Antonio and Los Angeles,” *American Journalism* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 78.

There exist a slight discrepancy in the timeline of events pertaining to the Lozano family migration, as reported in Rivas-Rodriguez’ article, as one source reports the family’s migration in 1908, while another in 1909. This discrepancy emerges within a series of interviews with members of the Lozano family, including the sister, daughter, and nephew of Ignacio. Each of the three interviews, referenced in a single end-note, support the account of “money stolen on a train” as the family traveled to San Antonio. More importantly, the three interviews underscore the significance of storytelling and memory to histories of migration. See Rivas-Rodriguez, endnote no. 12.

⁴⁴ Rivas-Rodriguez, 78.

the impacts of this discrimination, and its material consequences fell unevenly upon individuals and communities. Amid the racializing rubrics in the United States, designed to destabilize and disenfranchise Mexican communities, any negotiation to acquire or maintain power necessarily emerged out of negotiations with class and gender as well as claims to European ancestry (whiteness). Although Richard Griswold del Castillo asserts that *La Prensa* laid the foundation for a contemporary intellectual and political movement that ““championed the cause of non-white peoples of the Third World,”” it remains critical to acknowledge that *La Prensa* gained traction primarily among an affluent, well-educated Mexican diaspora.⁴⁵ The relative affluence of its readership therefore is born out of longstanding mechanisms racialization operating within the United States and Mexico.

Still, *La Prensa* marks a significant moment of influence in shaping a political and cultural identity among communities of Mexican immigrants and Mexicans by descent living in the United States. This, in turn, influenced the cultivation of a Mexican-American social and political consciousness that would emerge in the 1940s, and the subsequent Chicano political consciousness of the 1960s. Nevertheless, the cultivation of a Mexican, as with any identity predicated on forms of nationalism, cannot be divorced from forms of dominance. The production and promotion of homogenous formations of social, cultural, and political identities inevitably renders occlusions and erasures. In the case of *La Prensa* in these formative years of Mexican national consciousness, it is necessary to consider preexisting systems of social stratification in both Mexico and the United States. Incorporating a nuanced analysis of social hierarchies, formations of identity, and cultures of belonging, with respect to colonial histories,

⁴⁵ Richard Griswold del Castillo’s 1977 “The Mexican Revolution and Spanish Language Press in the Borderlands” as cited in Garza, *They Came to Toil*, 44.

race, class and gender, add necessary complexity to the false equivalency that a Mexican identity is unequivocally “non-white.”

The role of *La Prensa*, in its focus on middle-class respectability, sheds light onto *why* its sister publication, *La Opinión*, reported that pachuca women as posed a threat to the social position of Mexicans, and Mexican Americans in society. Pachucas, through visual technologies and bodily expression, “mark the limits of la familia;” in which the kinship of *familia* extended beyond the nuclear family to include the subjectivity of Mexicans within the nation. Enacting agency through claims through visual technologies, the body figured as central to movement, claims for space, and sexual autonomy. By refusing the norms of the family and nation, *la pachuca* “introduces disorder into its essentially patriarchal project.”⁴⁶ With regard to femininity, expressions of the pachuca posed a worrisome threat to the stability of Mexican American social positioning, by revealing the tenuousness of the Mexican American middle class.⁴⁷

Ruiz underscores the significance of class, race and gender to the histories of Mexican-American communities, first by asserting that in 1848, with the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican war, the discovery of gold in California, and Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border became second-class citizens, “divested of their property and political power.”⁴⁸ Though some elite families, particularly in New Mexico, “retained their land and social standing” many Mexicans, in this period of conquest, experienced systemic and structural barriers to prevent advancement in society.⁴⁹ The histories manifesting in genealogies of

⁴⁶ Rosa Linda Fregoso, “Homegirls, Cholas, and Pachucas in Cinema: Taking over the Public Sphere,” *California History* 74, no. 3 (1995): 319, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25177514>.

⁴⁷ Ramírez, “Crimes of Fashion.”

⁴⁸ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 5.

⁴⁹ Ruiz, 5.

communities in the Southwestern United States, particularly in the usage of terms denoting geographic and temporal location, such as *Californio*, *Nuevomexicano*, and *Tejano*, function not only to indicate a loyalty to place, signifying the presence of a community or family lineage predating annexation, they also denote colonialist claims to region.

Historian David Gutiérrez argues that these colonial claims perpetuate the “Spanish fantasy heritage” of the Southwest, wherein the privileging of European (Spanish) ancestry, infers racial superiority.⁵⁰ As a result of the impact of annexation, and subsequent waves of migration, Mexican and Mexican immigrant communities’ attempts to grapple with the social status issues raised by involuntary incorporation into United States Society mirrored the internal stratification prevalent in Mexico and the *colonias* of the Southwest.

Ruiz situates this settler colonial history as important to understanding the historiography of this period, by addressing women’s networks of blood ties and fictive kin, as “central to the settlement of the Spanish/Mexican frontier.”⁵¹ Importantly, Ruiz acknowledges, “exploitation took place *among* women, [f]or those in domestic service, racial and class hierarchies undermined any pretense of sisterhood.” Missionary elites utilized religion and midwifery as mechanisms of social control to dominate Native populations. As a result, forms of indentured servitude “prevalent on the colonial frontier ... persisted well into the nineteenth century,” justified systems of stratification with an expansive reach back into Mexico’s colonial history.⁵²

Predicated on the concept of purity of blood, *limpieza de sangre*, operated as a mechanism to maintain a caste system based upon ancestry in colonial Mexico. María Elena Martínez traces a prototypical formation of this concept to Iberian expansion, which established

⁵⁰ Cary McWilliams as quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 33.

⁵¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 4.

⁵² Ruiz, 5.

Christian dominance and ensured religious purity through family lineage. In its Transatlantic move to colonial Mexico, *limpieza de sangre* produced a system of racial stratification, in processes devaluating and/or erasing Indigenous and African lineages. The collision of two distinct racial ideologies, one in the United States the other in Mexico—reinforced similar principals of European domination and control. These colonial legacies of *sangre* are helpful in analyzing shifting positionalities within rapidly expanding communities. Further, it provides an entry point for understanding how modernity, too, operates as a colonial project, privileging European dominance, and because *limpieza de sangre* is predicated on the rigid control of sex, manifested through the patriarchal control of gender and sexuality.

Films, Fantasies, and Frontiers

Film offers a platform through which to examine modernity, providing venue for the fantasy projections of social life. In the period of the 1920s and 1930s, films relay frontier anxieties and fantasies, intermingled, unfolding on the silver screen. Though primarily through bilateral conflict, (one homogenous group pitted against another/one dominant cultural mode against another) borderland films can hint at overlapping contestations of region and culture. To explain the popularity of Western/Border genre films, Chicana feminist theorist and film scholar Rosa Linda Fregoso states “border genre” films captured the “cultural imaginary of both the United States, and Mexico” since the 1930s.⁵³ Films in this genre offer tropes of a landscape open for the taking, wherein the “eroticized, underdeveloped” terrain breed “otherness” and operate as the cite of “unrepressed libidinal energies.”⁵⁴ Its “inhabitants are coded as outcasts,

⁵³ Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters : The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, American Crossroads ; 12 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 53.

⁵⁴ Fregoso, 53.

degenerates, sexually hungry subalterns, and outlaws.”⁵⁵ In this landscapes of frontiers and contested territories, narratives of race and gender are crucial to the production of national identities, even in this fantasy realm.

As such, the Latina body has been critical in defining femininity and citizenship in the United States through film. Dolores del Río and Lupe Vélez navigated the terrains of racialized femininity throughout their careers. Their images were mediated through dominant/powerful forces of media, thereby imposing some limits on their agency and voice. Nevertheless, their relationship to film, and film’s fantasy projections shed light on their negotiations within these systems of power. Their portrayals in western/order genre films demonstrate dominant views and stereotypes of Mexican and Indigenous women in the southwest, as well as the relationship between these two racialized categories when portrayed by Mexican women.

Dolores del Río was born the only child to a doting mother, and banking father, in Durango Mexico, between 1904 and 1906. Del Río grew up in the flourishing city of Durango, which had accumulated wealth in mining and cattle raising, dating back to the colonial period. Del Río’s father hailed from Basque province of Spain while her mother’s family, having been in Mexico for a number of generations, was of “Spanish and Indian ancestry.”⁵⁶ Del Río attended a convent school in Mexico City, and at a young age married into family of greater social prominence. A trained singer and dancer, del Río choreographed and performed ballets for family in friends. Ultimately, one of these performances led to her discovery by film director Edwin Carewe, during his honeymoon in 1925. Defying the conventions of a lady of her social

⁵⁵ Fregoso, 53.

⁵⁶ Clara Rodriguez, “Discursive (De-)Constructions of Nation and Gender in Early Filmic Texts: Dolores Del Río and Lupe Vélez, 1924-1944,” in *Of Fatherlands and Motherlands: Gender and Nation in the Americas : A Joint Project of Bielefeld University, the University of Leipzig, and the Colegio de México*, ed. Sebastian Thies, Gabriele Pizarz-Ramírez, and Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco (WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2015), 240.

position, the del Río family relocated to Los Angeles in order for del Río to begin to work in film. Del Río and her success “reflected awareness that she was Mexican, but ... consistently emphasized her high social status and the wealth of her family ... race and ethnicity, in this case, were significantly modified by class.”⁵⁷

Lupe Vélez was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, in 1908 into a military family. Like del Río, Vélez attended a convent school, however, Vélez’s attended school in San Antonio, Texas, which she later credited for granting the opportunity to learn to dance “the latest American dance crazes.”⁵⁸ The death of Vélez’s father curtailed her education, as she returned home to help support her mother and younger siblings. In strikingly similar parallels, Lupe Vélez journeyed to Hollywood on the advice of a producer in 1925, following a dance recital. Dolores del Río and Lupe Vélez were actresses in Hollywood to proclaim a Mexican identity. Their lives and careers are an important element in understanding the identity formation, as offshoot of identifying with the vicarious fantasies of film, is the potential to identify with the actors embodying that role.

In film Dolores del Río played characters deemed ambiguously exotic, even as she held firmly to her Mexican heritage. Del Río bemoaned the fact that rarely had been given the opportunity to portray a complex rendering of Mexican women, offering critical insight into the limitations of Hollywood. Over the course of her career, Del Río’s image shift from the “Mexican shawl to the glamorous fur” resulted from contract negotiations which afforded del Río greater authority in approving her own scripts. Del Río, therefore selected roles to reflective of star status, “steeped with ... modernity and sophistication,” eschewing stereotypical

⁵⁷ Linda B. Linda Biesele Hall, *Dolores Del Río Beauty in Light and Shade* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013), 30.

⁵⁸ Rodriguez, “Discursive (De-)Constructions of Nation and Gender in Early Filmic Texts: Dolores Del Río and Lupe Vélez, 1924-1944,” 240.

presentations of Latinas.⁵⁹ Vélez on the other hand, enacted agency from within the limits of the stereotypes. Acting with intensified affect, amplifying her accent Vélez frequently returned to these roles projecting a constructed image of Mexican Latina femininity representation. In this Vélez cultivated an image that, despite being at odds with sophistication of the image put forward by del Río, was nevertheless, an image of modernity.

Del Río, was “enormously popular, despite the unease about Mexicans in the United States.”⁶⁰ Lupe Vélez, similarly, held her own in Hollywood. For each, their claims to identity were mediated through the racial scripts of the United States met with the colonial legacies of Mexico. The unease pertaining Mexicans in the United States may be understood, once more, through the logic of nationalist projects to construct *Mexicanness* as a “racial other.” Further, this unease can be understood as a recognition of the instability of racial rubrics in United States, and the particular ways in which Mexico’s Spanish colonial history, which, like that of the United States, operated through European dominance. As a result, when negotiating place and presence, whether at individual, communal, or institutional levels, claims to whiteness—however fragile, or problematic—could be made. Such claims unsettled the terms and conditions of racial stratification and hierarchy in the United States. The creation of *Mexicanness*, as well as claims to a “Mexican identity,” take into account definitions of citizenship and cultural belonging constructed within and through hierarchies of gendered, racialized, classed-based systems of stratification.

It is within the rubric of the modern girl, that the self-fashioning of Dolores del Río, and Lupe Vélez as Hollywood celebrities assumes greater meaning. Not only did del Río and Vélez

⁵⁹ Rodriguez, 248.

⁶⁰ Hall, *Dolores Del Río Beauty in Light and Shade*, 84.

contend with racial and ethnic categorizations in their careers, they contended with these powerful forces of race-making; the gaps and limits of categorization, in the public eye. Del Río, never able to shed the exotic “otherness” of her presence in Hollywood, she nevertheless eschewed the stereotypical images of the Mexican woman, deriving from male-dominated expressions of Mexican nationalism. To reference back, the figure of la mujer in José Juan Tablada’s “El amor de la patria” offers a clear example of this stereotype. Lupe Velez, however, remained typecast, frequently appearing in caricatures of the overly dramatic, fiery Latina. In a mirrored projection onto her public persona this Latina stereotype was ascribed into the personhood of Lupe Vélez, as well.

Curiously, though not surprisingly, both actresses started in films in which they portrayed Indigenous women. Blackface, yellowface, brownface (sometimes called redface when referring to portrayals of Native Americans), were common products of Hollywood film. Yet for del Río and Vélez the adoption of aesthetics representative of the racialized/exotic other raises unique questions in the context of how they are racialized in the United States. In 1927, when considering Dolores del Río for the starring role of *Ramona*, director, Edwin Carewe expressed concern that he may be “pushing the limit with a racially ambiguous star”⁶¹. The concern did not lie in whether del Río could believably portray the role, as indicated by the aforementioned Hollywood practice of “making faces,” but rather, that the role would limit future roles by overtly marking her racialized body at such an early juncture in her career. When Lupe Vélez followed suit, portraying a Navajo woman in the 1934 film *Laughing Boy*, her body, public persona, and predominance in comedic roles over drama, had already begun to cultivate a form of typecasting.

When considering the constructions of Mexican identity, and how racial ambiguity

⁶¹ Hall, 84.

operates these instances, one must take into account the racial scripts of the United States, which constitute Mexicanness as other due to the *presumption* of indigenous lineages; as well as the legacies of Mexico's the colonial caste system which *obscure* it. In either case, the projects of colonialism and nationalism, subjugate indigeneity through a reductive rendering, while entirely obscuring other racialized groups (African, and Asian) as historical agents within the borderlands. These manifestations of the borderland, in popular culture and on film, offer an important platform from which to consider the mechanisms of racialized, gender and sexual formation as interacting with the histories and legacies of Mexico and the United States.



Dolores del Río and Warner Baxter
in *Ramona*.
Promotional image. (1928)



Lupe Vélez and Roman Navarro in
Laughing Boy
Promotional image. (1928)

Ramona in the Fantasy Borderland

The 1928 United Artists film, *Ramona*, directed by Chickasaw filmmaker, Edwin Carewe, starring Dolores del Río, presented one of several adaptations of Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel by the same name. A film of the silent era, the 1928 production utilized the technology of synchronized sound. Dolores del Río recorded a title song for the film, released the same year. These lyrics romanticize the Mexican colonial landscape, conjuring similar

sentimental imagery of ringing bell towers as in *La Prensa*'s printing of "El amor de la patria" as del Río sings declarations of affection. Ramona, I hear the mission bells above. Ramona, they're ringing out our song of love.⁶² However, the narrative of the film offers much more than a dramatic romance.

Set within the Temecula Valley of 1850s Mexican California, Jackson's novel addresses the injustices and discrimination against Indigenous communities. The narrative text follows Ramona, a woman of mixed Indigenous ancestry, and her husband, Alessandro, a Luiseño sheepshearer. Though fictional, *Ramona* follows the path of Jackson's previous non-fiction publication, *A Century of Dishonor*, and, in the publication of *Ramona*, Jackson's work stands out as of the first fictive account "by a white author to take the Indian side of the American colonial racial question."⁶³ Jackson's novel illuminates "the social and economic plight of Indians" through attentiveness "to the problem of assimilation, land grabbing miscegenation... reservation politics and racial prejudice" making her work "exceptional for its time."⁶⁴ However, the novel and its sustaining legacy signal its shortcomings by inadequately addressing "the historical tragedy that lay, in the missions, at the feet of Christian capitalism and expansionism."⁶⁵ Further, the popularity and proliferation of this work of fiction, does not attend to the ways Mexican Californios and Anglo writers alike romanticize Indigenous histories and colonial narratives. The contested territories of Mexican and European settler colonialism bear bitter, unromantic realities.

⁶² Dolores del Río, Paul Whiteman, and Paul Whiteman's Orchestra, *Ramona - Waltz (Theme Song of the Motion Picture Production, "Ramona")* (Victor Records, 1928).

⁶³ Scott B. Vickers, *Native American Identities: From Stereotype to Archetype in Art and Literature*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 64.

⁶⁴ Vickers, 64.

⁶⁵ Vickers, 64; Phil Brigandi, "The Ramona Myth and Southern California Tourism," in *Ramona* (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2008), 9.

The legacy of *Ramona* holds staying power. In addition to multiple film adaptations, the first theatrical production *Ramona* premiered with the 1905 Virginia Calhoun stage production. In the longest running theatrical drama to date, the *Ramona Pageant*, in Hemet, California, has continued in its annual summer production since 1923. Of the conditions that garnered *Ramona*'s timing proved a crucial factor. The publication *Ramona*, coincided with a Southern California real estate boom and favorable railroad fares, affording greater opportunities for tourism and resettlement. Capitalizing on the publicity of Jackson's novel, and the tourism it brought to region, the Southern Pacific railroad built a station at the gates of Rancho Camulos, in Ventura County, dubbed, "the Home of *Ramona*."⁶⁶ The confluence of expansion, tourism and resettlement, facilitated by new forms of travel; modes of entertainment facilitated by new technologies of stage and screen; and an alignment with the sweeping popularity of literary fiction, romanticizing colonial narratives, signal the thin line between reality and fantasy. Within the rise of *Ramona*, the figure assumes a mythical power great enough to influence the development of a region. Even as a fictional character, *Ramona*, demonstrates the ways in which marginalized women bear processes of modernity.

The story of the 1928 film, *Ramona*, stands on its own as a compelling narrative of movement across borders, loss and recovery. Archival practices for film did not exist in this early period of filmmaking, and the volatile nature of nitrate film, highly susceptible to degradation and combustion, resulted in only a small percentage of films from this era survived, constituting an "irretrievable loss" to the nation's "cultural record."⁶⁷ The declarative that film exists as part of a nation's cultural record signals the importance of film historiographic and

⁶⁶ Brigandi, "The *Ramona* Myth and Southern California Tourism"; Brigandi, 10.

⁶⁷ Abby Ohlheiser, "Most of America's Silent Films Are Lost Forever," *The Atlantic*, December 4, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/12/most-americas-silent-films-are-lost-forever/355775/>.

contemporary film analysis, and further, clarifies the recovery effort undertaken by film archivists to recuperate lost film. Film archivists have begun to look beyond the garages and storage units in the United States, turning attention to archival repositories abroad. In a 2013 Library of Congress publication, film historian David Pierce tracks the proliferation of American produced silent film in the global market, suggesting, “themes were universal,” moreover, “titles could easily be translated,” turning silent film into a “worldwide medium.”⁶⁸ The former Czechoslovakia, had been one of major import countries of Hollywood film between the 1910-1930s, with major film companies operating out of branch offices in Prague. Despite the standard practice to dispose of films after their run, the glut of American films in Czechoslovakia created many opportunities for prints to leak into the private market. “Those aging copies served as unadvertised second features in small-town theaters or were offered by touring showmen in rural areas” offering an important insight to the ways in which film distribution may have operated more broadly.⁶⁹ In addition to highlighting the emergence of international celebrity of the era, this expands the possibilities for film re-discovery and recovery in this contemporary moment.

Czech audiences witnessed Dolores del Río’s performance in *Ramona* sometime after its studio release. Near the early part of the Second World War, during the German invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia, Nazi troops confiscated a single print of the film sending the copy to the German film archive of the Third Reich, Reichsfilmarchiv, in Berlin. In the final stages of the war, when Soviet forces invaded Berlin, soldiers seized the print, sending *Ramona* to

⁶⁸ David Pierce, *The Survival of American Silent Feature Films, 1912-1929*, CLIR Publication, no. 158 (Washington, D.C: Council on Library and Information Resources and The Library of Congress, 2013), 48.

⁶⁹ Pierce, 50.

Gosfilmofond film archive near Moscow.⁷⁰ There it remained until Czech film historian and archivist, Myrtil Frida, discovered the film in the 1960s. Frida successfully retrieved the film, carrying it with him as he returned to Prague, where he deposited it in Národní Filmový (Czech National Film Archive). The print appeared on the archive's manifest in 1987, as the only known copy in existence. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the film dropped off the record, leading archivists to conclude that the film, like others unaccountably dropped, deteriorated beyond restoration.⁷¹ However, scholars of American Silent film discovered the print of *Ramona* in 2009, and in collaboration with the Library of Congress, coordinated to have the highly flammable reel 35mm nitrate film transported to the United States for restoration, translation, “repatriation” into the United States Library of Congress Film Archives. In 2014, the fully restored version of *Ramona* premiered at the Billy Wilder Theatre, home of the UCLA Film and Television archive. The film premiered with live orchestral accompaniment, in honor of the accompanying musical score.

Since its restoration, the Library of Congress Archive of Washington, D.C., hosts the film for public viewing, releasing a duplicate print, which has appeared in screenings throughout the west coast of the United States. In an additional phase of restoration, the film has been duplicated to DVD, and as of 2017, entered into circulation within university library systems.⁷² The film

⁷⁰ Hugh Munro Neely, “No Longer Lost: Comments Upon the 2014 Premiere of Edwin Carewe’s 1928 *Ramona*,” n.d., <https://scvhistory.com/scvhistory/carewe1928hughmunroneely.htm>.

⁷¹ Neely.

⁷² When I began to trace the showings of *Ramona*, in February, 2018 the screenings were just beyond my reach. When I called the Library of Congress to inquire about the film, I learned the duplicate *Ramona*, had been transferred onto 35mm film, limiting to theatres to which the Library of Congress could issue a loan. Since its re-release, various film events screened *Ramona*. I missed it at Seattle Theatre Guild’s Silent Film Fest, by exactly one year; and lamented when an upcoming screening as hosted by the Utah Division of State History, proved too far to travel. However, I learned more about the film in the process: despite its California setting, Carewe selected Utah’s National Parks as film location. At some point in the three months that followed, the University of Washington, Tacoma library, quietly obtained a copy of the film, revealed in a cursory catalogue search on May, 25, 2018. I look forward to deeper engagement with archival construction, and the digital technologies that lead to new directions and new considerations of archival work in my future work.

itself offers a compelling narrative of loss and recovery, border crossings, and contested territories, while the film's movement through multiple archives signal consideration factors defining what constitutes cultural artifact, commitments to archival preservation and new technologies, and ways of thinking through the restoration of historical markers otherwise believed to have fallen through the gaps of the archive. As a project of rediscovery and restoration, the recuperation of this film reflects significant work on the part of film historians and archivists. Yet, it also signals many other unaccounted losses. Engagement in the work of compensatory histories, particularly histories of racialized women and marginalized communities gesture toward the construction of the archives, signaling power imbricated in their development, and, the purposes they serve.

Modernity's Tensions

MGM's 1934 film, *Laughing Boy*, starring Lupe Vélez, proved to be a box office disappointment, yet this film, like *Ramona*, features Vélez in the role of a Native woman. In similar fashion, this film offers a screen adaptation of Oliver La Farge's 1929 novel of the same title. In the genre of Western/Romance, a critical reading of *Laughing Boy* offers fertile ground for an analysis of borderland fantasies, nuanced narrative of nations and borders, nationalism and forced assimilation, demonstrating the ways in which racialized gender violence, and gendered expressions of desire, figure within dialogues of modernity.

From the outset, the introduction of the film situates the leading characters exist within a paternalistic view of Indigenous peoples. Like in the novel, the protagonists bear the names of *Laughing Boy*, and *Slim Girl*. The film opens to the high-desert landscape of the Navajo Nation, as clans converge for the annual Great Sing Dance at T'si Lani. The scene to follow depicts the

arrival of tourists by bus. The “bit character” tourists depict boorishness and materialism, posing a necessary critique to the practice of Native lands (and people) as tourist attraction. With this scene as the opening setting of the film, audiences are first introduced first to Laughing Boy, as he quietly, and smoothly negotiates a transaction with tourists who have insisted upon buying the silver adorning his body. Audiences meet Slim Girl only moments later as she prepares to participate in the ceremonial dances, however, in contrast to Laughing Boy, viewers become immediately aware of her awkwardness and guarded discomfort as she prepares to join in the ceremony.

Orphaned as a child, Slim Girl endures rejection for “[going] the white man’s way.”⁷³ True to the novel, this film gestures toward “historical resonances . . . highlighting tragedies of child removal, in which . . . thousands of Indians who were taken from their homes and heritages, often by force, sent to ‘away schools’ run by the white government under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.”⁷⁴ As a result of forced assimilation, Slim Girl endures painful rejections from Navajo society, as she tries, but fails in her attempt to “be a Navajo again.”⁷⁵ Moreover, the racial logics marking her body as Native to settler-colonial society override the possibility of full inclusion, regardless of the degree to which she possesses an understanding of the “white man’s way” through assimilated cultural knowledge. As she moves through and between the geographies of settler township and Navajo territories, she remains alienated from both worlds.

The figurative representation of Slim Girl’s struggle exhibited in scenes in which she is called back and forth between worlds. On her way to the dance, she walks past two white

⁷³ *Laughing Boy*, directed by W.S. Van Dyke, (1934; Beverly Hills: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. Redistributed by Warner Home Video, Burbank, 2015), DVD.

⁷⁴ Vickers, *Native American Identities*, 60.

⁷⁵ Van Dyke, W.S., *Laughing Boy*, 1934.

ranchers watching over the scene. One calls her by an anglicized name, asking with affected cordiality, “Hi, Lily. How’s business?” an exchange gesturing to her engagement in sex work. The insidiousness of this question becomes evident as variations of it resurface throughout the film. Throughout the film, Slim Girl encounters various white male townspeople, often in pairs, imposing an unsolicited presence through forms of harassment. Demonstrating power and domination through sexual exploitation, each interjection disrupts her ability to move freely. The feigned friendliness of the first iteration deteriorates rapidly, as subsequent interactions intensify by degrees of racialized sexual violence. That they outnumber her, or psychologically overpower her, signals the power and impunity of white masculinity in the domination of Indigenous women’s sexuality. Because these engagements follow instances in which Slim Girl moves with agency and autonomy, a critical reading of these repetitive interruptions offers symbolic representation of the continual disruptions of settler colonialism.

As reflected in *Laughing Boy* forced assimilation through genocidal policies of displacement and neglect, frequently operated in conjunction with missions and boarding schools. Christianizing missions drew upon equivalencies of religion, civilization, and nation building, wherein narratives of progress encompassed the proliferation of Christianity. Civilization, defined as white, Christian, capitalist, modern and industrializing contributed to the development of policies of indigenous child removal in the United States.⁷⁶ The policies to Christianize, civilize and modernize were born out of a cultural evolution wherein savagery was not only defined racially, and religiously, but also economically. Although themes of Christian

⁷⁶ Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011). See Chapter 2.

conversion remain notably absent in *Laughing Boy*, it becomes possible to recognize the role of modernity narratives of assimilation and acculturation.

Slim Girl struggles to adapt to norms of the reservation, accustomed to the trappings of life in town, distinctly marked by technologies of modernity. Early in their courtship, Slim Girl watches as Laughing Boy starts a fire. She offers gleefully,

In my house in Los Palos, I have a stove! None of that trouble!
 Oh, you should see my house! (A house with windows!)
 I have curtains in the windows. I have a music box.
 A train? ... One goes by in back of my house every day.

Here this fictional narrative overlaps with the themes discussed in this paper. The house with curtains, as a visual cue to social location and class status; the housing settlement situated on the line of the railroad, as well the role of commercially produced music. Laughing Boy expresses an uncertain curiosity in response, and an air of ambivalence persists throughout the narrative, signally one of the ways in which modernity as a process of cultural shifting, occurs unevenly across time and place.

The “commodity culture” of “modern domesticity ... made the home into an extension of a woman’s essential self.”⁷⁷ However, because modernity operates as a mechanism of self-fashioning, informing not only an expression of identity, but also as a measure of cultural citizenship, in this “rise of the ... nation state the development of a homogenous identity ... national identity is imbricated in the project of modernity (and vice-versa).”⁷⁸ Because of its complex ties to the nation, aspirations toward modernity’s commodity culture are taken for granted. A pervasive notion persists, of universal aspirations toward modernity. As such,

⁷⁷ Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 92.

⁷⁸ Hershfield, 6.

commodity cultures of modernity are positioned at odds with rural and agricultural economies. Due to the underlying racial logics undergirding modernity as defining the national body, the images and ideals of modernity are juxtaposed in sharp contrast to Indigeneity, precluding any possibility for coexistence.

In a striking transition between scenes, Slim Girl embodies this conflict and juxtaposition. Having returned from the dance, Slim Girl stands over her vanity, removing the silver rings; the jewelry which connect her to her Navajo identity. Her long hair sways with her movement. In an invisible cut to the next scene she once appears standing before her vanity, yet she would be almost unrecognizable were it not for the that her stance and posture mirror the previous frame. Not only is Slim Girl projecting a vastly different image, the small table displays table service, and a magazine. As an historical text, the presentation of this scene certainly demonstrated the very real tensions inherent in modernization and its relationship to the national project. However, in thinking through the uses of this juxtaposition, I consider parallel juxtapositions in which modernity and the rural/agricultural/working class and mechanisms of race in the creation of “other” continue to present these oppositions.

A brief synopsis of the film suggests that the plot unfolds as a “Navajo warrior marries a woman who covets the lifestyle of white settlers.”⁷⁹ While Slim Girl certainly delights in the trappings of settler-town life, in her utmost expression of desire, she seeks freedom from the split of existing between two worlds. In full recognition that this summary hardly offers the depth of complexity to engage with the film, it nevertheless requires attention. This summary reflects an assessment of the film’s premise within the context of this contemporary moment. As a corrective analysis, the scenes in which Slim Girl may appear to covet the lifestyle of white

⁷⁹ “Laughing Boy, 1934 - Google Search, 2018

settlers, more accurately show the unsettled negotiations with the imposition of settler colonialism. Moreover, within these contested borderlands the draw toward the trappings of modern life must be understood as operating, at least in part, in the service of the nation. To move briefly away from the historical analysis, the summary reveals the persistence pervasiveness of colonial ideologies in the contemporary moment. In addition to advancing the notion rendering modernity and Indigeneity as mutually exclusive, this framing continues to privilege the lifestyle of white settlers *as inherently desirable*.

Slim Girl's restricted movement between two seemingly oppositional worlds demonstrate negotiations within lived experiences of subjugation. The degree to which Slim Girl covets the lifestyle of white settlers Slim Girl's desire to desire repair the break of cultural transmission resulting from settler colonialism and forced assimilation profoundly eclipses her desire for settler life. Slim Girl bears the of settler colonialism through her bodily movements, and ultimately her death which operates as a symbolic and literal translation of indigenous genocide. She collapses as her lover's arrow punctures her heart, stating, "It has gone too deep. Now you know ... it is a good thing that I die. It is best ... the white man has spoiled the way for me. Always, I breathe two breaths, I think two ways."⁸⁰ Ultimately her death precludes the possibility of multiple modes of being. This too operates as part of a dominant, reductive narrative.

⁸⁰Lupe Vélez as Slim Girl in *Laughing Boy*, 1934.



Lupe Vélez as Slim Girl / Lily in juxtaposition.
Still images from the film *Laughing Boy*, starring Lupe Vélez, 1934.

Conclusion – *La Pachuca* Counterscripts

Taken together, these secondary and primary sources, contribute to a greater understanding of cultural identity formations within the narrative turns of migration, labor, modernity and nationalisms. Against a backdrop of shifting economic and political conditions in Mexico and the United States, and both nations' transnational influences, these expansions facilitated new pathways for migration and resettlement. Within these traces of trans border and regional movement narratives subjectivity and identity formation rise to the surface reflecting negotiations with these shifting landscapes.

Despite any and all attempts otherwise – nationalisms and the uptake of modernity, and as a result of movement among and across contested territories, heterogeneous Mexican and Mexican American communities formed in the United States. These communities took shape amid the rise and fall of tides of immigration and negotiated not only with the imposition of

national ideologies, but also colonial legacies. The cultural and political borders defining these communities resulted in continual dialogues with histories emerging out of overlapping, often competing, national and colonial histories. In such negotiations, tensions are inevitable, nevertheless, Mexican/American communities negotiated with these tensions, establishing cultural connections through elements of shared language and history, to arrive to a degree of acceptance of and adherence to shared cultural values and expectations.⁸¹ By the mid-twentieth century, communities of the southwest United States continued to shift in formation, due to persistent, at times, circular movements along travel along well-worn routes of migration, engaging in new negotiations, and reshaping cultural formations. I look forward to deeper engagement with scholarship that addresses the multi-dimensional space of the borderlands as a landscape for cultural formations, and continued engagement with the frameworks of modernity, to examine its incremental, uneven, diffusion across time and place.

These archives and sources give an understanding to the ways in which the origins of *la pachuca* may have been cultivated in the 1910s, 20s, and 30s, predating the flashpoint moment of 1943. Because cultural shifts span decades, if not generations, this project embarks on the exciting process of reaching back in time to consider modes of gender, sexuality, and identity formation, which can only be understood through an engagement with the complex national histories, colonial legacies, internal, and transnational politics. Just as femininity does not operate exclusively in relationship to masculinity, neither are pachucas an extension of pachucos. They are neither bound to one another, nor do they stand entirely on their own; pachuquismo came into formation in multidimensional inter/intra community relations. This work begins to clarify the avenues through which pachucas emerge, signaling a distinctive genealogy. In tracing

⁸¹ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 26.

the complex histories of identity formation, and subjectivity, the lineage of the *la pachuca* becomes clearer. By exploring the relationship between these histories of gender, sexuality and identity formation, in relation to nationalisms and settler colonialism, we may better understand pachucos as well. Tracing this genealogy lends itself to future work in exploring the uptake and/or refusal of modernity and its ideals cultivate formations of resistance, emphasizing the ways in which *la pachuca* has become symbolic in her subversive power; challenging norms of racialized, classed, gender expression through modes of resistance.

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