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Como Lo Recuerdo: A Remembrance of Mexican Folk Songs from Our Residents' Hearts

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COMO LO RECUERDO: A REMEMBRANCE OF MEXICAN FOLK SONGS FROM OUR RESIDENTS' HEARTS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Educators today face the challenge of finding either the individual in the community or the community in the individual. This study applies Jeff Titon's idea on communities as musical ecosystems to explore the sustainability of John A. Lomax's April 1939 Southern Collection field recordings, examining how and where these musical works exist in Brownsville, Texas today and investigating the meanings of these Mexican folk songs to Rio Grande Valley community members. In this work, I put the Lomax song collection in greater cultural, historical, and musical context, and argue that the songs can assist Rio Grande Valley individuals in both claiming and celebrating a Mexican musical legacy, even when they were not born in Mexico, and in maintaining a Spanish-speaking identity within an English-speaking majority nation.

Border residents' individual and culturally inherited memories evoked by Mexican songs learned in childhood weave a shared Mexican identity that can help build pride in the heritage of Mexican American students today and contribute to the narrative of Spanish usage. I explore the sustainability of these children's songs and games over time and unpack their role in maintaining cultural solidarity in the music classroom and in the community at large.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving husband and family who gave me everything I needed as I worked diligently on the various tasks this thesis and graduate work required of me. We did it!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Susan Hurley-Glowa, Dr. Teresita Lozano, and Dr. Cynthia Paccacerqua for their guidance throughout this project. Deep gratitude goes to my participants for allowing me to interview them and providing their advice, experiences, and testimony. Ms. Milagro Resendez, of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Library Special Collections Department, thank you for your assistance in locating artifacts for my study. Thanks also goes out to all the graduate professors whose courses pushed me and led me to the artifacts I needed to build my thesis. Dr. Rentfro, of Brownsville Independent School District, thank you for your encouraging words. My coworkers at Aiken Elementary, thank you for being patient with me and continuously willing to hear me talk about this research non-stop. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and give deep thanks to my committee members without whose presence and council I would not have completed this program.

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INTRODUCTION

It was 2020 in Brownsville, Texas, and I reclined in the barber's chair with my eyes transfixed on the darkness before me as a warm towel steamed over my face. I heard an infant's cry nearby. A father cooed at it, calmly clicking his tongue, and then began singing a lullaby. He hit every note on pitch. Perplexed, my mind raced, processing it, and comparing it to songs I knew. I did not recognize the lullaby, but the sound was familiar, like the songs my mother sang to me. In this intimate space between parent and child, this father's role expanded beyond parent to become a culture bearer as well. While the song's role was to soothe, it was also shaping the little one's identity and place in the world: an identity tied to Mexican culture and the Spanish language within the border region. This blended identity along the *frontera* made me reflect on Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestizaje*, a cultural and spiritual mixing (Anzaldúa 2007, 102-103). From shared family meals to songs during celebrations, whether they include "*Las Mañanitas*" or "Happy Birthday," a blend of activities builds each child's identity.

My phenomenological experience at the barbershop triggered an interest in folk songs in my culture. I wondered whether the Mexican folk songs typically sung to children in the border region of Texas play a role in a child's cultural development for just a finite time. Are these songs in Spanish gradually forgotten, or do they remain important cultural markers? To answer questions about the sustenance of Mexican songs within my community, I began to plan an oral

history project that utilized ethnographic interviews that would allow me to work within the surrounding bilingual, bicultural community that has nourished me.

I am a first-generation Mexican American, native to the Rio Grande Valley specifically from McAllen, Texas. I have worked as an elementary music educator in Brownsville, Texas for seven years. I make sure that my teaching sustains the Mexican heritage and culture so integral to this region, but I also include other world music content. The background of my students is highly varied, from those with little exposure to Mexican culture to other who cross from Matamoros daily. The contrasting language skills and culture groundings makes teaching a challenge.

Looking for musical recordings that might provide a foundation for studying music in my community over time, I found an entrance via John A. Lomax's 1939 Southern Collection, which includes Mexican songs for children recorded in Brownsville. While listening to songs in the collection, I wondered if others along the Lower Rio Grande Valley border would recognize these songs today. I called my mom and grandma, asking if they could recall the songs and associated games. I played the songs over the phone and could hear my grandma singing along in the background! I wondered to what extent others in the community might recognize them. With this question, a project was born: one that is close to my heart as a community member and educator.

Jose Ramiro Rivera, a graduate from Texas State University's Spanish department program, examined the Lomax's 1939 Southern Collection in his 2020 master's thesis. In reading his thesis, I noticed some gaps and an opportunity to build on his scholarship. The work of Jose Ramiro Rivera provides more insights into local culture. Rivera recently completed a dissertation that asserts that music served as a vehicle to preserve the Rio Grande Valley's

distinctive colloquial Spanish by comparing the lyrics of folk songs and/or *corridos* with songs as close to the present as possible (2020). Rivera also cites recordings from the 1939 Southern Collection as a primary source, but he leaves out local testimony concerning the folk songs and evidence of their continued existence. I investigate the longevity of these children's songs and games and their role in maintaining cultural unity through music at various localities, including school and the greater community.

The prolific American folklorist John A. Lomax (1867-1948) recorded a unique collection of Mexican ballads, *corridos*, and children's folk music for the Archive of American Folk Song (affiliated with the Library of Congress) on a fieldwork trip to Brownsville, Texas in 1939. As part of an archive project documenting and preserving folk songs endangered with extinction throughout the US in the 1930s and 40s, John and his family traveled the US with sound equipment and recorded a variety of traditional styles including the work songs, reels, and blues of the deep south. During the 1939 Recording Expedition, Lomax and his wife Ruby focused on songs in the southern states. While in the Texas, they recorded some 350 songs in Spanish including examples of *corridos*, lullabies, and ring dance songs, adding to previously recorded ballads and vaquero songs ("The 1939 Recording Expedition" n.d.).

During the Texas expedition in 1939, Ms. Manuela Longoria, a local school teacher, met with the folklorists at her Brownsville, Texas home near the intersection of East Monroe Street and East 13th Street (see Figure 1) and sang these songs in Spanish for them: "*Naranja dulce, límon partido*," "*Al corre y corre*," "*Si la reina de España muriera*," "*Zape, gatito*," and "*Los Patos"* (Lomax 1939).

Figure 1. Image of the Intersection between East 13th Street and East Monroe Street (Trevino 2021).

During the same excursion to Brownsville, the Lomaxes also recorded students from the Blalack School singing *"*Children of America," "*La Indita*," "*Maria Blanca*," "*Señora Santa Anna*," "*A la mar fueron mis ojos*," "*Los florones de la mano," "La pájara pinta," "Las águilas de San Miguel*," and "*A la ru"* (Lomax 1939).

My research focused on select songs from the Lomax 1939 Southern Collection and their legacy within Rio Grande Valley communities. These musical pieces are a vital part of Brownsville's Mexican musical heritage and they have appeared in many scholarly publications over the past eighty-two years. Yet, their place in today's community repertoire is not completely secure (Rivera 2020; Rodriguez and Torres 2016). Back in 1939, Lomax's informants undoubtedly chose to sing and record these particular Mexican folk songs because they knew them well and recognized their ongoing importance to local culture. I believe that the songs still have deep connections and meaning within the Rio Grande Valley community today. In this

work, I put the Lomax song collection in greater cultural, historical, and musical context by means of ethnographic interviews and historical research and argue that the songs can assist Rio Grande Valley individuals in both claiming and celebrating a Mexican musical legacy, even when they were not born in Mexico, and in maintaining a Spanish-speaking identity within an English-speaking majority nation. Border residents' individual and culturally inherited memories evoked by Mexican songs learned in childhood weave a shared Mexican identity that can help build pride in the heritage of Mexican American students today and contribute to the narrative of Spanish usage. I explore the sustainability of these children's songs and games from the late 1940s into the late 1970s from my participant's experiences and unpack their role in maintaining cultural solidarity in the music classroom and in the community at large.

Delving deeper into the circumstances and specifics of the recordings, Judge Hobart Davenport invited Mr. John A. Lomax to Brownsville to record folk songs of Mexican origins sung in the Rio Grande Valley for his Southern Collection. Based on the itinerary in Lomax's fieldnotes, Lomax and his wife finished field recordings in Otey, Texas, on April 23, 1939, and they arrived in Brownsville on April 24, 1939 (Lomax 1939). In his field notes, Lomax thanks some of the people that helped with the recordings including Manuela Longoria, Judge Harbert Davenport, and Jim K. Wells, but he omits José Suarez, the blind guitarist who sang *corridos* for him, and he does not include the names of the children from Blalack School (Lomax 1939, Image 3).

For Lomax's recording project aims, Blalack School, located in Blalack, Texas, was located conveniently close to Brownsville and Olmito, and he was advised that the students there grew up with songs and ring games that they learned in Spanish. The population in the Rio Grande Valley is and was predominately of Mexican origin and Spanish-speaking and/or

bilingual, retaining close ties to Mexican culture. Brownsville's public school system, developed in 1915, consisted of two city and six suburban schools at the time of Lomax's recording project. The schools included Brownsville High School, City Grammar School in the city center, and the Blalack School, the Las Matanzas School, the Media Luna School, the Nopalita School, the Linerro School, and the West Brownsville School outside the center ("What's so Special about the Year 1915?" n.d.). Local Historian Norman Rozeff mentions that in 1907 Peter Ebenezer Blalack built a school "four miles northwest of Brownsville, and five miles south of Olmito [where] twenty-four students were under the direction of one teacher (Rozeff 2021). In Lomax's fieldnotes, he partially identifies the students who participated in the Blalack School recordings: "Ramona Ramirez, Sophia H, Maria R. and unidentified girls" (Lomax 1939).

My research on the 1939 Southern Collection and its legacy raises perplexing questions about the songs and their relevance to local Rio Grande Valley communities today. Are they still in active use? If they are not, should they be reintroduced, perhaps as part of public school music curriculum? Which of these songs have survived over the years in songbooks, folklore, and children's literature, and why? In 1939, were these songs pervasive in Mexico as well as Hispanic Texas, or were they unique to the Texas communities?[1] How do the songs relate to early educational experiences and gameplay in Texas and Mexican communities? Do we still know the games associated with these Mexican folk songs for children? Have the games evolved

[1] Hispanic Texans here incorporate the notion that the early *Tejanos*, prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, included families from regions of the southwestern United States that existed outside of what we currently consider to be Mexico (Anzaldua 2012, 28). Numerous of these families already had their own distinctive cultural customs, which included music, food, and religion. Hispanic Texans may also include families who emigrated to the state following the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and who may have Spanish ancestry.

over time? Were the children from Blalack school typical Brownsville students, or was their background exceptional in any way?

These songs have histories on both sides of the Rio Grande Valley border. Do the songs play a role in the way that border residents form their distinctive Mexican and American identities, especially when they are pressured to conform as US citizens to speak English instead of Spanish in some contexts? Do we know if Lomax was fully aware of the region's distinctive historical context at the time the songs were recorded? In this work, I study the Lomax collection songs in old and new contexts and attempt to answer more of these important questions. I maintain that these folk songs and games can still play a role in the maintenance of Mexican American cultures and Spanish language retention today.

In essence, my research examines and analyzes the function of existing Mexican children's songs in border communities. I am interested in community memory and cultural meanings, I decided to do a small-scale ethnographic study concerning the Mexican folk songs and their associations. After obtaining IRB permission at UTRGV, I recruited a small sample of adults from the Mexican American border region of Brownsville, McAllen, and Edinburg to interview about the songs for this ethnographic study. Ethnomusicologist Andrea Emberly's insight into working with children in ethnomusicological research provides context for the challenges of working with children, giving me reasons to contemplate working with adults as participants in this research. She mentioned,

> Research with children and young people also presents a unique set of ethical concerns that must be addressed before research [begins]. What happens to the research data, where materials are stored, and how children can maintain access is central. In addition, research outcomes that support applied and wellbeing goals must consider how such

goals are met as those involved in the project also have vested interest in long-term commitment (Emberly 2014,11).

Thus, since children involved even after the project will have access to data, IRB red-tape with children participants made it difficult to consider how even adult participants in context to Emberly's thought could allude to participant-driven communication where my participants become coauthors with me in this research. This active role is something that Campbell alludes to since adults were once children pointing out that, "children …are not passive recipients of the music they value but active agents in choosing the music they will take the time to listen and respond to, to make, and to choose to preserve, reinvent or discard" (Campbell and Wiggins 2013, 1). The adults selected in this oral history portion of this thesis work were once children, and they were actively involved in their community taking charge as to which folk songs to remember or let go. The roles these adults have taken on have also allowed them to be active agents of cultural preservation. Concerning the Mexican folk songs, I am curious as to why my participants opted to "preserve, reinvent, or abandon" any of these folk songs, and how this connects to cultural solidarity in the context of how they linked themselves with others around them (Campbell and Wiggins 2013, 1).

The participants' testimony in ethnographic interviews coalesces experiences from both sides of the border and provides context as they define what the folk songs are and what they mean to the individuals in the present. Participant testimonies assisted me in locating the songs and games in old and new children's literature and educational resources. They also provided context about the participants included in the 1939 field notes by Lomax, connecting the experiences and recollections of Brownsville and Rio Grande Valley inhabitants to Mexican traditional music in the Southern Collection.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a musical and cultural sustainability-based theoretical framework to analyze Mexican folk songs recorded in John A. Lomax's Southern Collection field recordings made in Brownsville, Texas, from April 24 to April 28, 1939 (Titon 2009; Allen 2019; Cooley 2019; Hurley-Glowa 2019).[2] To contextualize the meanings of these Mexican folk songs within the Rio Grande Valley today, I conducted ethnographic interviews to explore whether residents sing these songs in the border region near Brownsville, Texas.[3] Individual and culturally inherited memories evoked by Mexican songs learned in childhood by border residents create a shared Mexican identity[4] that can inspire pride among multilingual Mexican Americans.[5] I study how others in the community preserve these Mexican children's folk songs and the enduring value of these songs to community members.

The songs and games from Lomax's recordings may be related to the 1930s Mexican government of Lázaro Cárdenas's use of *corridos* and other songs to foster communal solidarity in the embrace of socialism (Loyo 1990; Montes de Oca Navas 2007; Quintanilla 2002). Since 1939 was part of the Cardenas's period, there is a possibility that some of the students that were

[2] In the context of the discussed and transcribed music, I document the continuity of these folk songs through literature and other sources, with additional corroboration from participant testimonies.

[3] In this study, the geographic parameters of the Rio Grande Valley span from Rio Grande City to South Padre Island. The Rio Grande Valley and the northern portion of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas share a boundary. Brownsville falls in the southernmost area, often called the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

[4] This concept of Mexican identity, *mexicanidad*, is expressed in Alejandro Madrid's *Music in Mexico*, where he builds on Lila Down's persistent usage of numerous socio-cultural intersections defined as crossing no longer sacred political, cultural, and ethnic barriers (Madrid 2013, 120). Lila Down's utilizes these multiplicities to generate an expansion of what it means to be a Mexican, even in contexts outside of Mexico. Individuals whose ancestors may have been displaced continued to focus on their traditions, folklore, and folk songs, resulting in future generations of individuals outside Mexico continuing to foster and derive meaning of what it means to be Mexican as they individualize their local experiences.

[5] Mexican Americans are Americans with either complete or partial Mexican ancestry. This includes individuals who are currently residing outside of the United States as well.

part of the Blalack School were coming from either the urban or rural educational system imposed in that time. Could these songs have trickled their way over to the US? The literary and orthographical processes involved *corridos* as a means of exploring language. The government encouraged the authorship of textbooks with a point of view and content aligned with their political agenda to help build support for their cause, and many of the textbooks sent out by *El Nacional*[6] made their way to Mexico's rural communities (Montes de Aca Navas 2007; Álvarez García 2014).[7] One can speculate that aspects and artifacts of a Mexican socialist identity may have crossed the border and into the Rio Grande Valley through Mexican primary textbooks and oral tradition passed from parents to their child (Loyo 1990; Montes de Oca Navas 2007). These ideologies may have also become part of the music culture as these children sing and play the songs on the US side of the border by 1939. Interestingly, Mexican textbooks with songs selected by socialists may have unintentionally propagated songs and games in border communities' rural areas as well as these children or parents settled on the US side of the border (Loyo 1990).

Mexican folk music has traditionally been an integral component of Rio Grande Valley community activities such as birthday parties, weddings, and neighborhood play. In these gatherings and locales, youngsters and adults perpetuate these cultural performances, which are reliant on a balance of forces. Scholars of music and sustainability emphasize that the

[6] *El Nacional* is a newspaper that published education materials for distribution to both rural and urban schools across Mexico.

[7] I asked the Secretary of Education of Ciudad Victoria about copies of the textbooks used in Burgos, Tamaulipas in the late 30s or early 40s via e-mail. Sadly, no response came back from the department. A similar question during COVID was asked to the education department with UNAM. The reply from a Mexican professor said research requests were closed for the time being. Pandemic conditions limited research possibilities. Some of the textbooks in use have been archived and some are still accessible today for review. I recommend looking at: https://www.conaliteg.sep.gob.mx/index.html

continuation of musical repertoire and practices requires stable cultural centers; if external pressures are altered, musical traditions destabilize and vanish (Allen 2019; Cooley 2019; Titon 2009; Hurley-Glowa 2019). The Bullock Museum provides historical evidence demonstrating how business in one local community persecuted residents for speaking Spanish and for being Mexican, increasing awareness that other people or communities may have experienced like hardship. Image 3 of the carousel' in the Bullock Museum website shows a sign that reads "WE SERVE WHITE'S *only* NO SPANISH *or* MEXICANS" ("Life and Death on the Border 1910-1920" 2016). While it was unpleasant and unfair to be considered outsiders by mainstream Anglo-American culture, the exclusion of Mexican Americans and distain for Spanish may have, in fact, made Mexican American communities strong, stable, and self-reliant.

In sharp contrast, Mexican American culture and language today is more accepted and supported, with public school systems utilizing the use of Spanish in at least some contexts. This scholarship examines how contemporary individuals contextualize these old Spanish-language children's songs from Lomax's collection as an ongoing legacy of Brownsville's cultural heritage, asking what the songs and activities signify to those who keep them. As part of a study on the resiliency of Mexican culture in the Texas border region, I am interested in testimonial accounts of experiences related to the Spanish songs and games found in the John A. Lomax Southern Collection and the reasons why they resonate as essential to the participants' identities.[8]

[8] Even after the Treaty of Guadalupe, individuals living in the new U.S. territory already shared language and traditions with Mexican communities across the *frontera*. Menchaca mentions that "In 1848, The United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War. In the treaty, The U.S. government stipulated that Mexicans who lived in the newly annexed territory of the Southwest would be 'incorporated into the Union of the United States' with the 'enjoyment of all the rights of citizens' (Article IX)" (Menchaca 2008, 3). Realistically, Menchaca shows that the contrary occurred, "Tragically within a year of the treaty's ratification, the U.S. government broke the citizenship equality statements it had enacted with Mexico and began a process of racialization that categorized Mexicans as inferiors in all domains of life, including education" (Menchaca 2008, 3). Since the treaty supplied a displacement or diaspora from the country Mexico, readers can note that Mexican families have lived in the Southwest and continued to keep their traditions, folk songs, and other

The results may provide insight into what it means to be Mexican on both sides of the border.[9] I believe that this community scholarship will provide historical and cultural context for why we must preserve these songs for future generations.

If these children's folk songs from the 1939 Southern Collection are either forgotten or no longer performed, then we will lose a piece of our Mexican roots and the heritage of Brownsville. Exploring the phenomenological processes from the ethnographic interviews will provide insight into communal enculturation processes as to how these games were passed down or played at a specific time in either Mexico or Brownsville. By presenting these songs, games, and finds, we promote pride in our distinct Mexican heritage, strengthen our community's history, and promote togetherness among border inhabitants.

Literature Review

Within the developing field of folklore, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803) and Maud Karpeles (1885 – 1976) helped to contextualize and define folk songs from their content to the social dynamics of their origins (Wade 2004). Herder identified the folk as people who lived and worked on the land, sharing a common language, religion, and a set of customs including a body of music, dance, lore, and costumes (Auner 2013, 58). Folk music is derived from the commonalities of a geographically bound area, and the songs that originate here are continually

customs that make them partially still connected to the Mexico through their roots. Anzaldúa expanded on this in saying "With the capture of Santa Anna later in 1836, Texas became a republic. *Tejanos* lost their land and, overnight, became foreigners" (Anzaldúa 2012, 28).

[9] For an individual living outside of Mexico, *mexicanidad* will have a different meaning than for a person whose life remains in Mexico. This delivery and search for solidarity are motivated by a desire to find a place at the table of what it means to be Mexican. A parent who shares "*Pin Pon*" in the United States or a mother whose family is on a military installation in Okinawa, Japan, who sings the same song to her child can feel a connection to their Mexican roots without being physically in or near Mexico. Individuals who have immigrated from Mexico or whose ancestors have been politically redefined as *Tejanos* from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo have found meaning as they individuated their *mexicanidad* in that region, whereas Mexicans will focus on their interpretation of *mexicanidad* through the lens of nationalism.

performed in order for community members to remember them rather than having continual new performances within the area. Therefore, folk songs must be constrained by some social consensus that allows others in the community to certify their authenticity. Ethnomusicologist Peter Wade expands on this idea of a folk song by talking about how the music is passed down orally, bringing the past performance or lyrics into the present, and predicting how the text or melody will change over time (Wade 2004, 141). In this study, I seek to determine the extent to which of the Southern Collection's Mexican folk songs remain in local memory. This scholarship expands on definitions of folk songs and how to sustain cultural knowledge. I have already noticed that some of these folk songs are persistent across borders, and this transnational music culture seem to be governed by aspects of diversity, growth constraints, interconnectedness, and stewardship (Titon 2009, 123 –124).

In addition to analyzing ethnographic interviews with my participants, I discuss the educational history of the era in the United States with a focus on the Texas border region (Barragán Goetz 2020; Blanton 2007; Gonzalez 2008; Medrano 2010; Moreno 1999; Rivera 2020; San Miguel Jr. 1987) and Mexico. Scholars like Medrano provide historical testimonies like that of renowned folklorist Américo Paredes's experience living as a child in Brownsville at a time when the public school system was slowly developing.[10] Dr. Barragán Goetz chronicles the local fight in the state between ethnically and culturally centered *escuelitas* (schools) that provided a challenge to local public school systems and enrollment numbers needed to sustain these programs. Historian Guadalupe San Miguel Jr. describes cultural and musical centers that intersect with educational quorum on the issues of the time. These scholars intersect and braid

[10] Dr. Manuel E. Medrano's book, *Américo Paredes: In His Own Words, an Authorized Bibliography*, provides authority on the life and writings of Américo Paredes as he explores testimonial accounts through Paredes's writings and interviews with his friends and family members. Américo Paredes was a Brownsville resident, and his writings are still used across different educational institutions today.

the issues between Mexican, Mexican American, and hybridizations of local families as these different community members intersected in daily life and public dealings.

Methodology

Data for my study comes from ethnographic interviews, newsprint, folk songbook collections, and children's literature, including folk songs and games that preserve cultural materials related to Lomax's field recordings. I also use historical research from the Texan educational system in the 1940s and the Mexican primary school educational system during the Lázaro Cárdenas period. In my ethnographic study, I interviewed a total of eight people (see Chapter III). Some took the form of a family ethnographic interview with an elderly parent and their adult children, ranging in age from forty to eighty-five. All were Brownsville or greater Rio Grande Valley residents, and all went to primary school in the area or across the border.[11] This ethnographic study employs oral history techniques in which participants share their lived experiences as firsthand accounts providing depth into this inquiry allowing them to share without danger, and (re)defining what the children's folk songs means to them over time and in the present ("50 Questions for an Oral History Interview What to Ask the Relatives" n.d., Emberly 2014; Jessee 2011; Wade 2004). Their experiences will aid in triangulating data from historical accounts, literature I discover, and materials provided by Lomax's field notes.

The UTRGV IRB committee approved my oral history project in January 2022, allowing me to begin interviews in March 2022. A previous class project allowed me to practice interviewing for an oral history project that compared primary schooling in Burgos, Tamaulipas,

[11] All my participants currently live in the Rio Grande Valley region. Some participants' childhood experiences took place outside of the Rio Grande Valley and in different parts of Mexico; one participant's primary school experience was in Santiago, Nuevo León. Some of the participants interviewed live in McAllen or Edinburg, about sixty miles north of Brownsville today.

and Brownsville, Texas, in the 1940s. I adapted questions used by the Dallas Jewish Historical Society ("50 Questions for an Oral History Interview What to Ask the Relatives" n.d.) as a model. The following section provides more details about the interview procedures. One thing to consider in conducting this research was the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic brought in having future participants feel safe in the process. I prepared an online Zoom version of this interview ready for those who could not meet in person. I had planned for a large sample size requesting my colleagues (some twenty-five individuals) to participate. Due to factors such as pandemic fears, work disruptions, and new stresses some people chose not to participate in this study. This limited my participant yield. Perhaps there will be on opportunity to expand the study in the future.

Interview Content And Process

Stage One

The ethnographic interview process was in two stages. The first stage featured four questions after listening to the audio from the 1939 Southern Collection field recordings. First, I asked my participants to provide their full name as it appears on their release form. Then I informed my participants that I would be playing audio from the Library of Congress's website. The eight musical selections were played in the following order: "*Naranja Dulce, Límon Partido*," *"Señora Santa Anna," "La pájara pinta," "A la ru," "Los florones de la mano," "María Blanca," "Los patos,"* and *"Si la reina de España muriera."* I played each song one by one. When each track was complete, I posed the following questions to the participants:

1. Did you hear this song when you were a child?
2. Do you remember where you heard this song?

3. What do you remember about this?
4. Is there anything else you want to share about this song?

The importance of these questions stems from phenomenological experiences where the focus is on the reaction participants present from the stimulus of the musical melody presented to them and whether any experiences come to mind. The questions deepen the context by defining the participants' experiences with the folk songs, identifying the role participants take in the continuity of these songs, and assessing the value of these works from their communal experiences. I played the next song until all songs were complete.

Stage Two

The second stage of the interview process included these next questions:

1. What do you remember about your elementary school years?
2. What was music like when you were in elementary school? Who taught music?
3. Did you remember hearing songs in Spanish while in elementary school?
4. Which of the songs that you heard today did you use outside of the school? If none of these songs were in your community, which songs do you remember hearing outside of school?
5. What were some of the songs or games that you used while in recess or outside of the elementary school?
6. Did you teach any of these songs you heard today to others? Why or why not?
7. Do you think these Mexican children's folk songs still exist in our communities in the Rio Grande Valley today? Why or why not?
8. Some of these songs still exist today; how do you feel about that?

9. The 1939 Southern Collection participants, Maria Longoria and students at Blalack School, performed these songs in Spanish; how do you feel about that?
10. Did any of your family members teach you any of the songs we heard today? Which one(s)?

These questions aid in examining the socio-cultural and historical backdrop of what these individuals encountered and how these songs infiltrated the community or the elementary school system. Questions seven and eight of the second part provided the participants a chance to elaborate on their experiences from a personal perspective. Additionally, the participant's testimony on the historical context supplied background on any games associated with these songs.

Additional Summer 2022 Interviews

Participants had three weeks to go over the interview materials. Participants chose their interview dates. On March 6, March 14, and March 16, and the last one occurred on July 18, all occurred at my home. Coffee and cookies aided in creating a warm and inviting environment rather than making the participants feel like they were in some research facility. This positive rapport aided in eliciting responses between myself and those that I interviewed. I used Otter AI to help transcribe most of the English interviews and Sonix.AI to transcribe the Spanish interviews. One additional interview was done in person in July 18. The additional interviews were a surprise, as they were not part of my original plan. However, feedback and scholarship focused on progressing from the most basic to the most advanced level in the communal space where fieldwork took place (Goffman 1964). This means that beginning locally with my family and expanding from there helped and continues to help shape the community dynamic of how these folk songs exist today and spread throughout the community.

As Sociologist Erving Goffman recommends, I started gathering information beginning with my family and then branched out. The following individuals participated in this research: María Inés Treviño, Graciela Z. Rodríguez, María de los Ángeles Rodríguez, María Lourdes de León, María Magdalena Mata, Anna Judith Gomez Treviño, Carlos Arturo Gomez Treviño, and Delia Saldaña. I begin with my grandmother, Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga, and her two children, María de los Angeles Rodríguez and María Inés Treviño.

My grandma Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga was born into a large family in 1940 in Burgos, Tamaulipas, Mexico. After her husband died, she joined extended family in Reynosa, Mexico. Both my aunt and mom attended primary school in Reynosa in the early 70s. My mother María Inés Treviño married my father at the age of 15, and at nineteen years of age moved her family from Reynosa to McAllen, Texas. At age 18, my aunt Angeles also moved to the United States seeking employment. My grandma eventually left Reynosa to join my aunt in the United States.

Anna Judith Gomez Treviño, my mother-in-law, was born in 1941 in Brownsville and attended First Ward school in the mid 1940s. Carlos Arturo Gomez Treviño, Anna's son, was born in Brownsville and attended Martin Elementary between the middle and end of the 1970s. María Lourdes de León was born in 1938 and grew up in Santiago, Nuevo León. She began attending school but subsequently stopped because it was too far away from her home. María Magdalena Mata was born in Brownsville and went to Cromack Elementary in the mid to late 1970s. The last of my informants, Ms. Delia Saldaña, was born in Matamoros and attended the primary school Lázaro Cárdenas. Having attended schools in both Mexico and the US, she added valuable details about the public school system in Brownsville in comparison to those in Matamoros. Ms. Saldaña presents three perspectives: one from Matamoros, one as a parent

observing American society, and one as an active participant in her work as a teacher's aide for Brownsville ISD.

Thesis Structure

Chapter I introduces the thesis topic, research plan, survey of literature, and methodology. Chapter II focuses on historical facts that place John A. Lomax and the 1939 Southern Collection participants. It includes transcriptions and discussion of the melodies used in the ethnographic interviews in context. Chapter II also examines the persistence of any folk songs from the 1939 Southern Collection found in contemporary scholarship, children's books, archives, or any other medium available today, demonstrating the long-term preservation of these musical works and fluctuations to the musical work in contrast to what Lomax finds in 1939. Chapter III contains data analysis from the community ethnographic interviews. The concluding chapter includes a summary of discussion findings, autoethnographic experiences that I share, and suggestions concerning the proactive role that others in the community might play as stewards of Mexican children’s folk songs today.

CHAPTER II

JOHN AVERY LOMAX AND THE 1939 SOUTHERN COLLECTION

John Avery Lomax

The entire Lomax family was involved in groundbreaking projects that recorded and studied folk songs across the United States, and later, the entire world, that had received little interest or documentation. John Lomax, his first wife Bess Brown Lomax (1880-1931), and after her death, his second wife Ruby Terrill Lomax (1886-1961) and his children made it their work to record and preserve American folk songs before the repertoire disappeared. John Lomax and other folklorists of his generation viewed the influence of radio and record players and the whole-hearted acceptance of new popular music as a threat to older traditions and strove to record as many old singers and their songs as possible. Working with national institutions including the Archive for American Song and with agencies associated with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) during the 1930s depression, John Lomax helped to lay down the body of knowledge that has shaped US folk music studies ever since. John's son Alan Lomax continued and expanded his father's work, collecting and analyzing music from all over the world. In 1959, Alan developed a comparative approach to the study of music that attempted to link song styles and social organization in his

vast Cantometric Project that has had long-ranging impacts of the field of ethnomusicology. Patrick Savage writes:

> Alan Lomax's Cantometrics Project was arguably both the most ambitious and the most controversial undertaking in music and science that the world has known. Its flagship component, Lomax's "cantometric" analysis of approximately 1,800 songs from 148 worldwide populations using 36 classificatory features, sparked extensive debate. While Lomax responded to some criticisms, neither his final conclusions nor the evidence on which they were based were ever fully made clear. For decades, neither cantometrics nor Lomax's related projects involving dance, speech, popular music, digital humanities, pedagogy, and activism were widely adopted by other researchers, but there has been a resurgence of interest since Lomax's death in 2002 (Savage 2018).

Altogether, the Lomax family was at the center of US folksong studies for most of the twentieth century and played an invaluable role in shaping the field.

John Avery Lomax was born in Goodman, Mississippi on September 23, 1867, and "grew up in the Texan frontier," where farm life of the rural Bosque County exposed him to rural traditions and songs ("John Avery Lomax, 1867-1948," n.d.). His interest resided in local history and musical customs of the people in various communities. His desire to preserve musical works from isolated communities was largely based on the fear that Western culture would destabilize local customs and wipe out the folk song repertoire.

Lomax's initial interest in folk song studies was not taken seriously within academia. In 1895, Lomax showed a professor a series of cowboy songs that he had collected. This professor in UT Austin's English graduate program rejected Lomax's cowboy songs as a topic of study,

finding them uninteresting.[1] In *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter,* Lomax's writes of his frustration when his professor described his childhood cowboy song collection as "cheap and unworthy." He was so crushed by the rejection of his song collection that he "went behind the men's dormitory and burned it." Fueled by the setback, he soon found other programs of interest at Harvard University (Lomax 1947, 32).

As a graduate student at Harvard University in 1907, professors Barrettt Wendell and George Lyman Kittredge encouraged Lomax to pursue his interest in cowboy songs ("John Avery Lomax, 1867-1948," n.d.). His first collection, part of his dissertation at Harvard College, was titled *Cowboy Songs and Ballads* (Lomax and Waters 1938). Curiously, his fascination with cowboy songs even allowed him to collect the folk song "La Rancherita" in Brownsville when he asked Manuela Longoria, a teacher at Blalack School, to sing songs from her childhood relating to ranch life. In image sixty-two of his field notes he mentions two songs from the collection that were cowboy songs with Spanish lyrics, namely, "*Yo soy una rancherita*" and "*La Rancherita*" (Lomax 1939). The songs reflected a lifestyle that was disappearing and painted a picture showing how normative traditions of the people of the border differed between city and rural life. On April 30, 1939, Mr. Brewster, a local journalist for the Brownsville paper, hypothesized that:

> A hundred years from now folk songs and ballads from the Rio Grande Valley that even today are fading from the memories of its people whose history they so graphically record may spring anew to hold enthralled listeners in great opera halls. Melodies of the songs composed by a simple people near to nature may be taken by some great American

[1] This rejection is similar to what Gloria Anzaldua experienced when she pursued her Ph.D. in English at UT Austin. The rejection led to forging her own path in women's poetry, a realm where her work is highly regarded in many institutions today

> composer of tomorrow and woven into operas and sonatas that thrill a music-loving world of future generations ("Library of Congress Curator Records Folk Songs of Valley," Bill Brewster, April 30, 1939).

Brewster's assertion that these folk songs are likely to be forgotten over time if they are not recorded supports the idea that preservation was essential for future generations. Brewster and Lomax recognized the folksongs' unique role in this area in connecting people to the land. *Corridos* in particular preserved historical events through song, exposing a people's narrative where resilience, grit, and tragedy help to shape lives in the Rio Grande Valley borderland.

On April 25, 1939, Mr. Lomax corresponded with Mr. Harold Spivacke, chief of Music Division at the Library of Congress, about his interest in recording songs in Brownsville. Lomax wrote:

> Here in Brownsville, I think I could stay profitably for the Music Division throughout a month and turn up something worthwhile every day. Before I leave this section, I will have, I think, fair samples of the stuff that can be got here, including cowboy songs—a type that you have asked me more than once to get on the library records" (Dozier Pauline, letter from John A. Lomax to Mr. Harold Spivacke, April 25, 1939).

Lomax shared his candor in the quality and quantity of material available in the Rio Grande Valley that sometimes intersected with his interest in cowboy songs. Aditya Jain chronicled the journey through media, and Lomax's fieldnotes confirms that he came from Otey, Texas before he arrived in Brownsville Texas on April 24, 1939 (Jain, n.d).

In image 61 of the field notes in the Library of Congress, Lomax notes that Judge Hobart Davenport introduced him to Manuela Longoria (Lomax 1939). Mr. Davenport dabbled in local

history of the Rio Grande Valley and wrote voluminously. His journal articles often appeared in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. Davenport's writing is accessible through the Brownsville public library, where his articles provide insight on political and business leaders and events that took place in both sides of the border. In image fifty-one of his fieldnotes, he also mentioned that Judge Davenport was a member of the Texas State Historical Society (Lomax 1939).

In image eighty-five of Lomax's field notes, he shared that Judge Davenport provided Lomax with points of contact at Brownsville, where he set up a meeting for Lomax with Mrs. Henry Krausse. Lomax does not document the first name of Mr. Henry Krausse's wife and refers to her as Ms. Henry Krause. Mr. Henry Krausse at the time was the Vice-Consul of the United States in Matamoros. That meant that Mr. Krausse lived in Matamoros, and interacted with community members from Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Interestingly, Mrs. Krausse was the daughter of Officer Crixell, "who was shot down in 1912 feud between the Texas Rangers and the Brownsville Officials" which shaped her world view (Lomax 1939). One of the children that sang for Lomax was Dolores Reyes, Mrs. Krausse's maid. Mr. Lomax wrote that the child sang the song "*El Remolino*" and "The Disappointed Lover" (Lomax 1939). While my investigation does not specifically focus on these contributions to the 1939 Southern Collection, future scholars might research these individuals and the Crixell family history. Altogether, Judge Davenport's help was crucial in providing Lomax with as many recording opportunities as possible in the five days he was in and around Brownsville.

John A. Lomax and his second wife Ruby Terrill Lomax finished up and left Brownsville on April 29, 1939. He arrived at Falfurrias on April 29 and stayed on through the 30th conducting more recordings. They then left for Kingsville, Texas on May 1, 1939 (Jain, n.d.).

Southern Collection Recordings

John and Ruby Lomax visited a number of southern states recording songs for the 1939 Southern Collection, spending some seven weeks in Texas alone, however this thesis focuses on their work around Brownsville, Texas. The first participant Lomax recorded was Ms. Manuela Longoria of Brownsville, Texas and then recorded the children of Blalack School.

Manuela Longoria (1887–1972) is included in the 1910 United States Federal Census as "Manuella Longorio." Records show that she lived in housing in the alley behind East Madison Street in Brownsville, Texas with her parents, three siblings, and her twelve-year-old nephew (Ancestry 2006). Her place of employment listed on the 1910 census was "Public School," but it doesn't say exactly where she was employed or what she taught in the public school (Ancestry 2006). Could Ms. Longoria be the new Blalack School's original teacher?

Mr. Bill Brewster wrote in the Brownsville Herald on April 30, 1939, that Ms. Longoria taught at Blalack School near Brownsville on the Los Fresnos's Highway (Rodriguez and Torres 2016, 11). The 1936 map by the United States Geological Survey of East Brownsville showed Blalack School on Paredes Line Road in the Resaca De La Palma Battlefield territory, where the *resacas* (oxbow lakes) meander across the land. Comparing the location to today's map would place the school at an approximate location near the intersection of Coffee Port Road and Paredes Line Road in Brownsville where this location in 1939 would have been Blalack, Texas.

Ms. Manuela Longoria was consistently referenced as the school principal, but in reality, she was likely everything for those students—the sole teacher. A newspaper clipping from November 16, 1951, in *The Brownsville Herald* mentions that,

> Blalack School had a 100 percent attendance of parents at its National Education Week 'open house' yesterday, Miss Manuela Longoria, principal, reported. All the fathers and mothers of the 41 students of the one-room school on Paredes Line Rd. went to the school yesterday to see displays of student work. The school houses the first through sixth grades, and Miss Longoria is the only teacher ("Blalack School Has Perfect Adult Attendance" The Brownsville Herald, November 16, 1951).

Concerning the Blalack School children, Lomax noted that they all had Mexican heritage and that while English was spoken in school, most spoke Spanish with their family at home. This is typical for Brownsville even today, but it is not clear if the Blalack School was selected for demographic reasons or any other reasons in particular, image sixty-one and sixty-three of his field notes, he mentioned:

> Three records were filled at Blalack School, a school for children of Mexican parentage, three miles of Brownsville, Texas. Miss Manuela Longoria is principal. The children speak only English in school, but Miss Longoria invited the children to sing game songs, lullabies and other children's songs in Spanish. She herself added to her list of songs recorded at her home. The father [Atanacio Hernandez] of two of her pupils came from his farm work to sing a 'bad man' ballad" (Lomax 1939).

No demographic data was collected on the children by John A. Lomax nor does Lomax provide additional context to the lives of the children in his field notes. Rather only spoke of the about the location in describing the room he was recording in, and the fact that the children could not write in Spanish (Lomax 1939).

Children's Folk Songs Overview

The continuity of musical works generates background value for both the listener and the person spreads the piece. Why would such works exist in children's literature if the authors or compilers presenting them to an audience today did not find them significant? As a teacher, I would encourage my students to determine the author's purpose; let us consider that there must be some significant purpose for these folk songs to continue in other sources like children's literature. The 1939 Southern Collection's performers use the work's value to keep it alive while asking the audience to analyze their reasons for listening to a song over and over. Community members, educators, grandparents, fathers, and mothers place these musical folk tunes as earworms for new listeners, obliquely distributing into other communities and actively participating in Titon's connection and stewardship (Titon 2009, 123–124).

Numerous websites, databases, and children's books yielded results that matched the names of songs in the 1939 Southern Collection. These sources include Ebinger's book, *Niñez*, Chris Strachwitz's Frontera Collection, Orozco's *De Colores: and other Latin-American children's folk songs*, as well as Beth Thompson's blog compendium of children's folk songs.

Children's Folk Song Musical Analysis

The Lomaxes recorded the Blalack children singing "Children of America," "*La Indita*," "*María Blanca*," "*Señora Santa Anna*," "*A la mar fueron mis ojos*," "*Los florones de la mano*," "*La pájara pinta*", "*Las águilas de San Miguel*," and "*A la ru,*" and Ms. Longoria singing in "*Naranja dulce, Límon partido*," "*Al corre y corre*," "*Si la reina de España muriera*," "*Zape, gatito*," and "*Los Patos*." Documenting sources where these folk songs exist today attests to the continuity and communal testimony about them provides deeper context concerning their

sustainability. In this section, I provide musical transcriptions of selected songs recorded by Lomax.

"*Naranja Dulce, Límon Partido*"

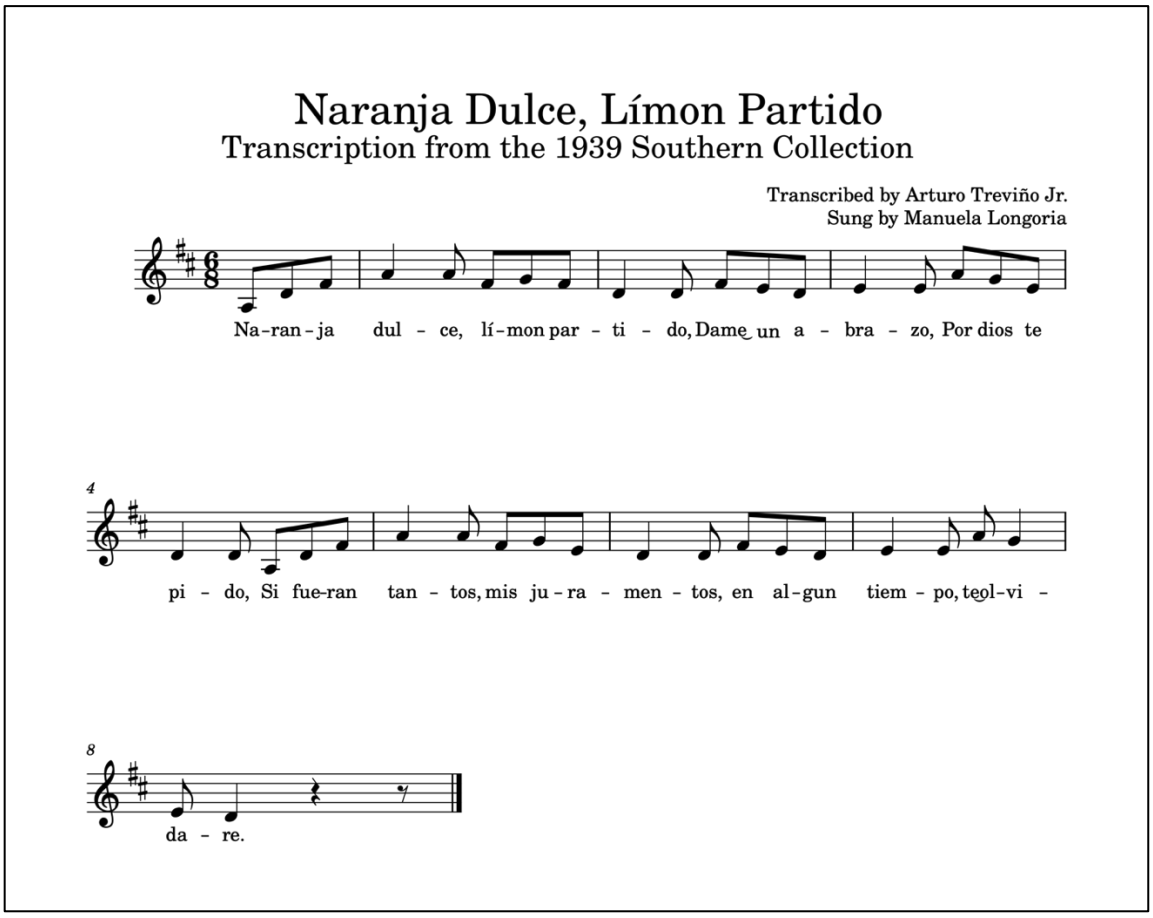

Figure 2. Music Transcription of "*Naranja Dulce, Límon Partido"* (Trevino 2022)

In Manuela Longoria's performance of this song, her voice is clear, and she hits every pitch with ease and accuracy (Longoria 1939, 00:00-00:25). The singing range is limited to an octave. The melody begins on Sol (A3), and then primarily outlines pitches based on the I and V chord in D major. Longoria sang this in two phrases, where the second phrase starts on the word "*si*" on measure four. In Orozcos's children's literature book, *De colores: and other Latin-American folk songs for children,* this song is included as one of the folk songs (Orozco 1999, 49). Other early

recordings of "*Naranja Dulce*" exist in the Library of Congress collections: one was recorded on May 01, 1939, in Kingsville, Texas with Ms. Acevedo[2] and then another was recorded with the Moye family.[3] In the Strachwitz Collection performers Antonio Flores and Manuel Valdez presented the entire folk song "*Naranja Dulce*." In the chorus at (00:44), there is a slight variation in the ending, "*te olvidaras* (you shall forget)" (Flores and Valdéz 1938). In this version, the song has been changed from a children's song to an adult courting song.

Several of my participants recalled details about the circle game associated with the song and recalled when and where they played the game as children. Locations varied and included at school, in their neighborhoods, in their homes, and with relatives at other locations. It is notable that all of my participants were able to recall the folk song "*Naranja Dulce*." What really caught my attention in this song was how Ms. Saldaña reacted when she was able to recall how her aunt was involved in sharing the song with her when she would take care of her and her siblings. The song brought back such strong emotions that I had to provide facial tissue for her to wipe her tears away and give her some time to compose herself after listening. These songs clearly evoked deep personal memories.

One last source that contains "Naranja Dulce" is Dr. Ruth De Cesare's *Songs of Hispanic Americans* (Cesare 1991, 22), where she notices possible chordal structures in the song that alternate between C (I) and G7 (V). The meter signature for the song is notated in ¾ starting on an anacrusis with the word "*naranja*" on three eighth notes. Dr. Cesare notes that the song has origins

[2] Performed by Olga Acevedo (Acevedo 1939, 1:08). See https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000142/.

[3] This was "performed by Carmen Taffinder with Moye children (Margaret Moye, Willie Moye, Jimmie Moye) (vocals with clapping) at home of Rev. & Mrs. Wm. A. Moye, Kingsville, Texas, on May 1, 1939" (Moye et al. 1939, 00:54) see https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000632/.

in the American Southwest and Puerto Rico. Interestingly, the melodic lines show variations in the two versions: Manuela Longoria begins by singing low so, do, mi. In contrast, Dr. Cesare notates "*naranja*" as do-do-mi and ends with "*olvidar* (to forget)." Ms. Longoria ended the song differently.

"*Señora Santa Anna*"

The folk song, "*Señora Santa Anna*" was transcribed by Gustavo Duran when he worked with the Library of Congress (Duran 1942, 9). He notated the first verse and showed how the second line in the first verse is repeated. This pattern continues for the other two verses. Santa Ana the Virgin Mary's mother, Jesus' grandmother, and the patron saint of married women. The text directs children towards religious faith. It is not clear whether the song was taught in a church setting. Concerning the melody, Gustavo Duran makes an interesting observation about the song "*Señora Santa Anna:*" "the modulation to the key of the subdominant in the fifth measure of the Texas version shows clearly the influence of the melodic style of urban music of the nineteenth century" (Duran 1942, 9). He notated the song in C major. Looking back to measures one through four, I can see melodic outlines of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant with some additional chromatic features.

Comparing Duran's transcription to that of Dr. Cesare's, Duran's version has a more lilting feel because of the dotted eighth note tied to a sixteenth note rhythms (Cesare 1991, 13). In Dr. Cesare's version, C and G7 chords are added as harmonizations throughout the song. Melodically, the versions are not exactly the same in melody or range. Dr. Cesare notates more of this song as a nursery rhyme. In fact, Orff-Schulwerk music specialist Virginia Nylander Ebinger expands a bit on this.

Ebinger explained that early lullabies like "*Señora Santa Ana*" put babies to sleep despite the inclusion of scary lyrics referencing the boogeyman coming out at night (Ebinger 1993, 19). El "*cuco*" or "*el cu cuy*" refers to the boogeyman. Ebinger notes:

> Duérmete mi niño, que viene el coco, (Sleep my child, here comes the boogeyman)
>
> Se llevan los niños, que duermen poco. (He takes children away, those that sleep little)
>
> (Ebinger 1993, 19)

Two of the transcriptions provided in Ebinger's book notate variations alluding to regional differences in Spain (one is from Fuenalabrada and the other is from San Martin de Travejo). She also documents the lullaby's transatlantic journey, showing textual evidence from versions in Chile and Sante Fe, New Mexico. Rather strangely, this "*cuco*" word and its link to the boogeyman survived in the children's folk song "*A la ru.*" Many of my participants mentioned the boogeyman in recalling the lyrics to that folk song. Interestingly, Ms. Anna Judith Gomez Treviño, Mr. Carlos Arturo Gomez Treviño, and Mrs. María Magdalena Mata could not recall the song "*Señora Santa Anna,"* but participants who attended primary school years in Mexico could recall it. María Inés Treviño mentioned, "Es una canción de cuna y recuerdo que mamá nos cantaba cuando estábamos pequeñas y recuerdo también cantándoselas a mis hijos (It's a lullaby and I remember mom singing this to us when we were small and I recall singing them to my children)." My grandma and aunt Angeles also clarified that they shared this lullaby with their children showcasing its continuity and their role in sustaining the folk song.

"*La Pájara Pinta*"

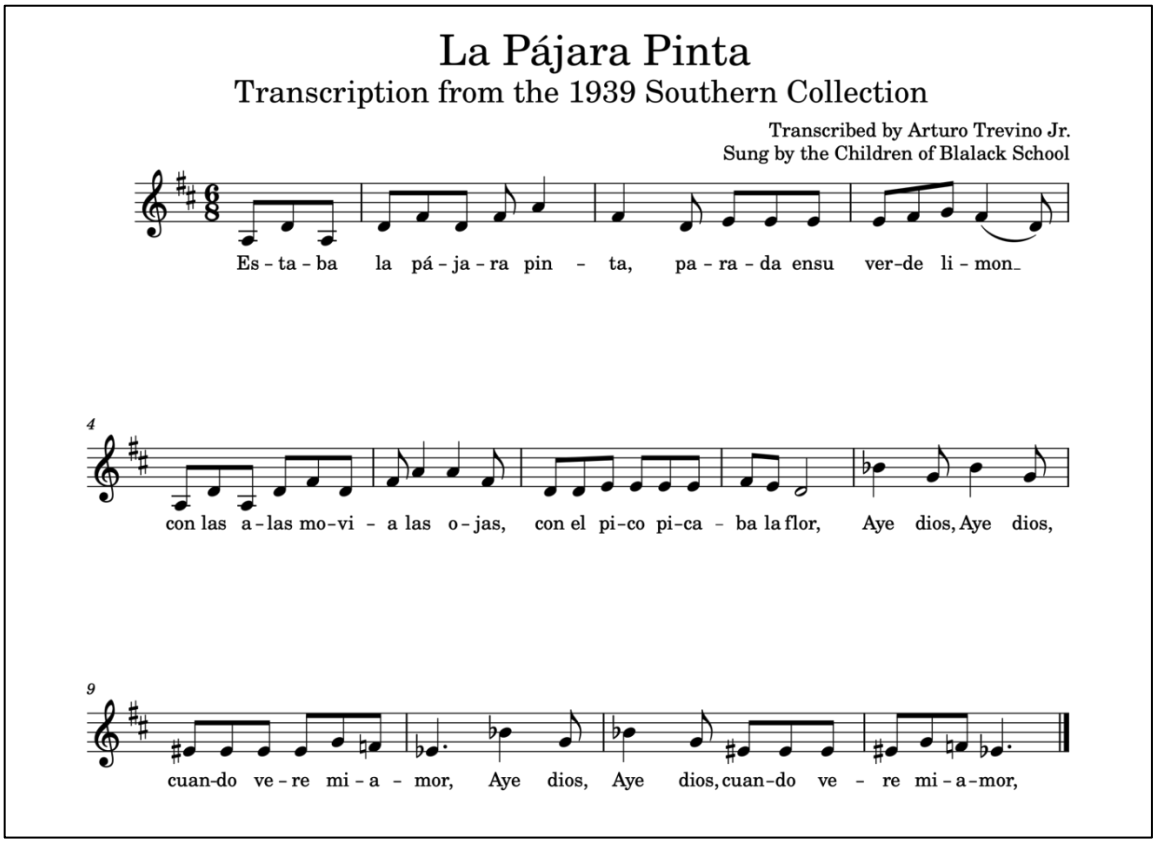

Figure 3. Music Transcription of "*La Pájara Pinta"* (Trevino 2022)

"*La Pájara Pinta*" is another song recording by Lomax in Brownsville, TX during the Southern Collection tour. In the Strachwitz Frontera Collection, there are two early tracks with the title "*La Pájara Pinta*." The first is a polka played on the accordion by the well-known conjunto musician Narciso Martínez and accompanied by guitarist Lorenzo Caballero (Martínez and Caballero, n.d.).[4] This track was purely instrumental, and the florid accordion runs could represent a bird flying around in the sky, as suggested by the title. The second recording was also done by conjunto accordion player Narciso Martínez. The "*La Pájara Pinta*" melody begins with the same running notes as in the previous polka recording (Martinez and Almeida 1937).[5] The

[4] See https://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/la-pajara-pinta-3.

[5] See https://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/la-p%C3%A1jara-pinta.

guitarist also accompanies the accordionist in a similar fashion. In the Lomax recordings, the children percussively mirror this accordion sound in their vocal melody. The chromatic shifts here and there are also reminiscent of the sounds in the accordion-style playing.

All but two of my participants were able to recall the song, "*La Pájara Pinta.*" Both Ms. De León and Ms. Rodríguez Zuñiga were able to sing part of the song back to me in the way they remembered it. I can recall from the interview that Ms. De León listened to the children perform through her headphones, she chanted along with the recording with fervor. My grandma, prior to starting the recording from the Library of Congress, began reciting the words to the song from what she could recollect. She remembered her father singing this song to her, which was reminiscent of what Ms. Longoria expressed to Lomax when she recalled her father singing as he is riding on horseback towards her. María Inés Treviño, María de los Ángeles Rodríguez, María Magdalena Mata, and Delia Saldaña all remembered this song from their childhoods, linking it to various contexts including elementary school and the neighborhood with friends, but firmly in Mexico rather than the United States.

"*A La Ru*"

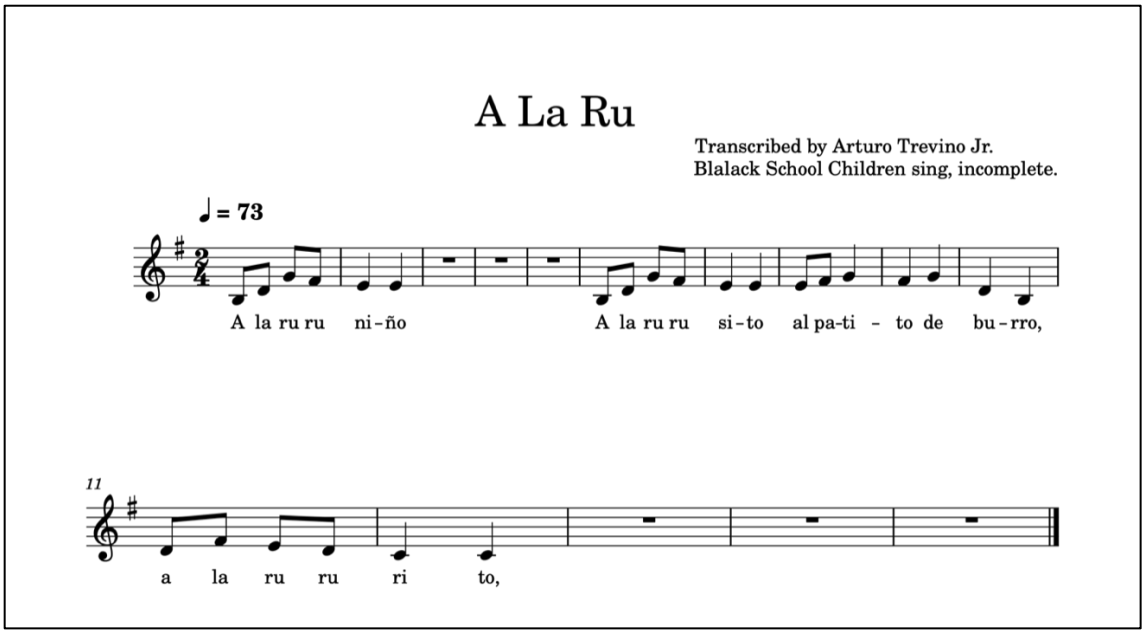

Figure 4. Music Transcription of "*A La Ru"* (Trevino 2022)

The Lomax recording of "*A La Ru*" was not complete or very well recorded. The children stopped singing when they could no longer recall the lyrics or the remaining song portion. There is no explanation of the recording circumstances for this particular song. It is possible that the children were exhausted from working on these recordings. This recording contains a version of the lyrics that has changed over time. I learned a different version of the folk song.

A la ru ru niño, duérmaseme ya, (Little child go to sleep)

porque viene el cuco, y se lo comerá. (Because here comes the boogey man and it will eat you.)

Looking at the text that the children sang in the recording, "-*sito*" and "-*rito*" may have been used in a similar rhyme scheme to help the song be more recognizable to the performer and even the listener. Even the phrase, "*Al patito de burro*" references to moving at a donkey's pace,

"*patito*" is a play term for "*pasito*" which translates to pace. The wording is very playful, and everyone involved in this project associates it with putting a child to sleep

All my participants were able to recall the song, *"A La Ru."* During interviews, Ms. Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga sang this children's folk song with the word "*Cuco.*" This was the children's name for the boogeyman. It created fear in the children, threatening them with an appearance of the boogeyman if they did not fall right to sleep. The persistence of the song with many variants calls to mind Titon's perspective on the sustainability of folksongs regarding song variation— while songs that are relevant to the culture will persist, they may be subject to variation over time (Titon 2009, 123–124). Ebinger also commented on the word "*Cuco*" in the children's folk song "*Señora Santa Ana,*" noting that while the threat of the boogeyman scared the kids to sleep, this was countered by *Santa Ana* (Saint Ann), who protected the child from harm (Ebinger 1993, 20). The *"A La Ru"* melody ascends with skips and jumps, then descends in a major second, stepwise motion. This song seems to be in E Dorian mode. This is supported by the fact that the notes sung included: e, f#, g, b, d. There are no C-sharps in this melody, but it suggests E dorian mode.

This "*A La Ru*" children's folk song seemed to be widely available in various other regions outside of the Rio Grande Valley border, with additional recordings of it available in the Library of Congress. One was recorded by Mr. Juan Bautista Rael on August 04, 1940[6], and another version was recorded by John A. Lomax on May 02, 1939, with the name change to "*A*

[6] Adolfo Chávez performed this song for Mr. Rael. Interestingly this work uses more phrases than the simpler children's folk song. This work was recorded in Antonito, Colorado (Rael and Chavez 1940). See https://www.loc.gov/item/raelbib000086/.

la ru ru ta ta".[7] Interestingly, in my interviews Ms. Anna Gomez recalled this song as "*A la ru ru rata*."

In (1:08) of "*A La Ru Ru Niño*" recorded by Los Tres Reyes, you can hear one phrase of the song, but the song lyrics circle more on love woes, infidelity, and spousal mistrust (Los Tres Reyes, n.d.).[8] This song becomes less of a lullaby and speaks more about the strains of a relationship. In context to this research, the very notion that Los Tres Reyes included this folk song text and melody in their recordings shows its value as a cultural artifact worthy of being sustained.

"*Los Florones De La Mano*"

"*Los Florones de La Mano*" from the Lomax collection is a relatively well-documented circle game song. This song was recognized by all participants. To play the game, the students begin in a circle formation. The game begins with one person in the center of the circle. The children forming the circle pass a small object from hand to hand as they sing. Each child can decide whether or not to pass the object on to his/her neighbor. Part of the game's goal is deception—hiding the location of the object, which the person in the center of the circle to guess. Ebinger describes this by saying, "the first player…places a small ring, stone, other token in one hand or the other…the guesser must decide which hand holds it" (Ebinger 1993, 47). She also documents other variations existing in Texas, New Mexico, and even in Spain, each with different meter signatures. As an investigator, my role as a steward also occurs when I have in fact used this folk song with my students. One variation I recall includes the text as, "*El florón*

[7] For additional listening I recommend visiting the site to hear the variation. Ms. Isabella Salazar provides a clear recording of this for Lomax (Lomax 1939). See https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000036/

[8] See https://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/la-ru-ru-ni%C3%B1o-0.

está en la mano, en la mano está el florón, adivinen quien lo tienen o se quedan de plantón." This shows that the words I recall compared to those in the Lomax recording demonstrates variation and change over time.

All my participants recalled this folk song. Ms. Anna Judith Gomez Treviño recounted hearing this song being hummed by her grandma. Mr. Carlos Arturo Gomez Treviño recounted listening to this in his Catholic doctrine classes at St. Mary's Church. María Magdalena Mata also remembers this when she was part of the *Teresitas,* a girl's faith program run by the nuns in the abbess, while Ms. Delia Saldaña remembered playing the game with her cousins. One interesting phenomenon in this interview process was how this one song spurred María Inés Treviño to recall another song called "Lobo Lobito," which had a similar melody similar to "We are dancing in the forest." While tangential in the interview, my grandma recalled how the wolf anticipated and stalled before chasing after the other children. Her words painted a lively, vivid picture. This testimony provides context on the continuity and sustainability of this folk song, while providing a window into another folk song as well.

"*Maria Blanca*"

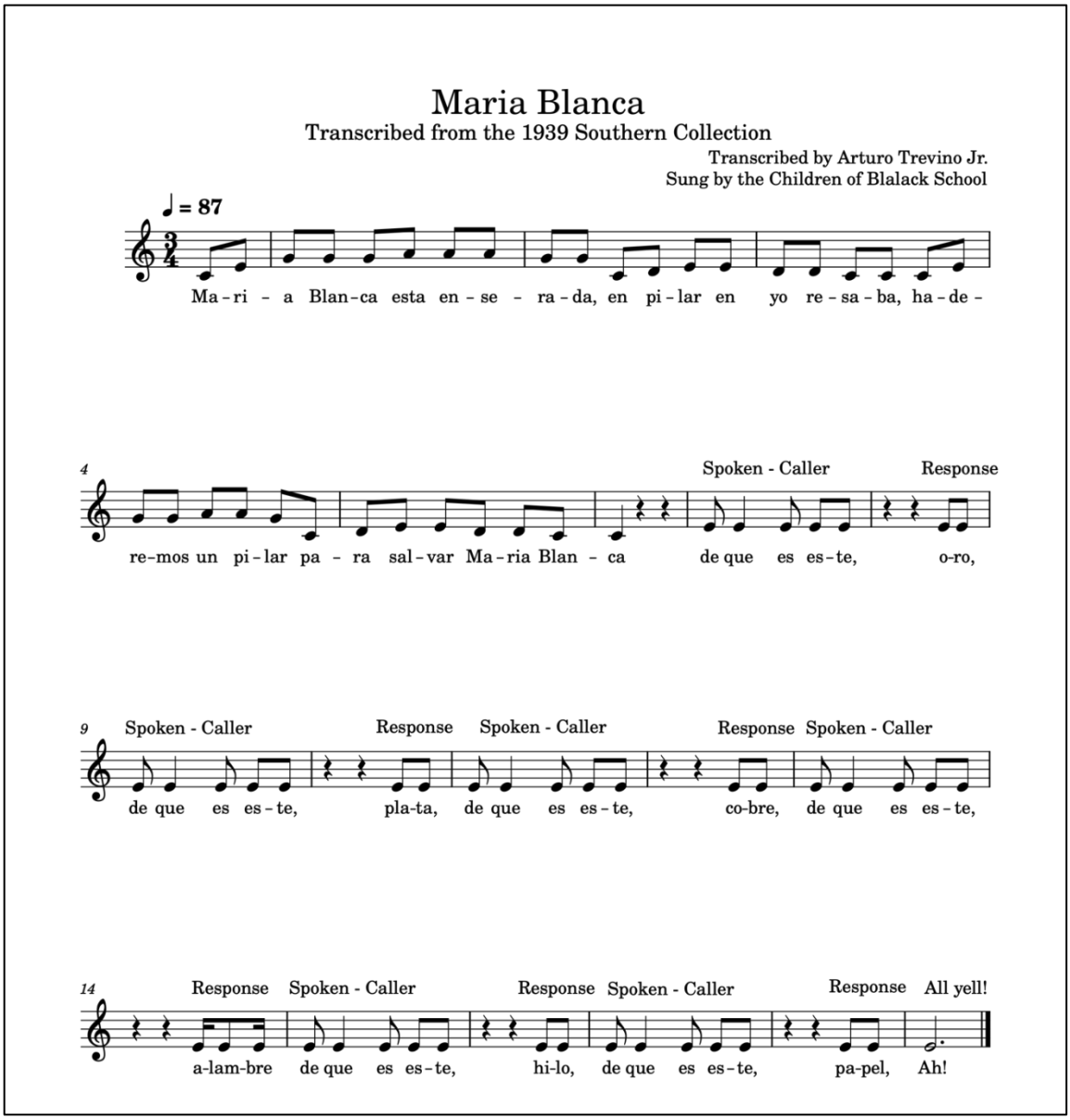

Figure 5. Music Transcription of *"Maria Blanca"* (Trevino 2022)

As part of the Brownsville recording sessions, the students of Blalack School performed another game song, "*Maria Blanca.*" From measure one to measure six, the students sing "*Maria Blanca*" in unison. Then, one student leads the rest of the group by asking, "*De qué es este*?" The question (What is this made of?) is then answered by another student. This occurs six times until the very end, when everyone shouts. All my participants laughed when they heard the children

scream at the end of this song, envisioning the delight they must have felt while singing it. Note that although the call and response sounds like it was sung on an E4, this is my method of noting what the youngsters from the Lomax recording said.

What is especially interesting is that this children's folk song continues to be performed, and Beth Thomson's blog, Beth's Notes, lists this under the name *"Doña Blanca"* is one source that continues to spread it to other areas (Thompson 2019). Beth Thompson supplies various folk songs for other educators to utilize for educational needs. In Thomson's rendition, the call-and-response gestures performed by the vocalists remains consistent with the Lomax recording. That said, Blalack pupils request copper and string, while in the blog version they want wood and glass. We do not know exactly when and where Thomson's song was recorded based on the blog's data, but the differentiation of these materials in the folk song itself is interesting enough for pupils to recall objects of value such as gold, silver, and bronze. In the Lomax version, the children used the word *"resaba"* (I prayed).

When I played "Maria Blanca" for my participants, they reacted in various ways. Mrs. Treviño was able to recall how the game was played, stating in detail the grip required for the "*pilar*" (pillar) created by the participants conjoined hands had to be strong enough to withstand the opposing player's chops. The locations of these songs moved from catechism classes, neighborhood pals, and play in the ranch, my interviewees all provided different contexts for the game. In the Strachwitz Frontera Collection, one recording labeled "*Maria Blanca*" is performed by the group *Conjunto Los Fronterizos* (*Conjunto Los Fronterizos*, n.d.).[9] This version of the song speaks more about love rather than trying to break Maria Blanca free like the children's

[9] See https://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/maria-blanca-0.

folk song. The variation and adult-theme context supplied by the musical group *Conjunto Los Fronterizos* showcases the continuity of this folk song and may have value to the group to add the text of "Maria Blanca" into their own musical creation.

"*Los Patos*"

In the Lomax recording, you can note that there are some lilts in Longoria's voice, and that the range of this song is wide as she sings in her chest voice, (00:29). She moves up to her head voice later in the song (00:47). The second time that she repeats the song, Ms. Longoria is able to sing the melodic run more smoothly by using the lyrics, rather than singing the pitches on a neutral "da" sound.

Ms. Manuela Longoria stated that this song was about courting another person (Lomax 1939). However, during my fieldwork, most of my participants referenced someone called *"Cri-Cri."* Cri-Cri was a singing cricket character that was invented by the Mexican composer and performer Francisco Gabilondo Soler (1907-1990). In the persona of Cri-Cri-: *El Grillito Cantor*, Soler sang and recorded numerous albums of children's songs that were widely popular in Mexico and beyond (Orozco 1997).[10] In 1934, Mr. Soler began playing his musical works on Mexican radio stations. His radio shows featuring the singing cricket performing new and traditional children's songs in Spanish were widely circulated and much loved (Latino USA 2011). You can hear more on *Cri Cri* on the link provided below.[11]

[10] For further information visit this other website: http://www.cri-cri.net/biografia.html.

[11] For further information on *Cri Cri,* listen to this podcast segment here: https://www.latinousa.org/2011/05/27/cri-cri/ (Latino USA 2011).

Carlos Arturo Gomez Trevino specifically linked Cri-Cri to the song "*Los Patos*" in his interview, "I didn't hear this song as a child. I heard this song as an adult. My father introduced it to us. He had an album called Cri-Cri. And he sung a lot of these children's songs. So, my dad listened to these." This context provided a lens into a personal experience residing with the continuity and sustainability of these children's folk songs on that is even passed from parent to child, even when the child is already an adult. This was a precious memory for Carlos.

Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga recalled the song and mentioned, "*Pues yo sé de esa canción que dice 'patito, patito color de café. Me gusta la leche, me gusta el café', pero no me recuerdo dónde lo leí, pero sí lo escuché y me gustaba mucho cantarla* (Well, I remember the song that goes like 'duck, duck, brown duck. I like milk, I like coffee,' but I do not remember where I heard this.). María de los Ángeles Rodríguez and Delia Saldaña both remembered this song and they shared, "*Recuerdo oírla en algunas películas mexicanas de Pedro Infante* (I remember hearing them in the Mexican movies with Pedro Infante). This suggests that some of Lomax folksongs survived in new media after the 1930s.

"*Si La Reina De España Muriera*"

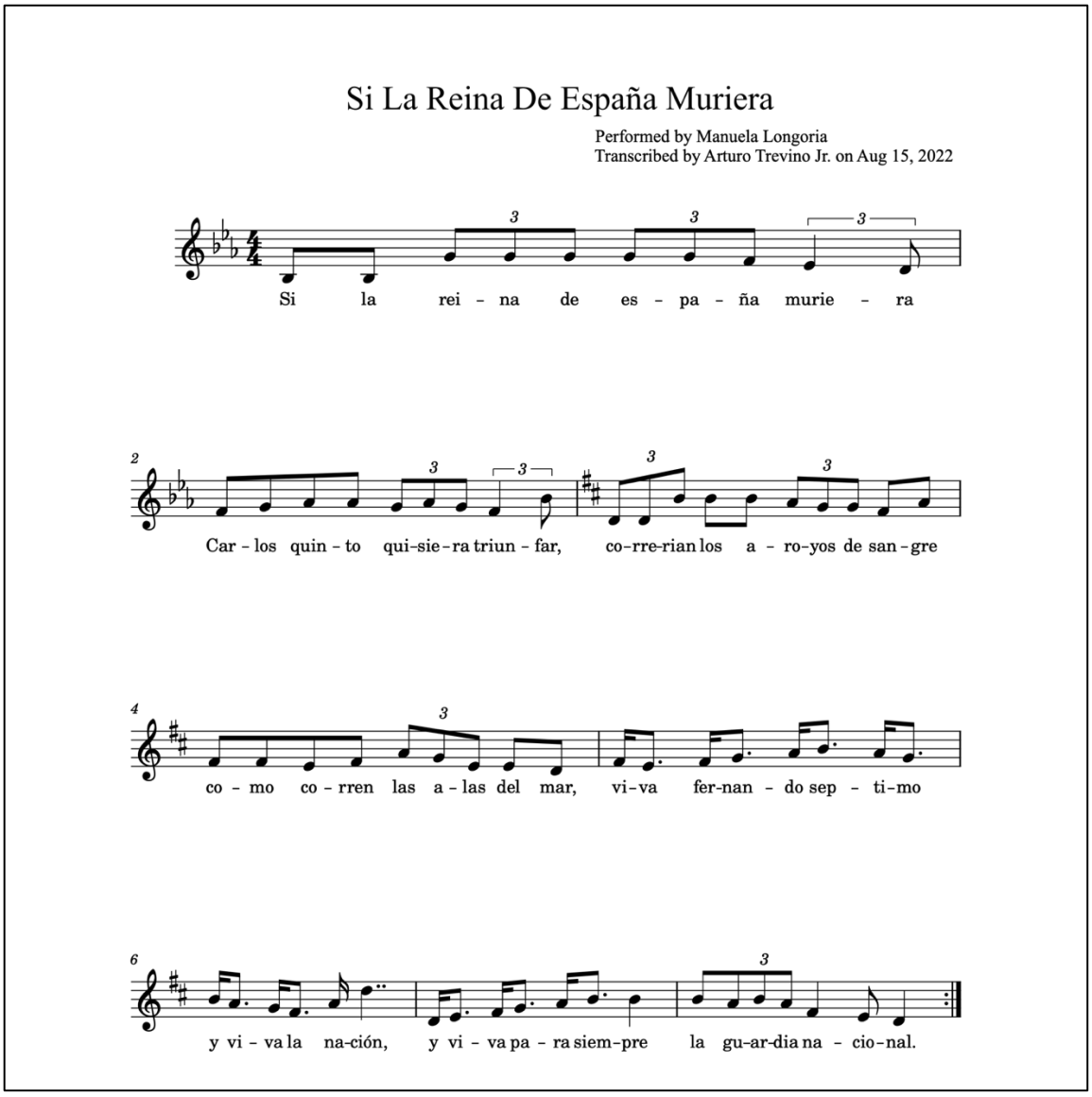

Figure 6. Music Transcription of "*Si La Reina De España Muriera"* (Trevino 2022)

In the version of "*Si La Reina De España Muriera"* sung by Manuela Longoria in the Lomax recordings (Longoria 1939, 00:39)[12] she started singing this folk song in E-flat major but ended a half a step lower in D major. Measures five through seven provide a lilting like feel as the sixteenth note moves to the dotted eighth note in stepwise motion, either ascending to the

[12] See https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000609/

next pitch or descending to the next pitch. It's interesting how this work utilizes triplets rhythmically, which is unusual.[13]

It is noteworthy that most of my participants couldn't remember the song "*Si La Reina De España Muriera,"* although Ms. Saldaña was able to recall a bit of it. It must have fallen out of favor over time for reasons unknown. I found a transcription of the song from 1947 by Ms. Julie Viggiane Esain. She notated it as "*Partitura Numero 86*" for the "*Instituto de Arqueología, Lingüística y Folklore de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*" (Viggiano Esain 2019).[14] The 1947 "*Si La Reina De España Muriera"* variant is in 6/8 meter and shows a series of eighth notes and the chord changes moving between I, V, IV and I throughout the song (Viggiano Esain 2019). This transcription didn't include the lyrics. The song remained active in Spanish folk repertoire in 1947, but it seems that it is no longer very well known in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. That said, song versions on YouTube suggest that many of the songs recorded by Lomax can be found elsewhere in the Spanish speaking world. One user posted a version of the folk song "*Si La Reina De España Muriera"* on YouTube by the musical group Los Troveros Criollos. They called it the vals "*La Reina de España*" (LastingDream 2010). In that version, we hear most of the words which include the phrases: "*si la reina de espana mueriera* (if the Queen of Spain were to die)" (LastingDream 2010, 00:00-00:18). In the YouTube version, the words are switched where Manuela Longoria (Lomax 1939) mentions "*Carlos Quinto quisiera triunfar* (Charles the Fifth would **want to succeed**)." Los Troveros Criollos change the activity their song to "*Carlos Quinto quisiera reinar* (Charles the Fifth **would like to rule**)" (LastingDream 2010,

[13] Please note that the first beat of the last measure seems to include one eighth note followed by a triplet note. The program MuseScore formatted that part like that, and I hope that it doesn't confuse readers.

[14] The Anthropology Museum at the University of Cordoba holds this document and can be viewed here: https://suquia.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/handle/suquia/2458.

00:18-00:22). There are other small changes. For example, Longoria sang "*correrían los arroyos de sangre* (the rivers would flow with blood)" and Los Troveros Criollos sang, "*correría la sangre española* (the Spanish blood would flow)" (LastingDream 2010, 00:22-00:26). The next part still concurs somewhat in the place where Longoria sang, "*como corren las alas del mar* (like the running of the wings of waves)" and Los Troveros Criollos sang, "*como corren las olas del mar* (like the running waves of the ocean)" (LastingDream 2010, 00:26-00:30). After that both melodies change with text and pitch, diverging in terms of how these were works were remembered or performed.

Altogether, fieldwork interviews revealed that many but not all of the folk songs recorded by Lomax were familiar to informants who lived near Brownsville at least a generation after his recordings were made. Conducting research and finding sources outside the Rio Grande Valley show that the folk songs were widely spread through the various communities beyond the border region defined in my study.

These children's folk songs continue to exist and hold personal meanings to the individuals who recall them. In the next chapter, I will show how the existence of these Mexican folk songs for children relate to Titon's musical sustainable model, where diversity, growth constraints, interconnectedness, and stewardship have altered the way these works exist within the *frontera* (Titon 2009, 123–124). As the fieldwork participants describe their relationship to the songs, their experiences, memories, and reactions as Mexican Americans gave the repertoire new meanings at both a personal and community level.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNAL CONFIRMATION

Texas communities are comprised of ethnic communities whose customs frequently overlap, blurring the lines between community's cultures. Although Texas public officials are mandated to ensure that education for Mexican residents of the state and Mexican Americans was equal and fair, this hasn't happened in optimal ways for the sustenance of local cultures (San Miguel Jr. 2001; Barragán Goetz 2020). Even in Hispanic-majority communities, Anglo languages and customs dominate the curriculum in Texas public schools. Issues relating to optimal education of Mexican Americans in Texas have been contested since the mid-nineteenth century, and details are still not fully resolved.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the origins of the public school system and the escuelitas system while connecting John A. Lomax's work to this narrative on language preservation. Secondly, I will examine the shared experiences of Anna Gomez and Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga. I will discuss schooling on both sides of the border. Thirdly, I will discuss Ms. Gomez's elementary school experience and how the public education system disliked Spanish. I also provide a testimonial from Américo Paredes and additional proof, through journal articles and participant testimony, showcasing Texas's past indicating that some community members were upset with Spanish-speaking people, strengthening Manuela Longoria's contribution. Last, I describe the participants' experiences by discussing the oral history method

and how I structured my interview questions. I also share my participant's testimonial experiences as I unpack the findings.

The “Common School Law of 1854” was the first [law] to establish a school system, requiring the state to organize and pay for the construction of common schools and to cover the tuition of orphans and poor children” (Barragán Goetz 2020, 21). Barragán Goetz writes:

> The superintendents in counties along the Texas-Mexico border obsessed over ethnic Mexicans' relationship to public education and with differentiating that relationship from those that Anglo American children had with education. The 'Summary of Scholastic Census' report required superintendents to classify students by race…either as 'white' or 'colored.' Mexicans, as a condition of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the US-Mexico War in 1848, [Mexicans] were legally considered white…but did not classify them as American. [They were counted as] children by 'nationality,' which meant that Mexicans, as well as Italians, Germans, and Bohemians, could be identified as such. Grouping children by nationality made it [historically] impossible to know how many of the Mexican children were U.S. citizens (25).

Sorting students by nationality (and therefore “un-American” or “not fully American”) influenced the teaching objectives within public schools. It became a priority to change the “un-Americans” into “real Americans”: in this case, to assimilate Mexican and Mexican American children into what others expect. Strum captured this notion in stating, "The function of public schools was to integrate children into what educators regarded as the American way of life—a way of life that emphasized work, cleanliness, manners, and a scorn for anything as "un-American" as the Spanish language or Mexican culture. As Mexican American children were perceived as coming to school without the benefits of socialization into the American ethos, they

were best off being educated separately from other students (Strum 2010, 19). From this state-sanctioned point of view, the way to deal with “un-Americans” was to wash off their culture and individuality and help them integrate into what the consensus accepted as being "American."

According to San Miguel, some local Texas communities reacted to the perceived needs to educating Mexican Americans by developing private schools (*escuelitas*) for youths that had three main purposes: to maintain a Mexican "spirit" in the youth of the border by imparting Mexican ideas and ideals; to uphold the ideals by imparting knowledge of Mexican national traditions and history; and to arise pride in their community. The school curriculum was similar to that of Mexican schools, with courses on Mexican history, civics, character development, grammar, general science, math, reading, and writing in Spanish (San Miguel 2001, 10). Curriculum offered at *escuelitas* supported the maintenance of distinctive local cultures rather than the full integration model suggested by the state, but the number of schools gradually waned over time and state-wide curriculum standards were adopted. Scholarship presented in this section and even in the literature review showcased the ongoing discussion and mixed views about the best way to education children from Mexican American communities within the United States borders, with support swinging like a pendulum over the years between curriculum that fully integrates students into the mainstream US ideologies into schools that foster skills in Spanish and a deeper appreciation for Mexican American culture. The tension between two extremes still exists, with local cultures often having to conform to mainstream educational goals with subsequent loss of local groundings. As the American melting pot has continued to cook its stew over the years, heritage erasure has consequently been a constant threat for local Mexican American communities and many other ethnic groups (Menchaca 2008, Anzaldúa 2012, San Miguel 2001, Medrano 2010). Indeed, in the 1930s, John A. Lomax may have recognized that

singers of Mexican folk songs on the American side of the border were becoming scarce and that there was a need to record those people and their songs before they disappeared through assimilation.

While US schools have tried to make “un-Americans” like Mexican Americans living along the border “unlearn” their culture, this culture has proven to be remarkably resistant over the years. Ms. Delia Saldaña reflectively takes on a three-fold perspective as she reflected on her personal experiences from Matamoros, then as she compares her environment her children are in through the public school system, and last as she reflects on her own actions as an active participant in the work she does with other children as a paraprofessional aid. Indeed, the oral history component of the interviews with culture bearers helps combat (un)learning when we learn what the participant's background was like and how they (un)learned institutional erasure, or subtractive learning, by utilizing music in the community, on the ranch, and in spaces beyond the classroom. One scholar’s case study focused on the interactions of what the trend was occurring in education to a phenomenon known as subtractive learning. Ms. Angela Valenzuela described the subtractive process in the public educational system as one that "divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (Valenzuela 1999, 3). In his fieldnotes, Lomax shared that the children of Blalack School “sung the songs that they use at play in their own homes.” Lomax also noted the challenges that the children faced had because they were not taught to be biliterate in school. He noted that it was “interesting that when Mrs. Lomax asked them how to spell certain titles, they shook their heads, saying that they could not [write] Spanish words. Their written and spoken schoolwork is all done in the English language" (Lomax 1939). It is important to recognize that Mexican folksongs like those in the Lomax Southern Collection are invaluable because they

serve as a means of preserving the Spanish language and they aid in the ongoing efforts to keeping residents biliterate through reading, writing, and singing in the present. Later in this chapter, interview analysis reveals that the participants in my study very much support this claim concerning the folksongs in the preservation of their culture.

Based on the interview data analysis, one can see how these songs existed in the community. The participants over the age of forty shared experiences that demonstrate a duality in which they used music for personal enjoyment as children while also using the songs to define themselves and their community in the Rio Grande Valley. Dr. Campbell and Dr. Wiggins mentioned that "Children…are not passive recipients of the music they value but active agents in choosing the music they will take with them to listen to and respond to, to make, and to choose to preserve, reinvent, or discard" (Campbell and Wiggins 2013). Based on Campbell and Wiggins' notion of child agency, I gave my participants a way to corroborate their narrative from their background through their experiences with Manuela Longoria and Blalack School's Mexican children's folk music.

Turning again to the methodology used in my ethnographic interviews, in each instance, I played the Library of Congress recording and waited for a reaction from my participants that would recall a memory from hearing the Mexican children's folk song. These musical moments also captured a discontinuity from the current technology and media we see in existence today as these adults explored what *rondas, or* circle games, meant to them. The older participants, whose childhoods were closer to the 1939 Lomax recordings, provided context for what life was like then on either side of the Rio Grande Valley border.

Life For Border Children In The 1930s and 40s

Exploring the 1939 Southern Collection required a deep dive into the historical events and circumstances that the Brownsville children and adults and later, the participants in my study experienced. I try here to relay experiences through testimonial account from those that have lived through that period. Two of my participants grew up on both sides of the border. Their primary schooling experiences explicitly show the resilience and grit these individuals faced at a young age.

Ms. Anna Judith Gómez Treviño and Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga respectively, lived their childhoods through the late 1940s in Brownsville, Texas and Burgos, Tamaulipas, Mexico. As part of a LatinX/ChicanX Schooling course with Dr. Christopher Carmona, I conducted an oral history project with these two individuals that contrasted their lifestyles and respective primary schooling experiences. Insights from the project fueled later research interests on the effect of primary schooling in either side of the border. My family on my mother's side came from Burgos, Tamaulipas. They were hardworking day laborers that worked the fields, often planting sorghum, and assisted ranch land duties. Working at the *parsela*, plot of land, was difficult and filled with challenges with the elements but daily life there was filled with musical moments as well. Between work and communal events, family members in Burgos, Tamaulipas played music to pass the time. In Burgos, Emilio Zuñiga[1], a blind accordionist and uncle to Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga, played songs that included *redobo*, polkas, *chotis*, and regional *huapangos* ("Agapito Zuñiga: A Pioneer of Conjunto Music Genre," 2016). He was accompanied with Ms. Rodríguez's father, Esteban Zuñiga, who played the harmonica, and later, by the famous conjunto musician,

[1] Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga, Interview with Burgos, Tamaulipas resident, March 16, 2021.

Agapito Zuñiga.[2] Making music for the sake of enjoyment is something that was not too foreign to Manuela Longoria. Manuela Longoria also provided context in Lomax field notes that music was even done for fun.

In his fieldnote book, Lomax noted what Manuela Longoria shared as she reflected on the song "*La Rancherita."* She recalled that her father would sing this song as he came back from work, and would sing to her as he approached closer to the house? (Lomax 1939, Image 64). In our interview, Graciela Rodríguez also recalled her father passing a song to her. It is noteworthy that she remembered how family members who worked after in the field would still come home to create music with family.

Contrasting Ms. Graciela Rodríguez's lifestyle to that of Ms. Anna Gomez Treviño, one thing that stands out is how central ranch life and land in Burgos was in defining one's outlook in contrast to town life in Brownsville. Ms. Rodríguez recounts,

> *Traíamos el agua del rio Concho. Boquetas a la vez. Para cocinar, para lavar. Se hervía. Caminábamos dos o tres cuadras. Si nos daban dinero, lo ahorre, pero también lo gaste. Le estaba diciendo a Elenita que todavía recuerdo mis tablas de matemáticas. En tiempo los vendían las tablas en papel. La primaria fue en Burgos. La maestra se llamaba Nazaria Garza. Bien estricta. Cuando no hacías las matemáticas te pecaba aquí en la mano, ella era bien brava. Hacíamos dibujos en los cuadernos, y los pintábamos con los colores. Mi hermano güero si fue a la escuela, pero fue a otra casa. La señora que asistía era Reyna. Ella le daba la comida y todo. Yo salí hasta tercero. Me gustaría terminarlo,*

[2] For further reading, I recommend seeing the information from the Texas State Historical Society (Palomo, n.d.).

pero no me dejaron terminar. Me sacaron porque se iba casar tu tía Celia. Llore, llore mucho cuando me saco de la escuela. Mi papa me pregunto porque lloraba, y le dije porque quería terminar mi estudio. Me dijo pos ni modo Graciela, aquí te va a tocar la basura de la cocina, lavar, planchar, y todo. Ni modo tuve que hacerlo. También le paso lo mismo a otras familias. Estuve en dos escuelas. Recuerdo cuando cantábamos las mañanitas. Les cantábamos las mañanitas y dábamos las flores. El que llevaba el camión se llamaba Domingo Chávez, el nació allí en burgos. Los ramitos bien bonitos. La música de guitara y violín, todos cantaban. La discriminación, le pego al estudiante en la mano. Le dijo al estudiante, "Te estoy diciendo que lo hagas correcto." Familias Mexicanas, trabajaban en diferentes cosas. Avía un muchacho con cosa mentalmente, nos devisa y nos correteo. Nos hacíamos ejercicios, y los bailables. En ese tiempo me gustaba tener mi pelo en churros.

Below I have translated Ms. Rodriguez's testimony for other readers to understand in English:

> We brought water from the Concho River. Bits at a time. To cook, to wash. Boiled it. We walked two or three blocks. If they gave us money, save it but also spend it. I was telling Elenita that I still remember my math tables. Back then they sold us the math tables on paper. Primary school was in Burgos. The teacher's name was Nazaria Garza. Very strict. When you did not do math, she would hit you on your hand, she was very rough. We made drawings in the notebooks, and we painted them with the colors. My brother Güero did go to school, but he went to another house. The lady who attended was Reyna. She gave him food and everything. I went up to third. I would like to finish it, but they did not let me finish it. They took me out because your Aunt Celia was getting married. I cried; I cried a lot when he took me out of school. My dad asked me why I was crying, and I told

him why I wanted to finish my study. Graciela told me, 'Well, too bad. Here you are going to have the kitchen, take out the garbage, wash, iron, and everything. No way. I had to do it. The same thing happened to other families in the area. I was in two schools. I remember when we sang happy birthday. We sang to them happy birthday and gave them flowers. The one who was driving the truck was called Domingo Chávez. He was born there in Burgos. The bouquet was very pretty. The guitar and violin music, everyone sang. Discrimination, [like hitting] the student in the hand. He told the student, "I'm telling you to do it right." Mexican families, they worked in different things. There was a boy with something mentally [unstable], he sees us, and we ran because he would chase us. We did exercises, and dances. At that time, I liked to have my hair in curls.

In asking Ms. Rodríguez about the music, she recalled songs from her childhood, recited the words with fluid movement, and then began singing the songs in Spanish. Her memory work led to moments of catharsis and pain as she considered the struggles she endured as a child. Her experience with teachers often meant contending with a teacher's strict demeanor—a child was physically punished for a wrong answer or for disciplinary reasons. In fact, two types of education programs existed in Mexico, that of the urban system, and rural system. Prior to the 1940s, the way that education was conducted in rural Mexico was based on a long-standing model based on teachers who were fairly autocratic and unforgiving in their behavior with students (Loyo 1990, Santiago Antonio 2015, Zermeño 2013). Ms. Graciela Rodriguez Zuñiga went to a rural school system, and I will expand on changes in the rural school in Mexico during the time frame when she attended classes.

In the 1920s, the idea of the educator also serving as a community leader was still somewhat of a novel idea as Mexicans incorporated more of John Dewey's ideas in their ethical

framework (Cerecedo 2006, 55). A Mexican governmental change led to increased support for children through agency developments that aided families by providing access to clothing, food and/or other basic needs (Antonio 2015, 196). This action connects with the idea of the family network working together, and people doing their part as described by Ernesto Colín. Isaías Álvarez García mentions that during the 1920s in Mexico, the role of the teacher began to be diversified and widened beyond the classroom to also serve as advocates for community needs (García 2014, 141). These institutional educational changes happened in part because of an influx of scholars coming in from Spain, which changed the social climate (Zermeño 2013, 1701). Engracia Loyo also mentioned the new role of the teacher in rural systems as advocates for the community (Loyo 1990, 328). For instance, she described how educators began to step in when children were subjected to an abuse or unfair workload outside the classroom (Loyo 1990, 327). Altogether, the educational experience that Ms. Rodriguez experienced as a child in rural Mexico was fairly typical of the times. Teachers were an important part of local communities, and they were expected to be strict with children. The demand for labor at home and in the fields often resulted in only a handful formal education years for girls, and not much more for boys. These sources and testimonial narrative supply one aspect of the possible challenges that the children may have faced in Blalack, Texas in 1939.

Speaking Spanish In Brownsville In The 1940

It was a challenge to find data on local educational practices that included both sides of the border. On the US side, the Administrative Assistant on curriculum and instruction for Brownsville ISD could provide no records for the 1930s and 40s time period.[3] Was this data never collected? Was it later destroyed to make room to collect recent district data? There was no overview or report to be found. Looking at data for Burgos required assistance from an expert, my aunt, Arcelia Treviño, who earned a masters degree in education in Mexico and now trains both educators and administrators there. She suggested that I look for national educational trends and materials from the time period 1940 to 1950 in local sources (Treviño 2021). Following her lead, I found relevant data on earlier educational resources and practices from newspaper articles in the *Brownsville Herald* archives and in journal articles written in Spanish. Hoping to find more information in Mexico, I tried to establishing contact with the *Secretaría de Educación* (Education Secretary) in Ciudad Victoria, but I was unsuccessful. A phone call or in-person interaction via the consulate office here in Brownsville might have been more productive.

The concept of students going to school is an equivalent of children giving back to their community and doing their part in the family as described as Ernesto Colín's idea on *tequio,* community work. Children attending local public school was still a novel idea in the border region during the early twentieth century. In a rural Mexican household, the children's labor contribution on a rural farm or ranch is crucial to its success and management. Ernesto Colín describes this as *tequio* or community work, "where every person has a civic duty" (Colín 2014, 45). The role of children in this civic engagement comes to question in looking at education and

[3] Dr. Rentfro provided this information (Rentfro 2021).

whether the children in these rural and urban families have the responsibility to attend school. Colín further mentions that "duties of the traditional *calpultin* were rotated so that everyone had experience in all vocations. In alternating turns, citizens lent their labor to public works, assisted teachers at the schools, helped the judges in the office, merchants at the market, or the keepers at the monuments" (Colín 2014, 45). Engracia Loyo, describes the venture of the teachers in the rural setting evolving past the need of curricular investment where the educator became a communitarian advocate while evolving into this larger tequio into the *calpultin* as described by Ernesto Colín (Loyo 1990, 328). So as much as these educators advocated for their students to stay in education, the final saying came from the parents. In this next section, I will share the experiences Ms. Anna Judith Gomez from the oral history project from the LatinX/ChicanX Schooling course.

Looking back on her early years of schooling in Brownsville, Ms. Gomez described a school system that had two first grade classes: high first for students that attained English proficiency and for first for those who still weren't proficient. She says she went to:

> First and high first. They had first grade. All the kids there did not speak any English. My teacher there Ms. Kemmy, an older lady but taught all of us. When you finished that class, you went to high first. My mother spoke Spanish. My father went 7th and 8th grade. He was a meter reader, and my mother did alterations and sewing where she later worked in the store. She used to work in the building we are in right now.

The building we were located for Ms. Gomez interview is located on Elizabeth Street, and currently a restaurant called *El Escondido*. The building existed back in the 1940s. The dress shop was called Lydia's dress shop, and the store switched over to Ms. Champion's. Ms.

Gomez's mom and sister worked there. One outlier experience was going to a friend's house to change clothes and attend school, then go back to change.

Ms. Gomez mentions that she and other children in the area picked cotton during harvest time. In 1943, Mexico closed its doors to citizens that left the country to assist farmers in the state of Texas (San Miguel Jr. 2001, 92–93). This led to a demand for local workers including child laborers who assisted in picking crops in the fields. The new law also led people to associate "Mexican work" with "undesirable, lowest-paid manual labor" (Gonzalez 1999, 54). Ms. Gomez recalls how her parents hustled to sell products and make a small profit in order to survive in a tough immigrant family market.

The school she attended in Brownsville was First Ward (Skinner Elementary today), where she attended from kindergarten through fourth grade. Fifth and sixth grade was taught at Central Junior High. "There was a train that slowed down by school, and I would hop on the train. It would pass by the road and would walk the rest of the way." First Ward students all walked to school. Not all students had shoes. "Ugly clunkers, ugly shoes." She recalls her twin brothers going to the "white house" because students constantly misbehaved.[4] Ms. Gomez recounted many wonderful memories of her high school times, but she did not focus much on the elementary experiences needed for this study.

In reference to the question regarding discrimination Ms. Gomez said:

> Definitely there was discrimination. The Mexicans were on one side and the Whites were on the other side. A lot of the gringos were very nice though, but there were a few that

[4] For reference, the white house described here was a building that housed students who had other disabilities. A school bus would take them to this other building. The external building was all white, which is why Ms. Gomez called it the white house.

were kind of ugly. You know, I mean, I went to a party one time. It was a swimming party. I didn't swim but it was like a bar-b-cue, and one of the womens, her mother was a teacher at school, Ms. Brooks. She was ugly, her mom was real rude. The girl comes up to me and tells me "What are you doing here?" I said I was invited, too, and just walked away. I told the host, and she was apologetic. Why did you invite her? If they are going to be rude to me, I am going to be rude to them. That is the way it stood; I never had any problems with her.

In asking about whether she saw discrimination in the public space outside of school, she said,

> Not really. I didn't have any problems at all. We were around people that were grown here. It was a lot of problems with a lot of newcomers who would say, "You are not supposed to speak Spanish, you are supposed to speak English." That made me feel bad. To me that was discrimination. I used to go to school, and the Mexican girls would walk behind me, and I remember them saying, "*Estas gringas*, are so slow." I turned around and told them, “Who do you think you are?” I told them in Spanish *y que tu te crees*?

Analyzing Ms. Gomez’s comments, she did experience conflict. She was stereotyped as an Anglo by other children that were like her. To Mexican peers, she passed as white enough because of her fairer complexion, but her other white peers did not see her as white enough because of her Mexican last name. To this day, she reminds others that her first name is Anna, said in an English American tone, rather than the Spanish version of this. Perhaps this is her way of finding acceptance in a world that has *othered* her by not being accepted by her white peers. Anna still fights the ghosts of social issues from the 40s to 50s in her mind. Growing up poor and

ascending into middle class, her role in the community and need to for solidarity and connections with others of various ethnicities means that she wants to fit in and call this space her home.[5]

In my search for data on education highlighting the 1940s to 1950s, Brownsville *Herald* articles from the 1940s mentioned the large need for systemic changes in education and teachers.[6] Many of these issues in the newsprint are invisible to the radar of students, and language is one facet that is never suppressed to the background. Ms. Anna Gomez described attending first, and high first grade. She acknowledged the fact she didn't know a lot of English in first grade but had soon picked up enough for her to complete high first. She also provided an example where Spanish was supposed to be some secret language that other Anglo students or teachers find difficult in understanding.[7] Earlier in her interview she mentioned playing a lot of childhood games in Spanish. It was her first language.

[5] Thinking about this makes me think about Guadalupe San Miguel Jr.'s evidence where a Mexican veteran coming back could not get service because the sign at the restaurant said, "No Mexicans Allowed" (San Miguel Jr. 2010, 103). Does her complexion qualify her as white enough or does It disconnect here from being too Mexican?

[6] The Brownsville Herald runs the respective stories. On September 9, 1945, the headline "Need for More Rooms Is Stressed in School Survey" addresses the need for more rooms in the growing number of students for the next five years in Brownsville. On December 31, 1948, the headline "Big Teacher Shortage in Texas Seen" captures a need for 51,772 teachers when only 46,500 are in the system based on the demographic needs in the state also showing the stress in the system as 31,689 reflect on retiring, quitting, or dying within the year. On April 24, 1949, the headline, "Texas U. Prof Authors Text On Education" where Henry J Otto develops *Principles of Elementary Education* in support of creating a book for teacher preparation programs for elementary level teachers. On April 25, 1949, the headline, "Foreign Jobs For Teachers Go Begging" indicates the local army program begging for teachers to work in Europe and oversees for an annual salary of 3,727.20 for teachers and 4,479.60 for principals. These are just a few of many other articles that indicate stress in the profession of education.

[7] This makes me reflect on the testimony done by Ms. Edith Gilbert on students in the public space continuously use Spanish more than English, she comparatively speaks on the English-speaking peers only to describe that these children are surrounded by so many times in speaking Spanish that applying English in a classroom setting becomes difficult because socially and communally these children were in an environment where it was predominantly Spanish (Strum 2010, 109).

In 1940, *Educational News and Editorial Comment* published statements asking for policy changes that would require all students up to the age of sixteen to attend school because it gives students more options to enter the workforce if they quit school ("Educational News and Editorial Comment" 1940, 323). Another comment said that the young students needed to learn how to become entrepreneurs, developing their own work when no one would hire them ("Educational News and Editorial Comment" 1940, 323). What is clearly innovative and anachronistic is the mention of some evaluation as a metric to guide students into the right vocation or career ("Educational News and Editorial Comment" 1940, 324). Schools during this time period often partnered with members of the community (Moore 1940, 324).[8] A large question in developing licensed teachers at the time questioned how many years of prior experience was necessary to officially be called a teacher (Wert 1940, 12–16). Wert went on to write that the larger concern of teacher preparation derived from institutional agency in molding future educators, maintaining that, "Teacher education, it would seem, is in a state of great confusion" (Wert 1940, 13). Much of the struggle in education in the United States is also seen in the roles of the educator in Mexico.

Insights From Américo Paredes & Participants

Medrano highlights Américo Paredes's sentiment to local leadership and administration in the Brownsville Public School System:

> Paredes remembered an incident when he and his high school classmates stopped by to say goodbye to an assistant principal afterschool. The assistant principal had a large

[8] Mr. Walter J. Moore on the book review of *Principles of Primary Education* mentions that "the use of neighborhood resources in the teaching program," is included as necessary in developing the elementary teacher (Moore 1940). Something similar is also happening in Mexico in earlier time periods.

> paddle in his hand. When the young Paredes asked what the paddle was for, the man answered *'Para pegarles a los huercos*' (to swat the [brats]). He had paddled some children for speaking Spanish. Undoubtedly, those years would leave a lasting impression upon Américo Paredes. (Medrano 2010, 17–18)

While this reaction captures the strict and stern enforcement of an English-only environment, Medrano continues to share the challenges children faced in the early 1920s. Medrano shared this:

> Américo had some interesting recollections about his schooling and his childhood in Brownsville. In the early 1920s, there was only one grammar school in the city, later named Annie S. Putegnat Elementary, after a local long-time educator. Paredes remembered, "In the lower grades, 90 percent were Mexicans. So really the Anglos were a minority. Sometimes if they didn't watch out, they might be beaten up. Everyone spoke Spanish. They were not supposed to. I'm sure, that began around World War I and was aimed at the Germans, not at the Mexicans." His first-grade teacher was Ms. Josephine Castañeda, who was the sister of Carlos Castañeda, The University of Texas historian, who was born in Camargo, Tamaulipas, but who grew up in Brownsville. Castañeda attended St. Joseph's Academy, a Catholic school, with Américo's older brother, Lorenzo. Américo Paredes recalled that although he and other Tejano students did not encounter too many problems at school, the new immigrant children whose families had been displaced by the Mexican Revolution was picked on. They either did not know the English language or spoke it with an accent. It was during these early years that Américo first heard the word mojado. Paredes remembered, "It does not mean wetback, for god's

> sake. I remember them chasing one little boy yelling "mojado, mojado" [illegal, illegal] and knocked him down. They felt behind his ears. That is where they were supposed to be mojados." Paredes continued by saying that the word became popular during the Prohibition Era. Since the pro-alcohol proponents were already called "Wets," it was only logical to call undocumented Mexicans crossing the Río Grande by the Spanish translation of "wets": "mojados" (Medrano 2010, 9).

The challenge for students speaking Spanish did not necessarily border on either where these children were born where children's families were displaced after the Mexican Revolutionary War. More so, stigma existed to oppress and disengage Spanish speaking as it would bring an anti-American sentiment. Ethnic communities and local communities were shedding their cultural practices and values for the sake of being "American" in the rise of supporting the United States' need for solidarity in the face of global conflict. Local residents ushered in an idealism for othering their neighbors rather than providing support, which may have made things difficult in the public school system where parents in the community showed a "lack of support" because the values of the home did not match the values enforced by state in the public education sector.

Another historical glance of this English-only environment and Spanish oppression occurred miles north of Brownsville, in San Antonio, from 1910-1920 where image three of five by Russell Lee Photography Collection in the Bullock Museum's exhibit on the "Life and Death on the Border 1910-1920" shows the picture of a sign with the lettering saying:

> WE SERVE
>
> WHITE'S only

NO

SPANISH or MEXICANS ("Life and Death on the Border 1910-1920" n.d.)

This type media in public locations provided other individuals in the community to police and promote this anti-Spanish rhetoric among their own community members in the name of patriotism, and following suit was deemed as "American." This stripping of culture was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter when Strum captured this in stating, "The function of public schools was to integrate children into what educators regarded as the American way of life—a way of life that emphasized work, cleanliness, manners, and a scorn for anything as "un-American" as the Spanish language or Mexican culture. As Mexican American children were perceived as coming to school without the benefits of socialization into the American ethos, they were best off being educated separately from other students" (Strum 2010, 19).

This makes me consider Titon's variables on limits to growth where the perpetuation of these folk songs is physically limited by the policing of language by others in the community, including those in the public school system. The extreme perpetuation of the English language created solidarity with local partners including parents who spoke in Spanish. This local rift marginalized communities as incoming immigrants may have established residency in the city, providing more cultural refuge in the streets of the neighborhood rather than the halls of the classroom. When Lomax asked the children of Blalack School to write the words in Spanish, this may have triggered some unsettling feelings (Lomax 1939). In fact, Manuela Longoria's efforts in the 1939 Southern Collection by singing, writing, and sharing her testimony with John A. Lomax subverted local and state designated English-only policies, but preserved and gave lasting value to these Mexican children's folk. Although she may not have realized it at the time, her role moved beyond simply an educator and an administrator to stewart and cultural activist by

singing, writing, and sharing things that derived from her culture and from her native tongue in Spanish. What she did is worthy of our respect.

Participant Experiences With The Mexican Children's Folk Songs

I describe the methodology used in this project in Chapter I, but I would like to add a few more points about the importance and challenges that limit this approach. In terms of general considerations when doing ethnography, one must always support the need for anonymity when the informant's life or reputation is in danger (Jessee 2011, 299). One must also take into account that an informant's testimony could potentially have repercussions, like the recycling of myths and propaganda that could alter current situations.[9] Perhaps the greatest strength of the approach is that it allows the informant to provide their narrative, which humanizes them and the conditions they have lived through. Personal testimony also helps to create a more democratic means of writing history (Jessee 2011, 300). Based on the ethnographic model used by Oral Historian Erin Jessee and others, I include the informant's words as they are delivered in the hopes of providing a clearer picture of the past. Testimony from people who have lived through difficult time gives them a voice and their words provide valuable lessons to all of us. Moreover, Garcia and Yosso maintain that those who are denied the agency to speak find it difficult to process the idea of change in the future (García and Yosso 2020, 59). In unique intersections of education and history, individual agents have proven, "We are what we do, especially what we do to change what we are: our identity resides in action and in struggle" (García and Yosso 2020, 60). Both scholars call for doctoral programs [that should provide a historical lens in scholarship

[9] In this case, Jessee mentions the informant's words could recycle the violence depicted in Rwanda (Jessee 2011, p. 300).

methodologies that rely on narratives and testimonies], especially from the perspectives of women and marginalized community members (García and Yosso 2020, 60). Allowing a variety of voices to be heard will result in less marginalization of valuable experiences. They further elaborate that, “Everyone theorizes, but often writing a narrative some historians feel a separate section or explicit description of theory may take away from the story they are constructing. Theory is manifest in who we study, what research questions we ask, what sources we utilize, and the narrative that we write and present” (García and Yosso 2020, 61).

In finding "a piece of evidence from one decade that resonates with some from another era, we may try to identify whether these represent continuities, contestations, or contradictions across time" (García and Yosso 2020, 62). This resonates with my work: the archival search that I conducted ties in exactly to what these two scholars' reference, showing the state of certain practices in the respective localities of Burgos, Tamaulipas, and Brownsville, Texas.

Interview Question Models

I had some idea on what to ask both informants, yet I needed more guidance. A google search yielded some tips by the Dallas Jewish Historical Society ("50 Questions for an Oral History Interview What to Ask the Relatives" n.d.). The majority of the questions intersected with individual experiences that shape the lens of the time frame of their childhood. My other focus was a need to address the issue of discrimination.

Another aspect in the oral history interview was the fact that several people were present during it. Having additional parties challenged my role of facilitator shifting to a family member sitting in the back and listening to a story. Roles shifted as others asked additional questions.

Some scholars recommend that interviewees and onlookers take charge of the interview content, democratize the process rather than narrowly defining the topic or roles.

My questions are included in Chapter I in the methodology section. I had to change my recording plans somewhat to maximize sound quality. The first interview with Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Gomez helped me adjust and plan accordingly when considering them for a second interview for this research in March of 2022.

Significance To My Participants And Their Background

My ethnographic part of my research project was based on four interviews. Those with Mr. Carlos A. Gomez and Ms. Anna Judith Gomez were conducted in English, and the other three interviews were done in Spanish. Ms. Gomez is a Brownsville resident and has shared extensively about her Brownsville Ward primary school (Skinner Elementary today), as well as on her experiences as Brownsville changed over time. Carlos A. Gomez is Ms. Gomez's son. He shared his experiences at Martin Elementary in the late 1970s. Both individual's experiences provided testimony about music making in primary school some thirty years apart.

Figure 7. Picture of Ms. Anna Judith Gomez and Mr. Carlos A. Gomez (Trevino 2022)

The first Spanish interview included Mrs. María Inés Trevino, Ms. María De Los Angeles Rodríguez, and Ms. Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga. Ms. Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga grew up in rural Mexico in Burgos, Tamaulipas, while Mrs. Maria Inés Trevino and Ms. Maria De Los Angeles Rodriguez experienced primary school in Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

Figure 8. Picture of Mrs. María Ines Trevino, Ms. María De Los Angeles Rodríguez, and Ms. Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga (Trevino 2022)

Ms. María Magdalena Mata and María De Leon were also interviewed in Spanish. Ms. Maria De Leon grew up in Santiago, Nuevo Leon, and Ms. Maria Magdalena Mata is a native Brownsville resident who went to Cromack Elementary School. They provided contrasting experiences that differentiate experiences on both sides of the border.

Figure 9. Picture of Ms. María Magdalena Mata and María De Leon (Trevino 2022)

The last interview conducted in Spanish is of great importance because Ms. María Saldaña grew up and started working in Matamoros, Tamaulipas and later began working for the school system at Aiken Elementary. She is both an insider concerning the inner workings of the school system works as an agent of the organization, and an outsider peering in as a community member and resident of Brownsville, Texas.

Figure 10. Picture of Ms. Delia Saldaña (Trevino 2022)

All my participants first started hearing the eight selections in this order: "*Naranja Dulce, Límon Partido*," *"Señora Santa Anna," "La pájara pinta," "A la ru," "Los florones de la mano," "María Blanca," "Los patos,"* and *"Si la reina de España muriera."*

Participant's Reactions

The interesting aspect is that of all my participants, Ms. Saldaña was the only one who was able to recall *"Si la reina de España muriera."* The fact that other individuals who grew up in Mexico were unable to recall it made it worth noting, since Manuela Longoria said that she learned from her father (Lomax 1939, Image 64). Participants shared how listening to these children's folk songs brought a sense of elatement in rekindling childhood memories that took

place either with family, friends, or school mates. Additionally, these participants were transported by the music between their ranches, their homes, their neighborhoods, their places of worship and their schools. The following findings provide key contexts that have created solidarity and clarity on their roles as cultural stewards and as active participants as children who used to play these games while nurturing Spanish continuity through the community beyond the classroom walls.

Finding 1 – Song Contexts

These children's folk songs were sung or played in schools, school yards, church yards, the neighborhood, and cousins' homes. Ms. María Lourdes De León described the songs' context the best in her interview when she shared, "*Porque ya cuando la familia, este, terminaban sus quehaceres domésticos, todos los niños nos salíamos a jugar. Las personas mayores conversaban y los niños jugábamos. Esa. Ahí lo aprendí*. (When we were a family, and were done with the house chores, all the children would go out and play. The older people would talk, and the children would play. That is how I learned this.)." Ms. María de los Ángeles Rodríguez mentioned at [12:07] "*Eso era casi siempre más cuando andábamos en vacaciones en el rancho que nos juntábamos todos los primos ahí en el patio grande y los adultos platicando y los niños jugando. Eran unas. Unas recuerdos. Son unos recuerdos maravillosos*. (It was almost always when we were on vacation at the ranch that we would play with all the cousins there on the large patio. The adults talking and the children playing. They brought some great memories. Some beautiful memories.)"

Other game song performance locations included the church yard, where Mr. Gomez, Ms. Anna Gomez, Ms. María Magdalena Mata and Ms. Saldaña all remembered listening to the children's folk song. When he heard "*Naranja Dulce, Límon Partido*" Carlos A. Gomez recalled

this, “I heard a similar one in English...nursery, pre-school at First Baptist School here in Brownsville. [5:11]” Ms. Anna Gomez recalled “*Maria Blanca*” from her “CCD classes at church. [16:37]” María Magdalena Mata described in detail on her participation with the *Teresitas,* an organization run by the nuns that worked with the young girls, [23:01]

> “*Bueno, esa. Yo. Esa yo la escuché. Esa yo la escuché cuando iba a la doctrina con las monjas y nos ponían a jugar y nos ponían también este. De canciones de cuna. Éramos puras niñas porque yo era una Teresita, era del club de Las Teresitas y éramos puras niñas y nos ponían a jugar y era a la rueda. O sea, nos agarrábamos varias niñas de la mano. Las más chiquitas. Yo era de las más chiquitas. Este de edad, este a jugar. Y las mayores ellas. A nosotros no nos dejaban corretear, agarrarnos de la mano, todas en círculo y dar vuelta. Nada más podíamos caminar, no podíamos correr, no nos dejaban porque temían que nos fuéramos a caer. Estamos chiquitas, chiquitas. Así que eso es lo que lo que recuerdo.*
>
> (Well, that one. Me. I heard that one. I heard that when I went to the catechism with the nuns, and they put us to play, and they also put this one on us. Of lullabies. We were all girls because I was a Teresita. I was from the Las Teresitas club, and we were all girls and they made us play and it was the wheel. In other words, several girls held hands. The little ones. I was one of the smallest. This old, this to play. And the older ones. They didn't let us run around, hold hands, all in a circle and turn around. We could only walk, we could not run, they would not let us because they feared that we would fall. We are small, small. So that's what I remember.)

Lastly, Ms. Saldaña [3:40] mentioned that she recalled “*Señora Santa Anna*” when she was “*cuando íbamos a la iglesia en la iglesia con la catequista. Nos ponía esa canción.* (When

we would go to church, they would play this in the catechism.)" As these songs were encouraged in Spanish in these faith-based areas where communities were built, were there other areas that restricted this usage of language? Ms. Anna Judith Gomez expands on this in the next finding.

Finding 2 – Localized Limitations On Spanish In Brownsville

Ms. Anna Judith Gomez mentions earlier in the chapter that she attended first and high-first grade. This was a local policy put in place by the Brownsville public school district to ensure that students had more frequent use of English in an academic environment, even if it was not spoken in the community at large. She mentions in "*Señora Santa Anna*" at 9:06, "I spoke, then I spoke English and I actually stayed away from Spanish." Carlos Arturo Gomez also talks about his experience in the Brownsville public school system at 31:17 where "everything was in English. All the songs were in English. If we sing anything, I do remember a couple of songs, but they were more American folk type songs. Nothing was ever in Spanish. And all my classmates in elementary and so forth spoke English." Ms. María Magdalena Mata expanded also on her experience in attending Cromack Elementary School in Brownsville and she said:

> *Nos ponían canciones que le decían canciones de cuna. Este de diferentes, pero era en ocasiones no era algo muy seguido porque las escuelas en ese tiempo en los setentas no había clases de bilingües, todavía no había ese programa. De incluso había maestras que no nos dejaban hablar español. No era permitido hablar español. Era puro inglés. En la escuela no podíamos. Este estar hablando el español, entonces por eso yo, parte de mi timidez vino, por eso era de esa. Por eso, porque como yo no podía comunicarme, pues mejor me quedaba callada. Y no participaba con los demás estudiantes de la clase. Esa fue la primaria de primer primer grado, hasta más o menos como el 4.º grado, ya empecé a desenvolverme más y a participar más.*

> (They played us songs, lullabies. This one was different, but sometimes it was not something very often because the schools at that time in the seventies did not have bilingual classes, there was not that program yet. There were even teachers who would. not let us speak Spanish. It was not allowed to speak Spanish. It was pure English. At school we could not. This being speaking Spanish, so that is why part of my shyness came… because I could not communicate, it was better for me to keep quiet. And I did not participate with the other students in the class. That was the primary, first grade, until more or less like the 4th grade, I already began to develop more and to participate more).

These narratives provide glimpses of lived experiences where Spanish was restricted. The next question I explored was how my participants spread the songs.

Finding 3 – Passing The Folk Songs Down The Line

Most of my participants were women and all the women did have families of their own. They spoke of times when they sang these songs to their children. For example, María Inés Treviño recounted that, "*Y yo recuerdo que mamá no nos cantaba. Nos cantaba cuando estábamos pequeñas.* (I recall that mom would sing to us. She would sing we were smaller)." In "*La Pájara Pinta*" María Inés Treviño mentioned, "*Yo recuerdo. No sé si mi abuelo haya jugado también en sus tiempos con esa canción, pero mi abuelo la cantaba, mi abuelo la cantaba y nosotros la utilizábamos igual en todas esas veces que nos reuníamos con nuestros amigos a...a jugar* (I remember. I do not know if my grandfather played that song in his time, but my grandfather used to sing it, my grandfather used to sing it and we used it just the same in all those times that we got together with our friends to...to play)." This provides glimpses that these folk songs were not just passed down by women but by men as well, like how Manuela Longoria's dad would sing "*La Rancherita*" to her as he approached his way home (Lomax

1939, Image 64). So as these women passed these songs to their children, the reaction was also reactive to the present school environment on language restrictions.

Ms. Saldaña spoke about the songs' functions in this interview segment:

Pero aquí en Estados Unidos no se acostumbra por lo regular esas canciones. Este fue un poco lo que lo, lo asimilé con ellos y luego se los expliqué, pero después como que ya no es lo mismo. O sea, ellos aquí cambian mucho la. La forma de, de los juegos, de ellos, las actividades, entonces es más de más deporte, entonces no es no esa música mucho en, en, en juego afuera, entonces eso es diferente, pero sí los sí lo hice con mis hijos.

(But here in the United States those songs are not usually used. This was a bit of what I assimilated with them and then I explained it to them, but then it is not the same anymore. In other words, they change a lot here. The form of, of the games, of them, the activities, then it is more of more sport, then it is not that much music in, in, in play outside, then that is different, but yes, I did this with my children).

She described how the school environment that her children experienced varied from what she lived through in Matamoros.

Finding 4 – Folk Song Meanings and Affects

Ms. Saldaña [6:24] in her interview says, "*A ver estos. Esas canciones ahorita me están haciendo recordar muchos momentos muy hermosos que viví en mi niñez. Hermosos*. (Let us see. These songs right now are making me think of beautiful moments that I lived in my childhood. Beautiful.)" Ms. María de los Ángeles Rodríguez mentioned [12:07] "*Eso era casi siempre más cuando andábamos en vacaciones en el rancho que nos juntábamos todos los primos ahí en el patio grande y los adultos platicando y los niños jugando. Eran unas. Unas recuerdos. Son unos*

recuerdos maravillosos. (It was almost always when we were on vacation at the ranch that we would play with all the cousins there in the large patio. The adults talking and the children playing, they brought some great memories. Some beautiful memories.)" Carlos Arturo Gomez also reminisced about his dad as he shared, "I think these were a part of his childhood and introduced till way, way, way later when I was an adult. So, it reminds me of my dad." Mrs. Maria Inés Treviño really expresses an important idea as well:

> *Como decía mi hermana. Son canciones que. Están bien escritas. Este es una. Son muy rítmicas. Son muy rítmicas. Son fáciles de recordar. Son poemas, son poemas escritos y son muy fáciles de recordar de de que se los queden en la mente y que a pesar de que son años, de que los jugamos todavía más, al escuchar inmediatamente la letra, se nos viene a la mente. Las palabras se nos vienen a la mente. Entonces este si es importante que se sigan difundiendo para que se se aprendan, se sigan pasando como dice mi mamá de generación a generación y que. Sigan vivas en nuestra cultura. Que no se vayan a perder y sean parte de de la historia, nada más que van a quedar ahí archivadas y guardadas y nadie más las va a utilizar. Que se sigan utilizando lo más posible. Y quizás una de las maneras de hacerlo es de que. Se sigan enseñando en la escuela. Ahora que en nuestra comunidad hay programas de música. Que se permita el. El incluir, el incluir este tipo de canciones en tradicionales, populares o folclóricas que son parte de nuestra cultura hispana, que se permita incluirlas dentro del currículo que se enseña en las escuelas, para que los niños vayan aprendiendo lo que muchas veces los padres no han podido enseñarles.*
>
> (As my sister used to say, they are songs that are well written. This is a…they are very rhythmic. They are very rhythmic. They are easy to remember. They are poems, they are

written poems and they are very easy to remember because they stick in our minds and despite the fact that they have been years, that we play them even more, when we immediately hear the lyrics, they come to mind. The words come to mind. So, this is important that they continue to spread so that they are learned, they continue to be passed on as my mother says from generation to generation and what. Stay alive in our culture. That they are not going to be lost and are part of history, nothing more than that they are going to be archived and saved there and nobody else is going to use them. Keep using them as much as possible. And maybe one of the ways to do it is that. They continue to be taught in school. Now that there are music programs in our community. Let him allow himself. Including, including this type of songs in traditional, popular or folkloric songs that are part of our Hispanic culture, that they be allowed to be included in the curriculum that is taught in schools, so that children learn what parents often do not…or have not been able to teach them.)

Mrs. Treviño expresses her hope that these folk songs continue in various places rather than being shelved for archival access. Her words resonate with me as son, as a citizen, and as an educator as I reflect on my role that invests into this very system that can participate in this avenue beyond arm chair research and provide action as an educator in the front line through the lessons I impart to my students.

Life in the 1940s were historically difficult in different communities across Texas and beyond the Rio Grande Valley border. Providing the scholarship and context to this provides readers a chance to see how these Mexican children's folk songs provided an avenue for solidarity and community. The participant testimony yielded some examples. Such policies while strictly being observed did not stop individuals in Brownsville from singing or playing games in

Spanish. The experiences of these participants, which span beyond 1939, did showcase how these games even across the Rio Grande Valley border existed beyond the school settings and into intimate spaces like the churches, neighborhoods, or relatives' homes.

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the origins of the public school system and the escuelitas system while connecting John A. Lomax's work to this narrative on language preservation. Secondly, I examined the shared experiences of Anna Gomez and Graciela Rodríguez Zuñiga. I discussed schooling on both sides of the border. Thirdly, I discussed Ms. Gomez's elementary school experience and how the public education system disliked Spanish. I also provided testimonial account from Américo Paredes and additional proof from Texas's past indicating that some community members were upset with Spanish-speaking people, strengthening Manuela Longoria's contribution in allowing her students to perform these works in Spanish. Last, I described the participants' experiences by discussing the oral history method and how I structured my interview questions. The participant testimonies share an overarching theme where their role as stewards and active agents in the community provided them a means to secure continuity and to sustain these folk songs. Mrs. Maria Inés Treviño's last quote places the balance of power to other agents who can support the community like educators and acknowledges that even some parents today may in fact not have the time or means to teach them these folk songs discussed in this study.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I discussed the Mexican folk songs that John A. Lomax and family recorded in 1939 and placed them in broader cultural, historical, and musical context. For a century and maybe longer, the songs have played a role in the lives of Mexican Americans in the Rio Grande Valley border region and beyond. Along the Texas/Mexican border, the songs have helped community members claim and celebrate their Mexican heritage while also fostering Spanish fluency in an English-speaking majority nation. The project's oral history component demonstrated that many of these children's folk songs continue to exist in the active memories of my local informants. Through the narratives of Rio Grande Valley's local border residents, we learned that the songs were associated with happiness during times when life may have been fraught with difficulties, thereby fostering community cohesion. John A. Lomax may not have been aware of the social conditions of the locals, but he may have witnessed other social cues across the state and country at the time; perhaps other scholars will investigate Lomax's views soon.

The Mexican children's folk songs that Ms. Longoria and the Brownsville children sang demonstrate how similar we all are. We all want to enjoy each other's company and forget about things that may go wrong in the future, at least some of the time. The song also assists us in preserving the Spanish language. In sum, I assert that the songs recorded by Lomax in 1939 can assist Rio Grande Valley residents in claiming and celebrating a Mexican musical legacy, even if

they were not born in Mexico, and in maintaining a Spanish-speaking identity in an English-speaking majority nation.

Personal Reflection

A question to consider now is how other members of the community—educators, parents, or friends—choose to motivate others to teach and perform these games and songs in order to keep the songs alive and to capture joyous moments in the present. Scholars of the future must continue to innovate, inspire, and create. We must be born storytellers, and we must invest in the channels that will allow structural alterations in the cogs to allow folk tunes to continue in corridors, cafeterias, parks, and elsewhere.

After working in the Rio Grande Valley for nine years, I reflect on my career as an elementary music educator. Critical planning and reflexivity occur on a weekly basis as I continually adapt my lesson plans to fulfill the academic and cultural demands of my students during those forty-five minutes in my class. I am constantly questioning whether I am still faithful to my fundamental aim, which is to assist students finding joy by making music and to have fun myself in the process. Are the pupils engaged in the lesson? How much of the lesson have they retained based on their experiences on that one day, that one 45-minute lesson?

I encourage my students to read and write in both languages, and I never turn down a child who wants to push their literacy in either English or Spanish when undertaking classwork. I appreciate my students' efforts. When I teach the song "Are you sleeping?" or "*Frere Jacques*," for example, I incorporate words in English, French, and Spanish.[10] Speaking various languages

[10] One day when I was shopping, my husband came up to me and told me that he heard students in the store singing "Are you sleeping?" I said, "Really?" and he said, "They were singing it in French. Were you not teaching them that

has the advantage of opening avenues to dialogue with others and creating points of human connection. When we add music as another language, we just harmonize better.

song in your classroom?" I simply smile back. It is experiences like these that keep me in the classroom rather than abandoning my position as an elementary music educator.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Names of Participants

The following individuals were interviewed for this research on the listed dates.

On March 6, 2022, the following individuals were interviewed:
María Inés Treviño
Graciela Z. Rodríguez
María de los Ángeles Rodríguez

On March 14, 2022, the following individuals were interviewed:
María Lourdes de León
María Magdalena Mata

On March 16, 2022, the following individuals were interviewed:
Anna Judith Gomez Trevino
Carlos Arturo Gomez Trevino

On July 18, 2022, the following individual was interviewed:
Delia Saldaña

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Arturo Trevino Jr. began his studies at the University of Texas–Pan American in 2007 as a pre-med chemistry major with aspirations of becoming a pathologist. During his first semester, with the assistance of his voice instructor, Dr. Vivian Munn, he switched to the music department and pursued a degree in music. He earned his Bachelor of Music in Music Education in December 2012. He earned his Masters in Music in Music from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley on December 17, 2022.

Currently employed by Brownsville ISD, he has ten years of experience teaching elementary music from Pre-K3 to 5th grade. The rigors of his graduate studies necessitated his participation in community service, where he served as the campus DEIC representative and the SBDM representative for his team. In July of 2018, Arturo was intrigued by the Kodaly pedagogical method and enrolled in level 1. Since the epidemic, Arturo has been developing lessons, integrating approaches, and sharing his experiences by publishing personal poems and research pieces on websites such as Music ConstructED. He can be reached at 1744 W. Washington Street, Brownsville, Texas 78520 or at atrevino55@gmail.com.