

Unraveling State-Sanctioned Gender Roles and Reclaiming Histories:

Alura Flores de Angeles' *Jarabe Tapatío*

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Abstract: Alura Flores de Angeles, “Godmother of Mexican Dance” (1905—2000), narrated a romantic love story whenever she taught the national dance of Mexico called the *Jarabe Tapatío*. I delve into oral, written, and bodily renderings of this love story to reveal the ways in which this dance encourages traditional gender role adherence as sanctioned by the nation. I also assert that performances of *Jarabe Tapatío* tell how some women in 1920s and 1930s Mexico navigated conflicting gender norm messages that pressured women to promote traditional gender roles to benefit the workings of a patriarchal government intent on promoting national unity.

Keywords: gender, folklórico, *Jarabe Tapatío*, Alura Flores de Angeles, Mexico

As I sorted through the stacks of papers, I quietly wiped a tear from my eye. My aunt, Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter, former dance professor at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and my inspiration had unexpectedly passed away. I was tasked with helping to clean out her home. Among the documents was a manilla folder with the name Alura Flores de Angeles written in pencil. I shouted in glee. My sadness momentarily passed as I looked through the folder. Included were photographs, programs, personal notes, and newspaper clippings all related to

Flores de Angeles “Godmother of Mexican Dance” (1905—2000).^{*} As I held a photograph of Flores de Angeles in my hand, I remembered the love story that informs the *Jarabe Tapatío*, the national dance of Mexico. The *Jarabe Tapatío* is famous for a part in the dance where the Charro, or Mexican cowboy, throws his hat on the floor and he and the China Poblana, the Mexicana, dance around it.¹ According to Flores de Angeles, as she described in *Real Mexico* magazine, the legend of the China Poblana tells of a princess from China who was kidnapped and sent to live in Mexico. She lived in Puebla as a servant and embroidered a beautiful skirt with Chinese motifs that reminded her of her home country. The outfit would become known as the China Poblana. The word “China” signals her Chinese heritage and “Poblana” indicates that she lived in the state of Puebla.

In 2011, I was fortunate to interview Nelda Drury Guerrero (1918—2019) and Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter (1942—2016), two women who studied under Flores de Angeles, before their passing. Drury first met Flores de Angeles in 1939 when she took classes at the Summer School

^{*} In articles published on March 8, 1979, in the *Austin American Statesman* entitled “Ballet Folklorico, Costume Display, Lecture Set” by an unknown author and on February 27, 1979, in the *Daily Texan* entitled “Grand Mama of Mexican Folk Dance to Conduct Dance Symposium” by Frank Harris, Martínez-Hunter refers to Flores de Angeles as the “Grandmother” or “Grand Mama” of the “educational aspect of Mexican dance.” I have kept the title “Godmother of Mexican Dance” as I remember it told to me repeatedly over many years by Martínez-Hunter and as a way of recognizing that some nicknames change over time.

program of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, (UNAM) in Mexico City.[†] She continued traveling to Mexico every summer and became a lifelong friend of Flores de Angeles. Drury was a dance professor for many years at San Antonio College.² Martínez-Hunter, my aunt, met Flores de Angeles as a teenager in the 1950s when the Pan American Round Table in Laredo, Texas, invited Flores de Angeles to present her Mexican traditional costume collection. Martínez-Hunter modeled one of these costumes. Later, Martínez-Hunter was employed as a dance professor at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). She started El Grupo de Danza y Arte Folklórico de la Universidad de Tejas en Austin (UT Ballet Folklórico) in 1975. Martínez-Hunter invited Flores de Angeles to teach workshops and lecture at UT in 1979, 1982, and 1988.³

The love story behind the *Jarabe Tapatío* was written by Flores de Angeles in the 1930s and published in Mexico in the bilingual magazine called *Real Mexico*.^{4 ‡} According to Martínez-Hunter and Drury, when teaching the *Jarabe Tapatío*-, Flores de Angeles would always tell of the love story of the Charro and his romantic conquest of the China Poblana. Furthermore, she would end her concerts with the *Jarabe Tapatío*.⁵ Flores de Angeles taught

[†] The National Autonomous University of Mexico was given this name in 1929. Before this, it was known as the National University of Mexico. In this case, I have chosen to refer to this university using its title as designated after 1929.

[‡] A photocopy of *Real Mexico* magazine was donated by Flores de Angeles to the Society of Folk Dance Historians in Austin, Texas. The article has a handwritten note indicating the April/May issue with an approximate date of 1934.

folklórico for more than fifty years at UNAM's Temporary Courses for Foreign Students.⁶ [§] She also taught *folklórico* at workshops held all over the United States, Mexico, and Europe.⁷ Consequently, evidence of the love story appears in workshop notes written by her American students.

I write to restore Flores de Angeles in the discourse surrounding the *Jarabe Tapatio*. Drawing upon archival sources and oral histories, I invoke the legend of the *Jarabe Tapatio* as articulated through the spoken word and bodily memories of Flores de Angeles. I also draw upon materials from the primarily American students she taught at UNAM and still others in workshops in the United States. I use these means to analyze the traditional gender role depictions of this dance in early twentieth-century Mexico. I write of the *Jarabe Tapatio* using the perspective of a *folclorista*-, or one who is engaged in the research, study, teaching, and performance of *folklórico*-, having taught for more than thirty years.**

I begin this article by historically situating the life of Flores de Angeles in 1920s and 1930s Mexico in order to analyze the ways in which her life intersected with the tenets of

[§] I note that there is a slight discrepancy in the name of the program at UNAM. In an interview conducted by Ron Houston in 1976, - Flores de Angeles indicates that the program is entitled Temporary Courses for Foreign Students, while in her interview with scholars Gabriela Cano and Verena Radkau, she calls it the Center for Studies for Foreign Students. I have decided to refer to this program as the Temporary Courses for Foreign Students as I heard her tell Houston.

** In Spanish, the term is spelled *folclorista*. I purposely spell it *folclorista* using the letter "k," which combines both the English and Spanish spellings to acknowledge my Chicana heritage.

cultural nationalism as advocated by the Mexican government. I undertake a choreographic analysis of the *Jarabe Tapatío* as taught by Flores de Angeles using archival footage of my aunt Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter and her student Roy Lozano performing in the 1970s. I analyze the dance movements of this rendition of the *Jarabe Tapatío* to explain how the love story as told by Flores de Angeles unfolds. I explain the traditional gender role expectations of men and women in 1930s Mexico and analyze how a performance of the *Jarabe Tapatío* bodily invokes these traditional gender roles. Then, I explore the mixed messages espoused by the government to women in 1920s and 1930s Mexico concerning adherence to traditional gender roles and discuss how many women thwarted the expectations of traditional gender roles while revealing the consequences of such actions. Furthermore, I discuss the creation of a “new” romantic version of the *Jarabe Tapatío* in 1930s Mexico, as well as its same sex portrayal by sisters Gloria and Nellie Campobello to demonstrate the dominance of Flores de Angeles’ heteronormative storyline. I argue that bodily renderings of the *Jarabe Tapatío* as taught by Alura Flores de Angeles not only tell the love story of the Charro and China Poblana but also reify state-sanctioned traditional gender roles, revealing how 1920s and 1930s Mexican women, - such as Flores de Angeles responded to conflicting gender norm messages that pressured women to promote traditional gender roles in order to benefit the working of a patriarchal government in the name of national unity.

Poetry, Athletics, and Folklorico: The Early Life of Alura Flores de Angeles

I now contextualize the life of Flores de Angeles in 1920s and 1930s Mexico to demonstrate the many ways in which her professional career choices intersected with the sociopolitical climate of that era. Flores de Angeles was born in 1905 in the Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.⁸ Her

childhood was marked by Mexico's Revolutionary War (1910—1920), which began when the middle class and peasants overthrew President Porfirio Díaz's government (1877—1880, 1884—1911) from power. Many sought agrarian reforms and opposed the abuses of the state.⁹ Some in the middle and upper classes wanted the government to abide by Mexico's liberal constitution of 1857 and stop the domination of one powerful political party.¹⁰ Flores de Angeles recounts stories from her childhood during the war. By the time she was fifteen years old, the Mexican Revolution had ended.

As a teenager, Flores de Angeles was enrolled in the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in San Ildelfonso from 1920—1924. Flores de Angeles described this period as one of the happiest times of her life, especially because she discovered sports as a profession and as a passion. She was a member of one of Mexico's first all-women's swim teams, volleyball teams, and basketball teams. She described herself as a star athlete who led her basketball team to victory by securing a national championship in 1924. She spoke proudly of her graduating class, indicating that many became very successful in Mexico's politics, educational system, business, and arts. In high school, Flores de Angeles also developed an interest in literature and a passion for poetic recitation. Flores began reciting poetry in 1923 and, in 1924, enrolled in an academy for poetic recitation led by Manuel Bernal, who was one of her high school classmates.¹¹ According to the printed program entitled "50 Veranos, Alura Flores de Angeles," she earned the title Professor of Declamation from the Academy of Manuel Bernal. Flores de Angeles went on to recite poetry, as she put it, "in all theatres in Mexico" and taught this art form to upper-class students whom she would help coach to earn national championships.¹²

During this time, José Vasconcelos served as the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) from 1920—1924. Vasconcelos initiated a cultural nationalist movement throughout Mexico designed

to unify the country culturally through education and the arts. He and members of the government in the 1920s utilized cultural nationalism to validate the economic and public policies of the state.¹³ In Mexico, artistic works, objects, and symbols were transformed to represent an educational ideology and an official history of the nation.¹⁴ Most importantly, Vasconcelos devised Mexico's educational curriculum so that physical education was taught alongside art and music. Thus, physical education teachers were trained to teach sports, as well as dance.¹⁵ Furthermore, Vasconcelos states that he is responsible for including the *Jarabe Tapatio* within the educational curriculum. He bragged, "Y en las escuelas entró no sólo el canto popular, también el baile nacional" (Not only popular songs permeated public schools but the teaching and performance of the National dance).¹⁶ ††

After graduating from high school in 1924, Flores de Angeles enrolled at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) majoring in physical education. She took courses designed to fulfill requirements to earn a degree in physical education such as rhythmic gymnastics, calisthenics, and sports and occupied herself in athletics. Flores de Angeles remarked that learning folklórico dances was part of the curriculum of the physical education degree.¹⁷ She earned her degree in 1927. Flores de Angeles graduated from college in Mexico at a time when few people even received an elementary education, much less women.

†† All translations are my own.

In either 1928 or the early 1930s, Flores de Angeles accepted the job as a physical education teacher in Mexico's Cultural Missions.¹⁸ ‡ The Cultural Missions program was developed by Vasconcelos as a way to encourage cultural nationalism. Here, a team of educators was sent to rural areas of Mexico to train rural teachers and incorporate indigenous and peasant communities into the national culture. Mexican educators believed this was necessary to construct a unified nation.¹⁹

Flores de Angeles describes this experience to Folklorist Ron Houston in an interview in 1976,

I made my specialty dancing first because the Board of Education gave me the commission to go in what they call the missions. These missions went to the little towns of the Republic, in the different states of the Republic. This group of missionaries where we had one P. E. teacher or dancing teacher, a doctor, a nurse, a normal teacher for what you call normal school, an artist, and a musician. So, we can go into the small towns and learn about the culture of these people and live among them. For a period of several weeks and a couple of months, until we learned about the dances. Try to help them with health. Give them advice to have a healthy life and better way of living. I did this kind of work for several years. But it requires a great deal of energy and health. Because you have to go into areas with malaria, no potable water. A very primitive way of living. You have to have a great deal of health and energy.²⁰

‡ Flores de Angeles wrote in *International Folk Dancing U.S.A.* that she began working in the Cultural Missions in 1928. Yet, Gabriela Cano and Verena Radkau indicate that she began working in the Cultural Missions in the early 1930's.

Dance served an important function in the Cultural Missions because physical education teachers investigated the traditional dances as performed in rural communities and taught them throughout Mexico, especially within the public school system, in the educational system for the teaching of professional dancers, and in staging of spectacular productions.²¹ According to Alberto Dallal in *La danza moderna en México*, these physical education teachers strove to teach “authentic” dances as performed in rural communities, which places a limit on their creativity. He postulates that in the 1920s and early 1930s the creation of original choreographic works utilizing nationalistic themes was left up to the ballet teachers.²²

As a cultural missionary, Flores de Angeles worked in the rural areas of Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. She is famous for having staged the dance called *El Bolonchón*, which she collected as a Cultural Missions teacher when living in Chiapas, Mexico.²³ Flores de Angeles found this lifestyle challenging: “So, I quit doing that and began teaching in the schools in Mexico as a physical education teacher. I began teaching in grammar schools, junior high, university and taught in all the schools in Mexico. I began as a regular teacher, then department head, then supervisor.”²⁴

In 1929, the United States stock market collapsed, and the country entered the Great Depression. This event affected the economies of many countries around the world. In Mexico, some began to distrust capitalism and instead promote a socialist approach to government which ignited political debates.²⁵ However, 1924—1934 is known as the *Maximato* period in which the Mexican government continued the policies of cultural nationalism espoused by Vasconcelos.²⁶ During this time, Flores de Angeles began teaching folklórico dance in 1932 at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.²⁷ She says of this experience, “I have been researching all the time. Always researching, taking special courses and lectures so I can be up to interpret the

dances of my country.”²⁸ In either 1934 or 1935, Flores de Angeles wrote of the love story encompassing the *Jarabe Tapatío* in *Real Mexico* magazine, illustrating the traditional gender roles of Mexican men and women in performance.

Later in life, Flores de Angeles would go on to excel in the three aspects of her professional life that she held closest to her heart: poetry, athletics, and folklórico. She was renowned for her poetic recitation; coached winning volleyball teams placing no less than third in six national championships; accompanied the Mexican Olympic team in Rome, Japan, Mexico, Munich, and Canada as an observer; organized a folk-dance camp held biannually in Oaxtepec, Mexico; directed the Yolo Xochitl dance group at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM); and was commissioned in 1977 by the National Federation of Charros in Mexico to present a folklórico dance program in Spain before the King and Queen. She also taught folklórico workshops in the European cities of Stuttgart, Hamburg, Berlin, Zurich, and Vienna; at Folk Dance Camps in Texas and California; and at three-week workshops with UNAM’s campus in San Antonio, Texas, for over twenty years (Flores de Angeles and Houston 2000, 201-202; “Three-Day Mexican Dance Symposium Begins Monday;” “Around Campus”). In 1979, Representative Gonzalo Barrientos declared March 9, 1979, as “Alura Flores Day” at the Texas capital to commemorate all her achievements (Houston, 2017, 249-257, Martínez-Hunter Personal Collection). Flores de Angeles taught the *Jarabe Tapatío* wherever she went.

State-Sanctioned Embodiment of Gender within the *Jarabe Tapatío*

I now explain the traditional gender roles of 1930s Mexico to demonstrate how the Charro and China Poblana portrayed these roles in their performance of Flores de Angeles’ love story. The physical movements of the Charro dancing signal the types of traditional male gender roles that

Mexican male citizens were supposed to enact in the 1930s. To characterize traditional Mexican male gender roles, scholars have invoked the concept of *machismo*, a manifestation of the patriarchal system in which men institutionalize superiority over women.²⁹ In “The United States, Mexico, and Machismo,” folklorist Americo Paredes states that machismo was not evident in folklore until after the Mexican Revolution (1900-1920) or until the 1930s.³⁰ Paredes argues that machismo was a result of “a growing feeling of nationalism accompanied by sentiments of distrust and inferiority toward outsiders, particularly toward the United States.”³¹ Paredes locates machismo as deriving from the sociopolitical climate between the United States and Mexico, for others, machismo is thought to be a result of Mexico’s history of domination and conquest. In “Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro,” Olga Nájera-Ramírez traces these paternalistic attitude to the Charro to the hacienda system that unified men regardless of social class in their domination of women.³² In this vein of thinking, many men’s feelings of political and economic insecurity were rationalized by the knowledge that they were in control of their women at home.³³

Mexican writer/poet Octavio Paz argues that “the Mexican views life as a combat.”³⁴ The macho man does not “back down,” is defensive, and is ready to fight any battle.³⁵ Scholars also note machismo as a concept used to denote and explain hyper-masculine males who act with command, control, power, and the concealment of “feminine” emotions through acts of drunkenness, violence, etc. Machismo is also associated with positive traits such as respect, bravery, and family accountability.³⁶ Evidence of these traits is prominent in Mexican films featuring the Charro in the 1930s and 1940s. Nájera-Ramírez argues that Mexican films depicted the Charro as the “true Mexican” because he defended his country and family. She argues that in

these films the negative aspects of machismo are tolerated, accepted, and even valued by some because the Charro demonstrates positive, endearing qualities.³⁷

The physical movements of the China Poblana's dancing body are indicative of the types of traditional female gender role fulfillment that were expected of dutiful Mexican women in the early twentieth century. The female counterpart to the concept of machismo is *marianismo* or "good woman" as described by Paz and Chicana poet/writer Gloria Anzaldúa.³⁸ According to Anzaldúa, the "good woman" (*marianismo*) is characterized as being kind, morally pure, and submissive.³⁹ Men are seen as spiritually weaker than women.⁴⁰ The term and concept of *marianismo* is synonymous with the Virgin Mary recognized as a suffering, sinless mother who embodies family values. On the other hand, *malinchismo* or the "bad woman" as described by Paz and Anzaldúa is the term based upon the name of Hernán Cortés' Indigenous mistress, La Malinche. Mexican history vilified her for helping to defeat the Aztec empire. Yet, her *mestizo* (Spanish and Indigenous) child is the symbolic face of modern, mestizo Mexico.⁴¹ *Malinchismo* characterizes women who have failed to live up to the ideals of moral purity and virtue.⁴² The China Poblana embodies the submissive, virtuous traits of *marianismo* while rejecting *malinchismo*. By the 1930s the China Poblana was recognized as the classic stereotype of the Mexican woman as determined by writers, poets, politicians, journalist, and the public.⁴³

Embodying Flores de Angeles' Love Story surrounding the *Jarabe Tapatío*

I base the following choreographic analysis upon archival footage of Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter and her student Roy Lozano dancing Flores de Angeles' version of the *Jarabe Tapatío* in the 1970s, my own bodily remembering's of the *Jarabe Tapatío* as passed on to me from my teacher Roy Lozano, notations of the *Jarabe Tapatío* by Houston, as well as the textual explanation from Flores de Angeles written in 1930s Mexico. I must note that the *Jarabe Tapatío*

is musically accompanied by Mariachi musicians. The *Jarabe Tapatío* is comprised of a potpourri of different *sones* (melodies) representing different regions of Mexico. These *sones* are from the *el bajío* (lowlands) region of Mexico which includes the states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco, Aguascalientes, and Querétaro.⁴⁴ During the 1920s the culture, customs, and figures of the *bajío* region of Mexico was used to represent the cultural diversity of the nation. The *sones* of the *bajío* region that comprise the melody of the *Jarabe Tapatío* and the iconic figures such as the Charro are derived from this region. The music, song, and dance of the *bajío* region best exemplified the imaginings of rural *pueblo* as invoked by 1920s post-revolutionary sentiment.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Charro performs wearing a wide-brimmed hat, jacket, vest, and pants adorned with embroidery or *botonadura* (metal, decorative buttons). The China Poblana puts ribbons in her braids and ties the ends to make two loops on either side of her head. She wears a traditional embroidered blouse and an A-lined skirt with sequins of Mexican nationalistic symbols. She wears red, white, and green colors which are the colors of the Mexican flag. When they dance, the couple move their feet using synchronized, percussive footwork called *zapateado*. It is the sounds of the *zapateado* that underline the entire love story of the *Jarabe Tapatío*. So, I begin recounting the love story of the *Jarabe Tapatío*.

Charro Rides on His Horse

Pressing play on my computer screen, I see Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter and Roy Lozano hold hands and run towards the center of the studio set. Martínez-Hunter wears the costume of the China Poblana and represents the ideal, virtuous Mexican woman. Lozano wears that of the Charro and, symbolizes the ideal Mexican man. As they rush, the music begins with the sounds of the trumpet. Then, the Charro uses his right hand to turn the China Poblana in place. They

dance facing each other. The announcer says, “the *Jarabe Tapatío*,” the national dance of Mexico.” The words *Jarabe Tapatío* appear at the bottom of the screen. Martínez-Hunter gently pinches either side of her skirt with her thumb and forefingers to hold it in place. Lozano smiles as he dances, holding both his hands behind his back, his left palm covering his right fist. The sounds of trumpets and string instruments fill the air as the music begins in an upbeat and fast-paced fashion.

As they continue to face each other, the couple moves side to side using the jarabe footwork movements. They perform in unison, smiling and flirting with each other. The Charro’s torso is bent slightly forward. As they dance, their footwork patterns resemble the sounds of a galloping horse. Flores de Angeles says that the Charro is on horseback, riding to visit the China Poblana. They dance with their feet together in unison, as the couple meets face to face, glancing at each other’s eyes, while gently moving their torsos towards each other. The China Poblana and the Charro flirt boldly smiling broadly at each other.

Charro Knocks on the Door

With the beat of the music, their footwork changes to resemble the sounds of a sharp knock at the door. Flores de Angeles describes the Charro knocking on the China Poblana’s front door wanting to call on her. Unfortunately, no one is home.

Charro Takes his Horse out of the Stable

The couple slowly circles around each other, their jarabe footwork imitates the sounds of horses’ hooves. Flores de Angeles indicates that it is the Charro taking his horse out of the stable.

Charro and China Poblana Flirt

Along the way, the Charro and the China Poblana happen to meet each other. They kick their legs one at a time in the air in front of their bodies and quickly turn to the left and right. Traveling with these kicks and turns, they make a straight path, crossing each other. As they cross, the two briefly dance closer, then pull away from each other, flirting as Flores de Angeles tells it.

Brazenly, the Charro sets out to romantically conquer the China Poblana.

I argue that the physical movements of the Charro dancing the *Jarabe Tapatio* serve as a bodily archive that demonstrates positive and negative aspects of machismo. The Charro expresses traits of machismo through the strength of his footwork. He stomps louder and with more force than the China Poblana. In addition, the Charro's body posture is assertive, and his footwork and body movements are more exaggerated than that of the China Poblana. The Charro's masculinity is further proven through his flirtations, kisses, and *gritos* (joyful shouts) directed at a woman.

Meanwhile, I argue that the China Poblana embodies the gender constructions of marianismo in the *Jarabe Tapatio* through flirty, coquettish femininity that she uses to attract the Charro's interest. Nájera-Ramírez writes of this interaction,

In the dances, ... the theme of "masculinity" appeared in romantic terms, with the male pursuing and ultimately capturing the woman. In such representations the man assumed the role of aggressor, particularly with respect to male-female relationships. While the woman flirted seductively, only the male made the first overt move towards establishing a relationship.⁴⁶

In the *Jarabe Tapatio*, the China Poblana is indeed the center of attraction. Her passive sexuality is evident in that she does not ever initiate a romantic relationship with the Charro but merely responds to his romantic advances by flirting.

A Drunken and Rejected Charro

The China Poblana remains aloof. A close analysis of the footwork movements reveals that something is awry. The couple now dances moving towards each other; their torsos rock gently side to side accompanied by footwork that is designed to depict the slow meanderings of a drunken man. In fact, this movement is called *el borracho*, or the drunkard. As told by Flores de Angeles, the China Poblana refused the Charro's advances. The Charro is deeply distressed at this rejection, so much so that his response is to drink a bottle of tequila to drown his sorrows. Both the Charro and the China Poblana perform the drunkard step even though the woman does not get drunk. The couple performs the *mecedora* (rocking chair) also known as the *quebrada* (broken) footwork. Here, each place one foot forward bent at the ankle, while the body weight remains on the opposing foot. Then, they alternate feet. They perform the rocking chair step as the couple moves away from each other.

Machismo can be extremely problematic when, as shown in the *Jarabe Tapatio*, the Charro's actions disempower the China Poblana. The Charro seeks the love of the China Poblana, and after he begins flirting with her, she responds by flirting back. Then, however, the China Poblana refuses the Charro's romantic advances. In response to this refusal, the Charro gets drunk on a bottle of tequila, signaled by the footwork patterns resembling a drunken man. The Charro's response is typical of most meanings of the term machismo, where machismo

manifests itself in abuses to the physical body, such as sexual incidents, drunkenness, and dare-devil antics.⁴⁷

Sobering up the Charro

It is evident that the virtuous China Poblana will not allow herself to be so easily conquered by the Charro. It appears that nothing is amiss since their playful flirting conceals the Charro's drunken state. According to Flores de Angeles, the China Poblana is worried that her father might see the Charro inebriated, so she tries to sober him up by giving him some tea. The acoustic footwork movements called the *hojas de té* or tea leaves conjure sounds of tea being served while the Charro continues his pursuit of the China Poblana.

Further, the China Poblana's benevolence and submissive qualities are visible in this dance when she sobers up the Charro by dancing the tea leaves sequence with him. Through this footwork the China Poblana accepts the Charro with all his masculine weaknesses. In the *Jarabe Tapatio*, the China Poblana is obligated to sober up the Charro and accept his love. I note the ways in which the Charro's bodily desire to conquer the China Poblana set up an oppressive force of sexual coercion in which the China Poblana is expected to acquiesce to his desires no matter how he responds to her refusal. Thus, drunkenness as evidenced in the dancing body is an acceptable form of sexual coercion designed to persuade the China Poblana of the Charro's desirable masculine traits.

Flirting Continues

Then, the animated music of the jarabe called "El Palomo" ("The Dove") begins. Here, the couple flirts by imitating doves courting. Next, the China Poblana gently holds her skirt in place on either side while the Charro with ever-increasing confidence briefly, chases after her. The

couple resumes flirting, kicking their feet in the air and travelling away and towards each other. Here, the Charro chases after the China Poblana in a circle, but she successfully eludes captivity.

Love Me, Love Me Not?

As Flores de Angeles tells it, the Charro wonders if he has won the affection of the China Poblana. Wanting an answer, the Charro offers his hat to the China Poblana by placing it on the floor. This signals that the Charro is asking if the China Poblana will accept his love. She modestly smiles. The two dance around either side of the hat as they travel in opposite directions. The Charro extends his leg outwards, while traveling with the opposing foot. Meanwhile, the China Poblana continues with the mecedora step. Then, the music slows. The China Poblana briefly squats and bows her head. She then reaches to grasp the top of the hat lying on the floor.

She Loves Me!

The Charro notices that the China Poblana has grabbed his hat from the floor. Joyfully, the Charro kicks his right leg over the kneeling China Poblana and then twirls in place. The conquest of China Poblana by the Charro is evidenced during the section of the dance called *La Cócona* wherein the Charro kicks his leg over the kneeling China Poblana to symbolize his conquest of her.⁴⁸ Then, the China Poblana picks up the Charro's hat signifying the acceptance of his romantic courtship. The Charro offers the China Poblana his right hand to help her up off the floor. Holding the *sombrero*, (hat), she positions it so that it touches the right side of her head as if ready to wear it. The Charro realizes that this means that he has succeeded in winning her affection.

A Victory Celebration

The couple turns to face the audience for the first time. Now, they joyously perform to a famous jarabe entitled “La Diana” which signifies the Charro’s successful conquest of the China Poblana.⁴⁹ “La Diana” is military tune and a congratulatory song played at celebrations. They walk forward and backwards together; the China Poblana’s left hand holds the Charro’s right as they move in a precise, military formation. Their legs travel in perfect unison as the couple points, stomps, and kicks their feet followed by a pushing of heels outward. I note that the Charro’s celebration of his conquest of the China Poblana effectively reinforces his masculinity. In addition, this celebratory ending signifies the mutual acceptance and re-confirmation of male/female power relationships.

A Marriage Proposal

The *Jarabe Tapatío* ends with a kiss in which the China Poblana turns and hides her face behind the Charro’s sombrero.⁵⁰ §§ In her love narrative, Flores de Angeles reads the kiss at the end of the dance as a signal for an engagement to marry.⁵¹ *** I postulate that the Charro shows bodily

§§ Houston’s notated score instructs practitioners that they can end the performance of the *Jarabe Tapatío* with the Charro kneeling as if proposing, while the China Poblana poses by placing her foot on the Charro’s knee. She holds the Charro’s hand while her left hand displays his hat over her head. Or the *Jarabe Tapatío* could end with the couple hiding behind the hat and kissing. These are also the two different endings that I have seen practitioners perform.

*** I notice a few slight differences between the 1930s version and the notated score. In the 1930s version, the China Poblana does not try to sober up the Charro. Instead, she finds him “touching” and resumes flirting. Also, in this version the China Poblana accepts the Charro’s love by

evidence of valuing family responsibility since he becomes engaged to the China Poblana at the end of the dance through their final kiss. In this regard, the Charro, while dancing the *Jarabe Tapatio*, does indeed display evidence of honor, and family esteem. Mexico, a predominately Catholic country, would not encourage sex before marriage. In this regard, the engagement kiss points to the China Poblana's moral purity.

The China Poblana's marianista ideal can be very problematic because it limits women to a very particular role: submission to men. Adherence to the marianismo/malinchismo doctrine leaves women with the dilemma of choosing to identify as either a virgin or a "whore" without any other alternatives.⁵² Norma Alarcón, in "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'the' Native Woman" postulates that patriarchy erases and excludes raced women from participation in the cultural and political economy. Alarcón describes the complexities of this scenario through which historical images of the Indigenous woman operate in a good-versus-evil dichotomy or marianismo vs. malinchismo. She notes the irony through which the construction of mestizo identity entails the rejection and denial of La Malinche who represents the dark, Indigenous mother while at the same time nationally representing her role in the creation of the fatherland.

In addition, the dancing body of the China Poblana figure aptly demonstrates that the only method for women to legitimize their position is to ascribe to the rules of patriarchy which entails marrying a man and bearing children. This reality, as Alarcón notes, truly complicates the multiple negations and rejections experienced by women.⁵³ I argue that the characterization of the China Poblana along the same lines as the Virgin of Guadalupe advises women that they dancing on the brim of the hat while in the notated score the dancers pick up the hat and put it on her head.

should subscribe to traditional female gender roles to secure a husband's protection through marriage. Still prevalent in the twenty-first century, discursive consideration of the *Jarabe Tapatio* as the "official" dance of Mexico cements, idealizes, and reinforces the usage of traditional gender roles by both men and women.

In addition, the bodily movements of the China Poblana reveal the manner in which women are taught to pursue romantic relationships. For the China Poblana, as evidenced in her responses, passivity is the key rather than instigation of romance. The China Poblana instructs women to "play hard to get." Thus, the China Poblana mercilessly toys with the affections of the Charro using feigned shyness and flirtation as sexual tools. This is evident in the two sections of the *Jarabe Tapatio* where Flores de Angeles notes that the couple flirts. In both sections the China Poblana and the Charro flirt with each other by dancing away from each other and then towards each other bodily demonstrating that the China Poblana is teasing the Charro. She then pretends to be uninterested in the Charro's affections and rebuffs his romantic desires. Through her footwork movements, the China Poblana tells women to accept men's drunkenness and tantrums as part of their masculinity. Here, the China Poblana has some agency in the process because she has the power to prolong or shorten the romantic relationship. However, by the end of the dance the China Poblana always accepts the love of the Charro no matter what hurtful actions were undertaken. The China Poblana's dancing body instructs women to engage in the marianista ideal, adopt feminine passivity, and play romantic games so that these actions will lead to the goal of marriage and family.

Reinterpreting and Reinscribing Women's Gender Roles in 1920s-1930s Mexico

Although Flores de Angeles disseminated the gendered love story of the *Jarabe Tapatio*, she did not abide by traditional gender roles in her own life. Flores de Angeles was college educated, and she worked outside the home for her entire adult life. Furthermore, in 1930s Mexico physical education was a profession dominated by men. Flores de Angeles quickly realized that men did not approve of successful women coaches with winning sports teams. She describes battling sex discrimination in the workplace.⁵⁴ However, she was also a teacher which was an acceptable profession for women, and she remained married throughout most of her adult life. So, why did Flores de Angeles teach the gendered love story of the *Jarabe Tapatio*?

Writings by Nikki Craske in “Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Making the Nation: Women and Politics in 20th Century Mexico” provides a clue as to why some women such as Flores de Angeles disseminated traditional gender roles when they did not abide by them. Craske delves into state support of women in the nation building projects of Mexico during the early and late twentieth century. Craske postulates that women were expected to both adhere to traditional gender roles and to encourage political change.⁵⁵ I argue that like many women of her era, Flores de Angeles was caught in a bind. I suggest that one way in which Flores de Angeles fulfilled the dual expectations that Craske identifies was to continue the bodily and oral transmission of the traditional gender roles espoused in a performance of the *Jarabe Tapatio*. Meanwhile, in her own life, Flores de Angeles utilized her education, social standings, and talent to advance her own career objectives.

In her writings, Craske also argues that during the early part of twentieth-century Mexico, the state was “inward looking, economically protectionist, and corporatist.”⁵⁶ Craske argues that the image of a woman as a “self-sacrificing mother” was a nationalistic tool designed to undermine political change. During this time, women were given paradoxical messages. They were expected

to abide by traditional gender roles and to encourage political transformation.⁵⁷ Unmarried, chaste Mexican women were encouraged to pursue the teaching profession although motherhood was still regarded as the ideal norm.⁵⁸ Men had the power to define and control womanhood. After the Mexican Revolution, male leaders expected women to subscribe to traditional gender roles and serve as moral guides for the nation. The education of women was promoted so that women could learn to be “wives to the nation.”⁵⁹ Although, women during this time did not receive the right to vote, they were given a variety of rights as stipulated in the Family Relations Act of 1917. Women were given the right of equality within their homes, the right to raise their children, and to manage family possessions. They could own property and could work under contract. Divorce was also legalized. These new rights were given to guard traditional gender roles so that women could remain a central force in the domestic sphere. However, Craske argues, that “although remaining subjects of the private, the fact that they had individual rights within the home was a radical break with the past and a partial recognition of women’s socio-economic citizenship.”⁶⁰

Due in part to the efforts of Mexican feminists, in 1927 the government revised the civil code. This revision served to equalize the civil liberties of the sexes and to protect the rights of married women. Here, legal reforms made in the Law of Family Relations Act were implemented, which enabled women to practice law, protected single women by allowing them the right to leave their parental home at the same age as men, and steadied the marriage contract by requiring both parties before a civil ceremony to indicate whether the couple would administer their property jointly or separately.⁶¹ In *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*, Anna Mácias argues that, although this was a big achievement for many women in Mexico, these reforms did little to help the lives of impoverished women throughout the

country. Middle- and upper-class women benefitted the most from these types of reforms. In addition, women were still not afforded the right to vote or hold office.⁶²

Anne Rubenstein in “The War on *Las Pelonas*: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924,” writes of the modernization of women’s clothing and attire. During the early 1920s, the term Pelonas (bald women) was used to describe women who wore a flapper dresses, cosmetics, and the fashionable short hair styles known as “the bob.” This style was in vogue for young, unmarried women of high society and was just beginning to be used by poor, dark-skinned, lower-class women. Rubenstein recounts that there was a tremendous amount of disapproval of this new look articulated as operating against traditional Mexican values. She argues that short, bobbed hair symbolized the masculinization of women and the growing influence of Western modernization.⁶³ Even period writer Carlos Rincón Gallardo in *El Charro Mexicano* wrote “*Eso de ver chinas con peinados ‘a la Bob’ con miriñaques y hasta zapatos de ‘dernier cri’ es muy gran impropiedad.*” (“This business of seeing *China Poblana*s with bob hairstyles, wearing hoop skirts, and even ‘dernier cri’ shoes is very improper”).⁶⁴ Here, Gallardo is protesting the use of the bob hairstyle and fashionable shoes as a form of Western modernization of the costume of the *China Poblana*.

Eventually, opposition took the form of violence directed at the pelonas in Mexico City in 1924. Male preparatory and medical students grabbed young pelonas from outside their schools. They then washed and shaved their heads. Eventually, the perpetrators involved were disciplined, and the violent acts subsided. This uproar over the short hair style coincided with state policies that increasingly employed women in arts and sports. For instance, In Mexico City, hundreds of women such as Flores de Angeles trained to be physical education teachers in a program of study newly developed by the state. Further, women attended recently integrated preparatory, normal,

and vocational schools.⁶⁵ Rubenstein argues that the reaction against the short hair of the *pelonas* was a response to the changes in the national educational system that included women in greater numbers. The *pelonas* with their short hair and entry into education challenged the subordination of women typical of traditional gender roles.⁶⁶

According to theorist Temma Kaplan, during the aftermath of revolutions, governments seek to reclaim control over society by idealizing masculinity.⁶⁷ As with female gender roles, masculinity in post-revolutionary Mexico was constructed alongside revolutionary patriotism and given nationalistic ideals.⁶⁸ Throughout the Mexican revolution (1910—1920), many *soldaderas* (women soldiers) fought in battle alongside men. However, at the conclusion of the revolution, most *soldaderas* returned to the traditional gender roles assigned to them by society.⁶⁹ Kaplan argues that as long as masculinity remained unopposed, men and women could have some leeway in traditional gender roles.⁷⁰ For instance, it was unacceptable for *soldaderas* to remain in the military because their actions threatened masculinity. Yet, women of all classes prepared strikes, organized suffragist campaigns, and led feminist movements. These women quickly learned that when they challenged traditional gender roles, they would be labeled as “*marimacha* a tomboy of dubious sexuality (dyke, or butch in more contemporary parlance).”⁷¹ Kaplan suggests that governments consider homosexuality as a social and political threat, particularly when associated with effeminacy, because it undermined the social order.⁷² It was deeply rejected because it was thought to be a negation of masculinity, a denunciation of revolutionary tenets, and a refutation of national values.⁷³

Clearly, women in early twentieth century Mexico battled conflicting messages concerning adhering to traditional gender roles in their own lives. For example, the traditional gender role depictions of a performance of the *Jarabe Tapatio* remained even in performances of the *Jarabe*

Tapatío performed by female/female couples. Period writer Frances Toor writes of one such performance of the *Jarabe Tapatío*. She argues that the idea of a courtship scenario was introduced by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) in the 1930s. Toor, in “El jarabe antiguo y moderno,” describes the reinvention of the *Jarabe Tapatío* by the SEP and sisters Nellie and Gloria Campobello.

Nellie and Gloria Campobello moved to Mexico City in 1923. They took dance classes with many renown teachers.⁷⁴ Margarita Tortajada Quiroz, in *Frutos de Mujer*, notes that in 1927 the sisters debuted in a ballet group directed by Lettie Carroll. This group was comprised of young women dancers of high society from the United States and England who lived in Mexico City. Tortajada Quiroz suggests that the dancers in this group were the prototype of the modern, independent woman of the 1920s. As part of this dance group, Nellie Campobello interpreted many roles, most especially the masculine roles. Some roles were created for her and other times she improvised them. According to Tortajada Quiroz, Nellie Campobello was chosen to dance male roles due to the lack of men in ballet. Her athletic abilities and her figure make this casting understandable. In 1929, the Campobello sisters decided to depart from Carroll’s dance group and begin performing together on their own. They performed folklórico dances and their own choreographic works with Nellie assuming the role of the man and Gloria the woman. Their choreographies had nationalistic themes that honored their country and were celebrated by intellectuals and artists alike.

By the 1930s, the Campobello sisters were newly hired as teachers in the National Music and Dance Section of the Department of Fine Arts of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Secretary

of Public Education, SEP).^{†††} They also participated in the Cultural Missions.⁷⁵ Toor stated that Carlos Trejo y Lerdo de Tejada, the Sub-Secretary at the time that Toor's journal was published and Secretary of the SEP in 1930, collaborated with Nellie Campobello to create a "new" version of the *Jarabe Tapatío*. Toor argued that the idea to interpret the *Jarabe Tapatío* as a courtship dance came from Lerdo de Tejada. Toor described this new interpretation of the *Jarabe Tapatío*, as follows: "instead of facing each other and dancing around each other in the usual way, the male flirtatiously follows the female throughout the entire dance, apparently courting her until she yields. Then she picks up the sombrero and they dance "La Diana" together."⁷⁶ This account gives credit to Lerdo de Tejada and the Campobello sisters for inventing a "new" courtship scenario in the *Jarabe Tapatío*.⁷⁷

Both the Campobello sisters and Flores de Angeles worked within the SEP operative in the 1930s. Toor's description of the Charro chasing the China Poblana, courting her until she agrees by picking up his hat, and dancing to the military tune "La Diana," corresponds to the love narrative told by Flores de Angeles. In *Real Mexico* magazine, Flores de Angeles writes that the Charro sets out to romantically conquer the China Poblana.⁷⁸ I must note that both renditions of the *Jarabe Tapatío* by Flores de Angeles' and by the Campobello sisters' center around a

^{†††} Flores de Angeles was employed by the SEP as a physical education teacher where she taught folklórico dances alongside sports, while the Campobello sisters were one of the first dance teachers hired by the SEP in a program designed to train dance professionals. Nellie Campobello served as Director of Mexico's National School of Dance for forty-five years and directed the Mexico City Ballet. She was also a poet, author, and choreographer. Gloria Campobello was Mexico's first prima ballerina and taught at Mexico's National School of Dance.

courtship scenario. However, Toor and period writers make no mention of the drunkard sequence that could have been read as part of the romantic chasing in the version by the Campobello sisters. I include the version of the *Jarabe Tapatio* performed by the Campobello sisters in my analysis to demonstrate that this “new” romantic interpretation of the *Jarabe Tapatio* espoused by the SEP aligns with the conquest narrative taught by Flores de Angeles even when danced with female/female couples.

In the 1930 rendition of the *Jarabe Tapatio*, Nellie Campobello portrayed the Charro and Gloria Campobello took on the role of the China Poblana. In *Choreographing Mexico: Festive Performances and Dancing Histories of a Nation*, Manuel Cuellar reads this same-sex portrayal of the *Jarabe Tapatio* as a queering gesture with elements of subversion. Cuellar argues that even when the Campobello sisters danced the *Jarabe Tapatio*, taking on the role of the man and woman, the SEP’s “new” romantic interpretation was read as heteronormative because of the prominence of the gendered narrative.⁷⁹ ††† I must note that while the love stories told by Flores de Angeles and by the Campobello sisters follow similar storylines, the choreographic

†† To read how school girls performing together as China Poblanas as same sex couples circumvented and consolidated traditional gender roles when performing the *Jarabe Tapatio* at the inauguration of the national stadium in 1924 and at Chapultepec Park in 1923, as well as a another reading on how the Campobello sisters contested traditional gender roles in their performance of the *Jarabe Tapatio* in 1930s Mexico, see Gabriela Mendoza-García, *Bodily Renderings of the Jarabe Tapatio in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and the Millennial United States: Race, Nation, Class, and Gender* (PhD diss., University of California Riverside, 2013), 130–43.

performances of gender are different. Flores de Angeles writes of the love story of the *Jarabe Tapatio* from a heteronormative perspective as sanctioned by the state. She does not mention or advocate for interpretations by female/female or male/male partnering. In fact, bodily renditions performed by Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter and Roy Lozano, my own remembering of the dance as passed on to me from my teacher Roy Lozano, as well as workshop notes articulated by Ron Houston all emphasize the fact that Flores de Angeles's love story does not leave room for any kind of interpretation that operates outside of heteronormativity or for versions that challenge the traditional gender role expectations that uphold the ideals demanded by the state. I assert that the Campobello sisters' successful embodiment of the Charro and China Poblana is a testament to the power of traditional gender roles underlying Flores de Angeles' love narrative. Furthermore, I postulate that Flores de Angeles opted to disseminate the gendered love story of the *Jarabe Tapatio* even though she did not abide by traditional gender norms in her own life in keeping with the expectations of women set by a patriarchal government in 1920s and 1930s Mexico that was determined to culturally unify the country.

Conclusion

I write to include Flores de Angeles in the historic discourse of the *Jarabe Tapatio* by analyzing the romantic storyline of this dance as she taught it. In so doing, I historically situate the life of Flores de Angeles in 1920s and 1930s Mexico alongside the governmental policies of cultural nationalism advocated by the state. My choreographic analysis interweaves archival documents written by Flores de Angeles, oral histories as told by her dancers, and bodily renditions passed down from Flores de Angeles to analyze how the dance movements instruct men to embody the machismo ideal and women to embody the marianista. I explain the traditional gender roles of 1930s Mexico and the manner in which some women reinscribed and thwarted these

expectations in their own lives. Finally, I analyze the “new” romantic story of the *Jarabe Tapatío* as created by the Campobello sisters in the 1930s to discuss the ways in which it aligns and deviates from Flores de Angeles’ version. In so doing, I argue that bodily renderings of Flores de Angeles’ love story disseminate state-sanctioned, traditional gender roles depictions in performances of the *Jarabe Tapatío* and tell histories of 1920s and 1930s Mexican women and the ways in which they dealt with the paradoxical messages of womanhood as ascribed by the state.

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Notes

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³ Sanjuanita Martínez-Hunter, in discussion with author, 2015.

⁴ Flores Barnes, “The Dances,” 17, 39.

⁵ Drury and Martínez-Hunter, interview by Mendoza-García.

⁶ Alura Flores de Angeles, *Alura 50 veranos: Alura Flores de Angeles*. (Society of Folk Dance Historians Collection, n.d.);

Alura Flores de Angeles, interview by Ron Houston, January 2, 1976, Society of Folk Dance Historians Collection.

⁷ Ron Houston, interview by Gabriela Mendoza-Garcia, April 14, 2011, Austin, Texas;

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⁸ Gabriela Cano and Verena Radkau, *Ganando espacios: historia de vida: Guadalupe Zuniga, Alura Flores, y Josefina Vicens 1920—1940* (Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, 1989), 68;.

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¹⁰ Hamilton, *Mexico: Political Evolution*, 32.

¹¹ Cano and Radkau, *Ganando espacios*, (57—59).

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¹⁸ Alura Flores de Angeles and Ron Houston, “Mexican Folk Dancing,” in *International Folk Dancing U.S.A.*, ed. Betty Casey (University of North Texas Press, 2000), 201; Cano and Radkau, *Ganando espacios*, 69.

¹⁹ Secretaría de Educación Pública, *El esfuerzo educativo en México (1924–1928)* (Secretaría de Educación Pública, n.d.), 1:120–23.

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²² Alberto Dallal, *La danza moderna en México* (UNAM, 2013), 7.

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- ³⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 39–40. Paz, *The Labyrinth*, 37–38; Reyes, “Machismo, Marianismo, and Marital Adjustment,” 18.
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