

Contemporary Latina/o Media

Production, Circulation, Politics

Edited by

Arlene Dávila and Yeidy M. Rivero



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CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Arlene Dávila</i>	1
PART I. PRODUCTION	
1. Corporate Transnationalism: The US Hispanic and Latin American Television Industries <i>Juan Piñón</i>	21
2. Converging from the South: Mexican Television in the United States <i>Rodrigo Gómez, Toby Miller, and André Dorcé</i>	44
3. NuvoTV: Will It Withstand the Competition? <i>Henry Puente</i>	62
4. One Language, One Nation, and One Vision: NBC Latino, Fusion, and Fox News Latino <i>Christopher Joseph Westgate</i>	82
5. The Gang's Not All Here: The State of Latinos in Contemporary US Media <i>Frances Negrón-Muntaner</i>	103
6. Latinos at the Margins of Celebrity Culture: Image Sales and the Politics of Paparazzi <i>Vanessa Díaz</i>	125
PART II. CIRCULATION, DISTRIBUTION, POLICY	
7. Anatomy of a Protest: <i>Grey's Anatomy</i> , Colombia's <i>A corazón abierto</i> , and the Politicization of a Format <i>Yeidy M. Rivero</i>	149

8. Colombianidades Export Market <i>Omar Rincón and María Paula Martínez</i>	169
9. The Role of Media Policy in Shaping the US Latino Radio Industry <i>Mari Castañeda</i>	186
10. Lost in Translation: The Politics of Race and Language in Spanish-Language Radio Ratings <i>Dolores Inés Casillas</i>	206
11. The Dark Side of Transnational Latinidad: Narcocorridos and the Branding of Authenticity <i>Hector Amaya</i>	223
PART III. CULTURAL POLITICS	
12. "No Papers, No Fear": DREAM Activism, New Social Media, and the Queering of Immigrant Rights <i>Cristina Beltrán</i>	245
13. Latina/o Audiences as Citizens: Bridging Culture, Media, and Politics <i>Jillian Báez</i>	267
14. Un Desmadre Positivo: Notes on How Jenni Rivera Played Music <i>Deborah R. Vargas</i>	285
15. Marketing, Performing, and Interpreting Multiple Latinidades: Los Tigres del Norte and Calle 13's "América" <i>María Elena Cepeda</i>	303
16. Latinos in Alternative Media: Latinos as an Alternative Media Paradigm <i>Ed Morales</i>	322
17. On History and Strategies for Activism <i>Juan González</i>	337
<i>About the Contributors</i>	349
<i>Index</i>	353

Un Desmadre Positivo

Notes on How Jenni Rivera Played Music

DEBORAH R. VARGAS

Gerardo Rodriguez, a self-proclaimed Jenni Rivera fan, once wrote that “we, the fans, make her. Not the radio, not newspapers, not the TV—it was us.”¹ What is insightful about Rodriguez’s comment is that it breaks the normative construction of popular music as something that is created and produced by the music industry and the artist and is merely consumed by fans. Rodriguez’s statement emphatically states that it was not simply the culture industry that created Jenni Rivera. Instead, Rodriguez’s standpoint as fan and consumer charges Latino media scholars of music to reconsider analytic frameworks that too often are unidirectional and linear.² Within the context of hyper-globalized commodification, where it seems no form of cultural labor, especially music, is free from the drive of capitalist markets, Rodriguez’s statement prompts us to pause, to reorient, and to shift meanings and concepts in media analysis. This prompt is especially critical when attempting to make sense of a *mexicana* pop icon such as Jenni Rivera, whose approach to playing music must be comprehended less through the mechanics of vocals, musicianship, or media players, but by reorienting the idea of “playing” to also include a consideration of the structural elements of the artist’s life, a life propelled into music by

her desires to escape, and by the necessity to trounce silence. In sum, in order to understand the cultural consumption of Rivera's music, we must understand how Rivera "played" music, that is, worked its normative standards of commercialization and production, the way working-class communities of color learn to "hustle" or "play" the system. This chapter is a Chicana/o Latina/o cultural studies approach to musical meaning and the possibilities that emerge, both problematic and potentially dissenting, of alternative meanings for playing music.

Angie Chabram-Dernersesian asserts that the concern of Chicano/Latino cultural studies should be "cultural practices and productions from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power of capitalist societies that are structured in dominance and privilege and that still carry the imprints of earlier geopolitical legacies."³ By extension, any analysis of Jenni Rivera must begin with the ways her immigrant experiential strategies acquired around labor came to bear on the cultivation of her music career—as a job, here distinct from art—and the ways her fans understood themselves as central to Rivera's musical production and iconicity. In fact, Rivera was often described as a "social singer" to emphasize the role her music played to raise awareness of social issues. This description simultaneously upholds the problematic binary between music as art and music as a means for social critique, and also points to Rivera's music as doing something unique compared to most *mexicana* singing artists of her generation.⁴

Two meanings of media transmission are critical for considering alternative meanings of *playing* music that I argue Rivera's iconicity cultivated: to allow to pass through a medium and being a medium for. A different understanding of the relationship between music making and consumption allows for a critical engagement with Jenni Rivera's musical labor and the ways *playing* her music by fans fostered alternative *mexicana* subjectivities and communities within a social world that continually challenges their endeavors for a quotidian existence.⁵ Rivera played music to transmit *testimonios* of gender nonconformity. Rivera's fans played her music to transmit undisciplined desires, endorse immigrant civil rights, and protest women's abuse.⁶ "She was the first Mexican American female singer from Southern California to achieve superstardom on both sides of the border, and that success inspired the legion of fans who shared her immigrant roots and humble working-class upbringing."⁷

Playing Music: "¡A Chabiar!"

Jenni Rivera's musical hustle actually disrupts the myth of music as a cultural art form. Instead, her approach to making music is anchored in the working-class epistemologies of informal economy entrepreneurship. In this way, consumers are rearticulated as dynamic communities through social media networks, and the artist's power as a popular icon becomes a conduit for publicizing social justice agendas. Such a consideration of music is what Angie Chabram-Dernersesian describes in her proposition for Chicana/o Latina/o cultural studies as the importance of difference, production, and positionality in the shifting terrains of Latin@ cultural productions.⁸ Rivera cultivated a technology of *testimonio*, using music to play back the chorus of *chismes* about her personal life, publicly displaying nonnormative gender through *chusmerías*, and linking her iconicity to social justice issues, that constructed a fan base as more than simply receptors of musical commodities.

Jenni Rivera, born Dolores Janney Rivera Saavedra, was born July 2, 1969, in Long Beach, California, the third child and eldest daughter of six children, to Pedro and Rosa, immigrants from Sonora and Jalisco, Mexico, respectively. Rivera is what we may identify as a typical first-generation Chicana born to Mexican immigrant parents: growing up in a working-class, bilingual, and bicultural world and attending public schools. Like many working-class youth, Rivera desired to earn a better livelihood, taking business classes in order to open her own real estate agency, Divina Reality. During her sophomore year in high school Rivera gave birth to her first child, Janney, after becoming involved with an older man, José Trinidad Marín, who also fathered her next two children. This early relationship would leave traces of physical and emotional abuse that would frame much of Rivera's life and her eventual advocacy of survivors of domestic abuse. The immigrant labor ethic she was raised in, knowledge of the social world acquired as a young mother in an abusive relationship, and the strategies of cultivating ways to assure her own well-being came together to form the Jenni Rivera who would create a lasting impact on the *norteño*/Mexican music world.

In 1995 Rivera released her first album, *La Chacalosa*. Generally, the term *chacalosa* refers to a girl who likes to have fun, party, drink, and at

times is known to be involved in some sort of illegal activity, especially associated with drugs. *Chacalosas*, in the context of Rivera's music, are thus represented as Mexican working-class/immigrant women who have survived bad relationships and who have little trust in men. *Chacalosas* are hard-living souls. It would become a nickname for Rivera herself, based on the popularity of her song and its aptness as a symbol for her life. In fact, an overview of her life includes some of the characteristics that defined *chacalosas*, including three divorces, overcoming domestic abuse, and strains on relationships with her elder brothers. Transmitted through Rivera's performance as well as through the narratives of her songs, *la chacalosa* would construct a powerful gendered representation of *mexicanas* that countered their containment in dominant projects that construct them as normative citizen-subjects. Rivera staged a nonnormative gender *mexicana* subjectivity by *playing* her music, often cultivating messages—in song and in her activism—about class warfare, immigrant xenophobia, and women's abuse.

Rivera staged her career by being savvy and assertive. Pepe Garza, the program director at 105.5 Que Buena, the Los Angeles regional Mexican radio station, one of the first stations to give airtime to Rivera's music, recalled having first come across Rivera while she was trying to shop airtime for her first song:

It was a song called "Las Malandrinas." She asked me if she could perform [on an awards show called *Premios que buena* that Garza was producing]. I told her, "no, you're not that famous. But since your brother [Lupillo Rivera] is going to receive an award, why don't you present it to him?" She agreed. But when she got up on the podium to announce the award, she yelled, "¿dónde están mis malandrinas?" and she started singing the song. The crowd went crazy. I knew then that she had an audience.⁹

Jenni Rivera was offered an opportunity and she, in turn, made it her premiere. Rivera's savvy talent at *playing* music, or hustling the moment offered to her by Garza, is based on an immigrant epistemology of survival and persistence, or a working-class sensibility of finding any opportunity to create a different path for existence. Growing up, Rivera was surrounded by the *mexicano* immigrant/working class.

Rivera's parents' immigration was part of a significant demographic shift, whereby the Mexican-descent population of the greater Los Angeles area now became predominately immigrant, a huge presence that grew rapidly into the indispensable yet unacknowledged labor force that propelled Southern California's economic growth.¹⁰ Rivera's approaches to music were based on what she witnessed growing up. In 1984, Pedro Rivera put out his first record, drawing from the \$14,000 he had made selling buttons for the Los Angeles Olympics. Pedro Rivera recognized that "people wanted to hear their names in corridos"; eventually people hired him to write corridos for those in his neighborhood. Sadly, Pedro Rivera would one day write a corrido honoring the life and name of his late daughter.

Rivera's immigrant work ethic was one that required you to make your own way and create your own opportunities, a creative force that comes from knowing there is no steady work, only steady effort. Rivera once recalled that as a youngster she sold cans for scrap metal and hawked music records at her family's stand at a Los Angeles flea market.¹¹ This work ethic is expressed in the Mexican Spanish vernacular terms for labor or work: "Necesito jale" (I need a job) or "¡Quiero chambiar!" (I want to work!). As a young woman and as a young single mother, Rivera was skilled at seeking *chambas* and *jales* in a variety of venues; she began working as a teenager, attending Long Beach Poly High School, and by age fifteen she was pregnant with her first child, fathered by a much older Trino Marín. Rivera's parents reacted by kicking her out of the house, resulting in her complete dependence on Marín.

After an eight-year marriage to Marín—one filled with emotional and physical abuse, including two suicide attempts—Rivera gained enough courage to divorce him.¹² During her marriage Rivera worked secretly to obtain her high school diploma and eventually took college courses. She majored in business administration at California State University–Long Beach and headed into the real estate business. "Growing up in Long Beach, I learned to face the world. I also learned that I wanted more for myself and wanted to become something."¹³ Rivera *played* music by bringing her life's *chamba* spirit with her. Rivera did not intend to produce music; she never wanted to become a singer. In fact, she entered the music scene through the mundane tasks of answering

phones and handling sales at the family's "mom-and-pop" record label, Cintas Acuario.¹⁴

Rivera became keenly aware of the varied parts of the music industry machine, and therefore she purposefully *played* music, aware that this playing involved more than the mere sonic transmission of sound through voice or performance. Rivera understood that it was not merely managers, producers, and radio personalities who kept her music playing in circulation, but those who made T-shirts, created disc compilations, and even snapped pictures of her. In Miami to promote an album in 2005, Rivera's entire music team sat down to dinner after working all day. Carlos Pérez, a publicist at Fonovisa/Universal Music Latin Entertainment, recalled,

The waiters and the people from the kitchen were taking her picture. Jenni said, "Carlos, tell them to come here and we'll pose for a picture," but the kitchen staff said they weren't allowed to do that. So Jenni said, "Okay, I'll come to the kitchen, then."¹⁵

After dinner they found themselves the target of paparazzi who were camped outside the restaurant waiting for Rivera to exit. Rivera was offered a way out through the back door to avoid them, but she refused, saying to Pérez, "do you know what they have to go through to get paid for that one shot?" She then whistled at the paparazzi and yelled, "muchachos! I'm just going to ask you one favor. When I say I'm done, let's call it a day."¹⁶

Playing Jenni Rivera

Jessica Quintana, executive director of Centro CHA, a nonprofit Latino social service agency formed in 1992 in Long Beach, recalled during a memorial held for Jenni Rivera days after her death, "we wanted to recognize her because she had done so much with her life despite her struggles. Jenni could always relate to the constituents we serve. There are a lot of people here that are still going through the same challenges that she went through."¹⁷ Quintana continued, "she talked about her life in a very open way and really cared about the issues that affected women, like poverty, domestic violence and

independence."¹⁸ Certainly, comments such as "she was just like everyone else" have become staple phrases when a popular figure dies. Yet it would be difficult to find examples of Rivera's musical iconicity that did not align her popular representation and musical themes with the exploited subjects of labor and gender violence. Moreover, Rivera's representation never shied away from airing her dirty laundry. "People could relate to her struggles, that's why so many people loved her," said Quintana. "She captivated her audience by being herself at all times and being open with her life through her music and interviews with the press."¹⁹

Rivera's manner of *playing* music—her music industry *chamba*—provides an alternative meaning for the production and transmission of music. Moreover, Rivera *played* music in ways that created spaces for gender and sexual subjects that are often shunned in neoliberal projects of normative *mexicanidad*. As Rivera became more powerful in her iconicity, she became more emboldened to "act out" *lo de abajo* (the *déclassé*) or *chusmería*, a form of "behavior that refuses standards of bourgeois comportment" and to a significant degree is "linked to stigmatized class identity" through nonconformist performances or enactments.²⁰ Rivera's representation and music channeled nonnormative gender through song characterizations of *la malandrina* and *la chacolosa*, and thus her public testimony of personal life dramas enabled social network spaces of conversation, imitation, and contestation among her fans, the often self-proclaimed *malandrinas* and *chacalosas* often hailed by Rivera and curators of their own social network virtual communities. Rivera *played* music and her fans *played* Rivera. Rivera transmitted stories, scandal, and harsh lived realities. Rivera's *malandrinas* and *chacalosas* transmitted themselves as imperfect, contradictory, and empowered beings who so often face violent acts of contained normative womanhood. For example, a person identified as Christina Mex posted on a blog replying to another fan who had said that Rivera's passing was a sign that everyone should seek God as a savior. In her post, Mex writes that fans like her didn't see Rivera as superior to them:

Just because we're in pain because of her death doesn't mean that we automatically put her on a pedestal. . . . some of us are hurting because

she represents strength and hope for us and was a voice for many of us. Jenni knew and understand [*sic*] the many types of issues that women have to go through because she has LIVED IT.²¹

Invisible, exploited, and nonnormative *mexicano* subjectivities are indecipherable within US state-sanctioned discourses of the heteronormative citizen-subject or the legal immigrant subject. Social networks become key sites for such communities otherwise expunged from privileged spaces of legal and class-based participation. Whereas I have argued—following two meanings of transmission—that Rivera channeled nonnormative *testimonios* of gender and immigrant civil rights through the medium of music, including recordings, video, and live performance, she too became a medium for the dialogues of her fans. Jenni Rivera was the impetus for many social network sites, including the Facebook pages “Las chacalosas de Jenni Rivera,” “Cartel de Jenni Rivera,” and “DivasParranderasYParranderos,” among many others. One of the most powerful social networks was the Twitter group J-Unit (or as they referred to themselves in Spanish, “jota-unit”), whose membership was so integrated in Rivera’s life that, during the days after her passing, Rivera’s mother directed media to this Twitter site for details on Rivera’s funeral and other breaking information.

Rivera’s @jennirivera Twitter site and websites of her reality television show were also networks through which fans engaged not only with Rivera but also with each other, commenting on everything from music to social issues. Moreover, such media demonstrate that Jenni Rivera was *played* and not merely consumed by her fans. Specifically, her music provided a space for *mexicana* subjectivities that were in contradistinction to what Arlene Dávila has called Latino “corrective” images, “the commercial representation of Latinidad [that] brings to the forefront the pervasiveness of racial hierarchies in the very constitution of corrective images.”²² Rivera’s public antics, her racialized class representations through the *chacalosas*, *malandrinas*, and *narcotraficantes*, configured an iconicity irredeemable as a “corrected” or normative brown citizen. Such is the case with the reappropriated Corona beer brand label that plays on stereotypes of Mexicans as beer drinkers who, as “imports from Mexico,” become the US public’s greatest fear. In this contemporary US context, working-class *mexicanas* and

undocumented immigrants are very familiar with the broken promises of the state to reward “good” and “appropriate” racial subjects. Thus, what I find significant about these social network virtual communities is how they *played* Rivera—as a medium, a musical conduit through which fans at times had access to alternative discourses of lived experiences, gender representations, and political agendas regarding domestic abuse and LGBT and immigrant civil rights. Rivera’s *chacalosa* and *malandrina* representations were replayed by her fans as audacious and undaunted and as potential possibilities for empowerment within contexts of labor and gender oppression. Moreover, such representations through her live performance, reality television characters, and song lyrics bore witness to everyday brutalities expedited under globalization regimes, gender violence, and immigrant xenophobia.

Jenni Rivera was often described by fans and the media as *una mujerona*, a big woman. Rivera certainly enacted such bigness—as a woman who takes up too much space and as a big force to reckon with—through her brash public acts and public postings about her personal life. For example, it was quite common for Rivera to use her Twitter account as a means of conversation instead of merely posting her whereabouts or announcing her shows. She once posted on her @jennirivera Twitter site, quoting Tupac Shakur, a response to judgmental remarks in the media about her personal life choices: “Only God can judge me . . . all you other motha fckrs need to say out of my business? . . . Tupac.” The themes of much of Rivera’s music demonstrated how Rivera embodied the *chusmería* associated with aberrant femininities.²³ In this way, Rivera was known for recording *narcocorrido* songs that often featured narratives about the women partners, wives, or daughters of *narcotraficantes* (narco-traffickers). In the 1995 song “La Chacalosa,” she sings of being the prideful daughter of a narco-trafficker:

Me buscan por chacalosa soy hija de un traficante
Conozco bien las movidas
Me crié entre la mafia grande

(They look for me because I’m a chacalosa, I’m the daughter of a
drug trafficker
I know the moves well
I was raised in a major mafia)



Figure 14.1. Cover of Jenni Rivera's album *La Chacalosa*.

"La Chacalosa" most certainly can be viewed as romanticizing and musically exploiting the violent circumstances surrounding the powerful presence of narco-traffickers in cities and rural towns across Mexico. Yet, I propose that the song also transmits the devastating reality her *mexicana* fan base recognized and could therefore possibly process differently. As Mark Edberg stresses, there must be diligent effort not to homogenize narcocorrido music or the ways narratives or characters are interpreted; rather, we must "unpack the complex and multilayered context feeding the near mythical characters featured in narcocorridos," especially gender and class.²⁴ By extension, narrating the presence of women as connected to narco-trafficking violence potentially accomplishes at least two things: it disrupts the idea of *mexicanas* as demure

victims and complicates racialized, classed, dominant representations of *mexicanas* that circulate in the public sphere, as fair-skinned and middle-class or as brown domestic and agricultural servants.²⁵ "La Chacalosa" created such a huge following among Rivera's women fans that internet social groups sprang up, creating networks of those who identified with the themes of being a bad girl, a partier, and a troublemaker, including "Las chacalosas de Jenni Rivera," on Facebook and Myspace, that invited interested persons to join:

K onda mi gente! Bienvenidos a la pagina oficial de las chacalosas. . . . para los que no nos conocen somos un grupo de amigas que nos gusta andar de party. . . . siempre nos gusta divertirnos y andar al 100! . . . pues como saben apenas andamos comensando nuestra clicka de puras muchachonas que les gusta la parranda so la que le entre solo manden un mensaje a nuestra pagina.

The interconnected ways Rivera *played* her career and the ways fans *played* new imaginaries outside the confinements of normativity and erasure were unique, and at times posed a significant counterweight to the business of music media. "I am the same as the public, as my fans," Rivera once said in an interview.²⁶

"Las Malandrinas," recorded in 1999, was another example of this, and propelled another *mexicana* iconography her fans connected with.²⁷

Nos dicen las malandrinas
 porque hacemos mucho ruido
 porque tomamos cerveza
 y nos gusta el mejor vino
 En los salones de baile
 siempre pedimos corridos
 no somos como las popis
 que se paran mucho el cuello

(They call us the delinquent women
 because we make lots of noise
 because we drink beer
 and we love the best wine

In the dancehalls
we always request corridos
we're not like the arrogant ones
who keep their collars upright)

The song and its representation became so popular that, in fact, Rivera would later commonly call out to her women fans, “¿Dónde están mis *malandrinas* y mis *chacalosas*?”

The unique characteristic about Rivera is that her personal life seemed to often align with the personas she sang about, such as the figures of the *malandrina* and the *chacalosa*. One example of this occurred during a concert performance in Puerto Vallarta. At one point during a song Rivera stops the music to confront an audience member who has just thrown beer at her from the front rows of the audience. Rivera brings the young woman on stage, where she directly confronts her. They stand face to face and Rivera says to her, “A ver, tíremelo. Tíremelo aquí donde estoy, tíremelo. Quien cree que tiene más huevos, usted o yo?” (Let’s see, throw it at me. Throw it at me here where I am, throw it. Who do you think has more balls, you or me?) The crowd starts chanting “Jenni, Jenni, Jenni.” Security then takes the woman off stage as Jenni addresses the audience:

Les digo por favor, que si yo los respeto a ustedes, que también me den ese respeto a mí. Vengo a cantarles con todo mi corazón. Yo pudiera estar en mi casa, puedo estar en el hotel haciendo un niño. Pero aquí estoy con ustedes. Y si de veras tienen el rencor para tirarle algo a una persona que está trabajando, pues haganlo aquí de cerca, no hay problema. Es todo lo que les pido.

(I ask you please, if I respect you, then please respect me. I come to sing for you with all of my heart. I could be at home, I could be in my hotel trying to make a baby. But I am here with you. If anyone really has the spite to throw something at someone who is working, then do it here, close to me, no problem. That’s all I ask.)²⁸

In this incident Rivera seems most offended by the disrespect of her performance, which she specifically refers to as “work.” What is especially

significant to convey to her audience is the exchange of respect, I argue here, as a mode of power not acquired through monetary or material capital but through loyalty to self-preservation. The respect Rivera demands in this scenario is a working-class cultural sensibility contextualized in the social world of immigrant *mexicano* Long Beach. Rivera’s decision to personally confront the woman—rather than have her security simply remove her from the audience—is another way of displaying that she is capable of taking care of herself.

While most celebrities would steer clear of spectacles that might be cast as inappropriate femininity, Rivera turned away from silence and toward transparency. When she was a young married woman, Rivera often recalled in interviews, her first husband physically abused her, especially when she desired more than to be at home cooking and cleaning.²⁹ As a domestic abuse survivor, Rivera learned the first principle of fighting back—to speak out, because shame and silence endangered her survival. Rivera publicly displayed her shortcomings, failures, and flaws, I contend, because it meant undoing the violence of silence. Social networks of Rivera’s fans too utilized virtual communities as ways to “act out” as brown bodies resistant to complacency and deference and as an alternative to the “Dreamer” citizen or *domesticana* acknowledged only as perpetual deferential labor.

Rivera was passionate about using her musical medium to speak out against domestic violence. Since she had experienced domestic abuse as a young wife, Rivera’s words and actions meant a great deal to those who had experienced or were experiencing the same challenges to survive. The Los Angeles music journalist Fernando González stated that

the secret to her fame was not that she had such an outstanding, gifted voice, because she didn’t, it was that she poured her life story into her songs, with all her faults, downfalls and tragedies, including a teen pregnancy and domestic abuse. The fans made her a star because they saw themselves reflected in her.³⁰

Many of the virtual communities established through Rivera’s fandom were more than mere social sites, but social imaginaries bound by codes of promise and respect for the themes raised and performed by Rivera.³¹ J-Unit’s site stated as part of its group membership

agreement, “Compromiso ser un J-unit,” “Ser parte del J-Unit de Jenni Rivera. Es un compromiso y una responsabilidad. Es apoyarla y llevar con respeto su legado. J-Unit no es una moda. Es un Estilo de vida. Una entrega incondicional.” (To be part of Jenni Rivera’s J-Unit. It is a commitment and a responsibility. It is to support her and carry on her legacy with respect. J-Unit is not a style. It is a way of life. An unconditional surrender.) In 2010, she was named a celebrity spokesperson for the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) in Los Angeles. To further commemorate her dedication to battered women, the Los Angeles City Council officially named August 6 “Jenni Rivera Day.”³² Rivera also founded a charitable organization—the Jenni Rivera Love Foundation—that offered supportive services to single mothers and victims of both domestic and sexual abuse, especially undocumented immigrant women. Moreover, Rivera’s advocacy for gender issues also included LGBT equality. In addition, Rivera was extremely passionate about undocumented immigrant civil rights. She was one of the first and the few major Latino celebrities to use the term “racist” in referring to Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070.³³ In fact, a press release announcing her participation in the May 29, 2010, Arizona state capital rally admonished other Latino celebrities for not showing up: “While other artists have contributed their names, Jenni has offered to present herself.” A few days prior to the rally she would tweet @jennirivera, “el sábado estaré marchando en Arizona en contra de la ley SB1070. La marcha será de seis millas a 10:30am.” (On Saturday I’ll be marching in Arizona to protest SB 1070. The march will be six miles, at 10:30 a.m.)

As Michelle González Maldonado put it, “Jenni Rivera did not just use her fame as a form of self-promotion, but as a platform for populations who are voiceless in the dominant discourse.”³⁴ Rivera testified to social injustice, immigrant xenophobia, and gender violence while often performing the very violent realities her fans survived daily. For example, Rivera drew on narcocorrido terms to describe her fans’ social networks: “es mi propia cartel” (it’s my own cartel), she said of her fan base, describing its function as making “un gran desmadre positivo” (a great deal of positive disorderliness).

Jenni Rivera once tweeted out to her fans on J-Unit, “Dear J-Unit: When I die remember to please make sure I am buried upside

down . . . so the haters can continue to kiss my ass, Jenni.” Rivera never seemed interested in *playing* nice with other celebrities or members of the public who sometimes launched judgmental attacks on her public dramas, failures at multiple marriages, and songs about badly behaving women. Rivera seemed born to fight, and her tough street smarts or *malandrina* sensibility prompted her strategies for *playing* music. In a *Dallas Morning News* interview, Rivera once stated that when she was a child growing up in her immigrant community in Long Beach, “I wasn’t allowed to have dolls.” Raised among four brothers, she continued,

my mom bought them for me, but they [her brothers] would tear them apart and get rid of them. They wanted to teach me karate and doing pop-wheelines in the street and playing baseball and playing marbles and being a great wrestler. It kind of made me tough. I got in trouble if I got into a fight and I came back crying.³⁵

Rivera’s fan Diana Reyes once described her in a Twitter post as “La Diva, La malandrina, La Gran Señora, La Socia, La Chacalosa, La Reina . . . Simplemente La Mejor” (The diva, the *malandrina*, the grand lady, the buddy, the *chacalosa*, the queen . . . simply the best).³⁶ The list is not merely an accounting of Rivera’s nicknames. It also calls out the *mexicana* subjectivities *played* every day in attempts to voice dissent against the corrective systems of normative fictions of citizenship. Monikers of disobedient gender such as *la malandrina* and *la chacalosa*, among others cultivated by Rivera, created representations that—while controversial—formed musical spectacles that shamelessly shattered the violent myth that for undocumented and class-disenfranchised *mexicanas*, complaisant silence, hard work, and playing by the rules result in safety, well-being, and freedom from exploitation. Rivera was well aware of her power and status, and by extension the ways she *played* her power in the music industry, as a means to persist and to be a witness for those struggling to exist. As such, Jenni Rivera and the virtual communities of her fans offer us the chance to consider the possibilities that new musical meanings and cultural media consumption can sometimes cultivate for Latin@ publics.

NOTES

1. "Remembering Jenni," *Latina*, March 2013, 103.
2. See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden: Blackwell, 2001).
3. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, "Introduction to Part 1," in *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5. Chabram-Dernersesian draws from Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1991), 33.
4. The word *mexicanas* is lowercase and italicized throughout; I use this style to disrupt the distinction between one of Mexican citizenship and those Mexican-descent US citizens residing in the United States.
5. When I italicize the words "playing" and "played" in this essay, I aim to signify the unique mode of engaging/producing/consuming music that pertains to Rivera and, at times, her fans.
6. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and his meaning of "tactic."
7. Fernando González, "Jenni Rivera's Fame Built on Gut-Level Connection with Her Fans," *Miami Herald*, December 11, 2012, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/12/10/3136089/jenni-riveras-fame-built-on-gut.html#storylink=cpy>.
8. Chabram-Dernersesian, "Introduction to Part 1," 1–22.
9. "Remembering Jenni," 103. The vernacular term *malandrinas* is a play on the term *malandró*, meaning criminal or good-for-nothing.
10. Sam Quinones, "Jenni Rivera's Musical Family Helped Popularize Mexican Narco-Ballads," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2012.
11. Cindy Y. Rodriguez, "Jenni Rivera Is Mourned, but Still Inspires," *CNN Entertainment*, December 11, 2012.
12. Mandy Fridmann, "Jenni Rivera: Mexican-American Singer's Tragic End Echoes Life of Hardship on Journey to Stardom," *Huffington Post*, December 10, 2012. Jenni Rivera and Trino Marín had three children: Janney, known as "Chiquis," Jacquelin, and Trino Angelo. Marín would eventually be charged with raping his daughters Janney and Jacquelin and Jenni Rivera's sister Rosie.
13. "Jenni Rivera Death: Long Beach Candlelight Vigil Planned as Hometown Mourns," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, December 12, 2012, http://www.presstelegram.com/news/ci_22162201/jenni-rivera-death-long-beach-candlelight-vigil-planned.
14. Alejo Sierra, "Jenni Rivera: La Divina," *Open Your Eyes: Latino Magazine*, n.d.
15. "Remembering Jenni," 104.
16. *Ibid.*
17. "Jenni Rivera's Death."
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 182.
21. See <https://thatwhoeverbelieves.wordpress.com/2012/12/11/an-open-letter-to-jenni-rivera-fans/>.
22. Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 90–91, 123.
23. Catherine Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Nation and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), xx.
24. Mark C. Edberg, "Narcocorridos: Narratives of a Cultural Persona and Power on the Border," in *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 67.
25. For a significant analysis of the representation of the maid in mass culture, see Isabel Molina-Guzmán, "Maid in Hollywood: Producing Latina Labor in an Anti-Immigration Imaginary," in *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 151–74.
26. "Jenni Rivera: Teen Mom, Abused Wife, and Lonely Star on the Rise," *Fox News Latino*, December 10, 2012.
27. *Que Me Entierren con la Banda* (Fonovisa, 1999).
28. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoU6-6oI8is>. Rivera performs what Marie Keta Miranda refers to as a "code of respect" contextualized in a working-class claim to territory, the public sphere, and nonnormative gender. See Marie Keta Miranda, *Homegirls in the Public Sphere* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
29. Rodriguez, "Jenni Rivera Is Mourned, but Still Inspires."
30. González, "Jenni Rivera's Fame Built on Gut-Level Connection."
31. See Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
32. Nina Terrero, "Jenni Rivera: Advocate and Champion of Women," *NBC Latino*, December 12, 2012, <http://nbclatino.com/2012/12/10/jenni-rivera-advocate-and-champion-of-women/>.
33. "Highest Grossing Female Mexican Regional Tour Artist, Jenni Rivera, Lends Voice to Defend the People of Arizona," press release, May 10, 2010. The press release included the following statement:
(Phoenix, AZ) La Gran Señora, Jenni Rivera, joins the movement against SB 1070 with a live concert at the end of Saturday's march from Indian Steele Park to the State Capitol. The legendary winner of "Best Artist of the Year" in 2009 from Premios de la Radio and leader of the Regional Mexican genre, Jenni Rivera, answers the call of the people of Arizona for a leader and a voice to represent their struggles. Jenni Rivera chose to participate in the march because she shares the outrage of the tens of thousands of people who will march prior to the concert and who have been targeted by this

hateful law that views any Mexican American or anyone with brown skin as “reasonably suspicious.”

34. Michelle González Maldonado, “Mourning Jenni Rivera: When a Lady Dies,” *Religion Dispatches*, December 13, 2012. By the time of her passing, Jenni Rivera was a massive media icon, having appeared on the reality TV show *Chiquis & Raq-C*, featuring her oldest daughter, Janney “Chiquis” Marín; having produced and starred in *I Love Jenni*, a Spanish-language reality TV show on Telemundo’s Mun2 network; and having served as a coach and judge on *La Voz* or *The Voice, Mexico*.
35. Ibid.
36. See <https://twitter.com/jenniriverafans>.