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RECOLLECTING ISLEÑO DÉCIMAS:
LOUISIANA'S LOST TRADITION OF SPANISH BALLAD

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Abstract

This dissertation takes a fine-grained approach to the study of a unique local genre of Spanish-language ballad from southeast Louisiana, the Isleño décima. For over two hundred years, the distal marshlands of lower St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, have sustained a handful of small communities of farmers, trappers, and fishers, known as the Isleños. Isleños trace their ancestors back to colonists from the Canary Islands who settled here during the Spanish colonial period (1763–1802). Their ballads, *décimas*, provided the soundtrack for a unique way of life in this marsh frontier. These songs composed a unique local tradition, distinct from the widely distributed eponymous genre of Spanish verse. The central concern of this study lies in the dynamic, mutable, and polysemous musical meanings embodied by the genre over time. It begins with the early history of the tradition, from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, situating the Isleño décima within a broad and diverse circum-Gulf of Mexico cultural milieu, and then narrates a history of the genre as it was collected, celebrated, and ultimately transformed into the icon of Isleño identity in the context of a local ethnic revival. The dissertation then turns to the ethnographic present, a present in which Isleño décimas are no longer sung or transmitted as an active musical tradition, asking how the genre might continue to mean in the absence of a living tradition. Engaging with a diverse range of interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological issues, this dissertation brings a new perspective to this little-known local genre, and brings insights gained from this local case to bear on issues of central concern in ethnomusicology and related fields, including historical and ethnographic methodologies, musical meaning, silence, absence, music sustainability, human ecology, and space.

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Introduction

"Southern Louisiana is full of surprises for the ethnographer."

—Lafcadio Hearn ([1886] 2002b, 69)

My introduction to the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish[1] came long before I though to make their folk songs the subject of my dissertation research. On a bright Saturday morning in March of 2009, I packed up my car and headed southeast on Judge Perez Highway, printed directions in hand, to the tiny hamlet of St. Bernard, Louisiana, about twenty miles away. At the time I was a professional musician and aspiring academic living in New Orleans, on my way to a gig with Fredy Omar *con su banda*, a Latin dance band based in New Orleans.

My destination was the *Los Isleños Fiesta* in St. Bernard, a festival held annually on the campus of the Los Isleños museum, a sprawling "village" featuring historical post-and-beam buildings, palmetto huts, and a rustic "trappers' cabin." The fiesta is the flagship event of the Los Isleños Heritage Society and one of the most visible (and audible) legacies of the Isleño heritage revival of the last forty years. As in decades past, the spectacular event features folkloric musicians and dancers from the Canary Islands, folk craft displays, bands from New Orleans, local seafood, and traditional cuisine.

I had never heard of the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish, and was surprised to learn about this small community descended from eighteenth-century colonists from the Canary Islands who had maintained their traditional language and culture to the present day. As I greeted my fellow musicians and began setting up at the back of the stage, a folkloric troupe visiting from the

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[1] "Parish" is the political equivalent of a county in Louisiana.

Canary Islands performed on stage. During our set, I watched as these visitors from the Canary Islands danced enthusiastically to Omar's eclectic repertory alongside the president of Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society and MC of the fiesta, Lloyd "Wimpy" Serigne, and other local Isleños dressed in traditional Canary Islands costumes.

After the performance I stuck around to enjoy the fiesta and have a beer with my friends in the band. Serigne greeted us warmly, and talked at length about his heritage and his work to rebuild the society since Hurricane Katrina flattened the region and flooded the grounds on which we were standing in 2005. My bandmates—Honduran, Guatemalan, and Dominican transplants to New Orleans—and I hung out with local Isleños from St. Bernard and the Canarian folkloric musicians, as they discussed shared interests in music and culture in mutually intelligible if far-flung dialects of Spanish. A jam session followed, featuring enthusiastic group choruses of classic popular songs like "Allá en el Rancho Grande" and "Cielito lindo."

I was struck by this rich musical exchange, and thought of it often in the following years as I undertook my doctoral study in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago and searched for a compelling topic for my dissertation research. But I returned home that day still having never heard of the unique genre of song, the Isleño décima, which would eventually become the subject of my dissertation research, without any knowledge of the musical form which—I would later learn—had previously played a central role in representations of Isleño culture. Rather, during my preliminary dissertation research, I thought to take the broad musical milieu I encountered at the fiesta as my object of study. How did folkloric music from the Canary Islands and a Honduran-led Latin dance band from New Orleans come to stand for the musical representation of the Isleños at their annual fiesta, and what did this mean to the participants and stakeholders involved today? It was only through an initial investigation into this broader question that the central historical question of this dissertation emerged: *how was it that the Isleño décima had not come to fulfill this role*?

This introduction follows the experience of my own introduction to the subject of this dissertation, the Isleño décima. Following from my early experiences with Isleño culture related above, I depict the broader context that emerged from my library research and initial experiences in the field, introducing the regional context, the Isleño people, and broader musical milieu, as well as general introduction to the décima as a polysemous and dynamic category. From there I turn to the key issues in the dissertation, and provide an outline of the chapters to follow.

Who are the Isleños?

For over two hundred years, the distal marshlands of lower St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, have sustained a handful of small Spanish-speaking communities of farmers, trappers, and fishers, known as the Isleños. Isleños trace their ancestors back to colonists from the Canary Islands who settled here during the Spanish colonial period (1763–1802). But the origins of the Spanish presence in Louisiana lie much earlier, spanning the present-day boundaries of the state, the three groups of Louisiana Spanish speakers originating in the colonial period, and situated within a circum-Gulf of Mexico regional milieu.

In 1519, the conquistador Alonso Álvarez de Pineda sailed past the mouth of the Mississippi River, some fifty miles south of the colonial villages in St. Bernard that Spain would establish over two and a half centuries later; he was followed in 1541 by Hernando de Soto's overland crossing of the state. It was the reaction to French colonization efforts, however, beginning in the late seventeenth century, that resulted in the establishment in 1719 of the first Spanish settlement in present-day Louisiana, *Los Adaes*. Adaes was the capital of Spanish Texas until the transfer of Louisiana to Spain in 1762 (Weber 1992). Though it was subsequently abandoned, with many of its settlers relocating to San Antonio, it rendered one of Louisiana's three enduring groups of Louisiana Spanish speakers in rural areas west of Natchitoches in northwestern Louisiana along the Sabine River, at Spanish Lake, Zwolle, Erbarb, and Noble.[2]

As governor of the Spanish colony of *Luisiana* (1762–1802), Bernardo de Galvez undertook a colonization effort in which Canary Islanders established agricultural settlements along the frontier with British Florida in the 1770s and '80s, which left the most enduring mark of Spain's colonial presence on Louisiana's cultural landscape, as well as the ballad tradition which forms the object of study of this dissertation. These settlements were established at Galveztown, on Bayou Manchac; Valenzuela, on Bayou Lafourche, south of present-day Donaldsonville; at Barataria, on Bayou Barataria; and at St. Bernard, on Bayou Terre aux Boefs, just downriver of New Orleans and across Lake Borgne from what was then British West Florida. Of these, Valenzuela and St. Bernard rendered enduring Spanish-speaking communities that retained their language and identity into the twenty-first century, scattered along Bayou Lafourche and in St. Bernard Parish, respectively. Though both groups have been referred to as *Isleños*, as have the descendants of Canary Island colonists around the world, the term is typically used to in Louisiana refer exclusively to the historically Spanish-speaking denizens of lower St. Bernard Parish, a convention I adhere to in this dissertation. In terms of dialect, *Isleño* Spanish refers exclusively to the St. Bernard variety while *Brulé* or *Brulí*, refers to that of the Bayou Lafourche. As discussed in chapter one, the communities of Isleños of St. Bernard were further bolstered by two centuries of ongoing immigration from throughout the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world, by connections with their compatriots in Mexico, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Spain, and by a regional milieu marked by a diverse Hispanic influence.[3]

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[2] As a unique and rapidly disappearing (there are no longer any active speakers) dialect isolate, Adaseño Spanish has inspired a number of dedicated linguistic studies (Stark 1980; Armistead and Gregory 1986, 1997), most comprehensively by Comfort Pratt (2004, 2008), and comparative studies with Louisiana dialects (Armistead 1991b; Alvar 2000) and other Spanish isolates, such as New Mexican Spanish (Lipski 2008; Alvar 2000). In addition to this preponderance of linguistic research, Hiram F. Gregory (1983; Gregory, et al. 2004) has pioneered crucial historical and archaeological research on this neglected topic. Dominica Dominguez Ramirez's (2004b) study of ethnic identity contributes a fine-grained cultural historical perspective to these linguistic studies.

Lower St. Bernard composes a distal frontier of the vast deltaic plain of southeast Louisiana, the "toes" of the Mississippi River's "bird's foot" delta. Here the river's ancient distributaries—since cut off from the sediment-laden water that once overflowed into their otherwise slow-moving or stagnant waters—meander out into an expanse of hardwood bottomlands, cypress swamps, and finally the grassy marshes, or *plerías* (prairies), as they're called in Isleño Spanish, that stretch out into Lake Borgne and the Gulf of Mexico. While the marshes sustain industries such as trapping, hunting, and, more recently, oil and natural gas extraction, most evidence of permanent human occupation—roads, railways, and permanent structures—is confined to the banks of the bayous which, through centuries of sediment deposits left behind by floodwaters, created the high ground that Harnett Kane once described as "long, jagged, peninsulas thrust into the sea" (Kane 1944, xx). Elsewhere Kane offered the following description the state's topography:

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[3] For the classic study, see Din 1988. An expansive body of scholarship has focused predominantly on the colonial history and linguistic study of these two groups. A number of historical studies (Scramuzza 1924; Villere 1972; Forsyth 1978; Acosta Rodríguez 1979; Tornero 1980; Vega 1998; Sluyter et al. 2015) and especially the essential work of Gilbert C. Din (1976, 1988, 2014) have addressed this colonial history. Other historical studies have addressed the submerged Spanish influence in the state's history (MacCurdy 1951, 1954; Montero de Pedro 2000). These are complemented by a few more recent studies focusing on cultural history and identity (Vega 1998; Ramirez 2004a; S. Perez 2011; Harris 2012). A few authors have contributed to a more holistic understanding of Isleño culture: Marc Anthony Quiñones's (1955) mid-century sociological study; Francis Hawley's (1976) ethnography of folk-healing practices; Joseph V. Guillotte's anthropological work on the St. Bernard Isleños (1980, 1981, 1985); and Jeanne Gillespie's studies of oral narratives (2002) and décimas (2016). Linguistic studies of St. Bernard Isleño Spanish (MacCurdy 1950b, 1950a; Beatriz Varela 1974; Varela 1979; Armistead 1991b, 1992a, 1994a, 1994b, 1997; Armistead and Gregory 1997; Coles 1991, 1993, 2011; Alvar 1998, 2000; Holloway 1997; Lestrade 1999, 2002) have emphasized its unique retentions and influences of other regional languages while those of *Brulé* Spanish from the Donaldsonville/Bayou Lafourche area (Holloway 1993; MacCurdy 1959), have focused on dialect death and Cajun French influences.

> The bayous build their own banks, push downward their own tendrils of land. Their ridges of side earth are thick mounds or thin strips, depending on the age and course of the stream. For many miles these double lines of dikes are the only land to be found, dry strings above the wetness. . . . From the hills of North Louisiana the land slips gradually downward to meet the Gulf. Soon all is flatness; levels are only a foot or two above sea level, and scattered over the surface is a mesh of interconnected bayous and shallow lakes, canals, inlets, cuts, and cut-offs. (Kane 1943, 7)

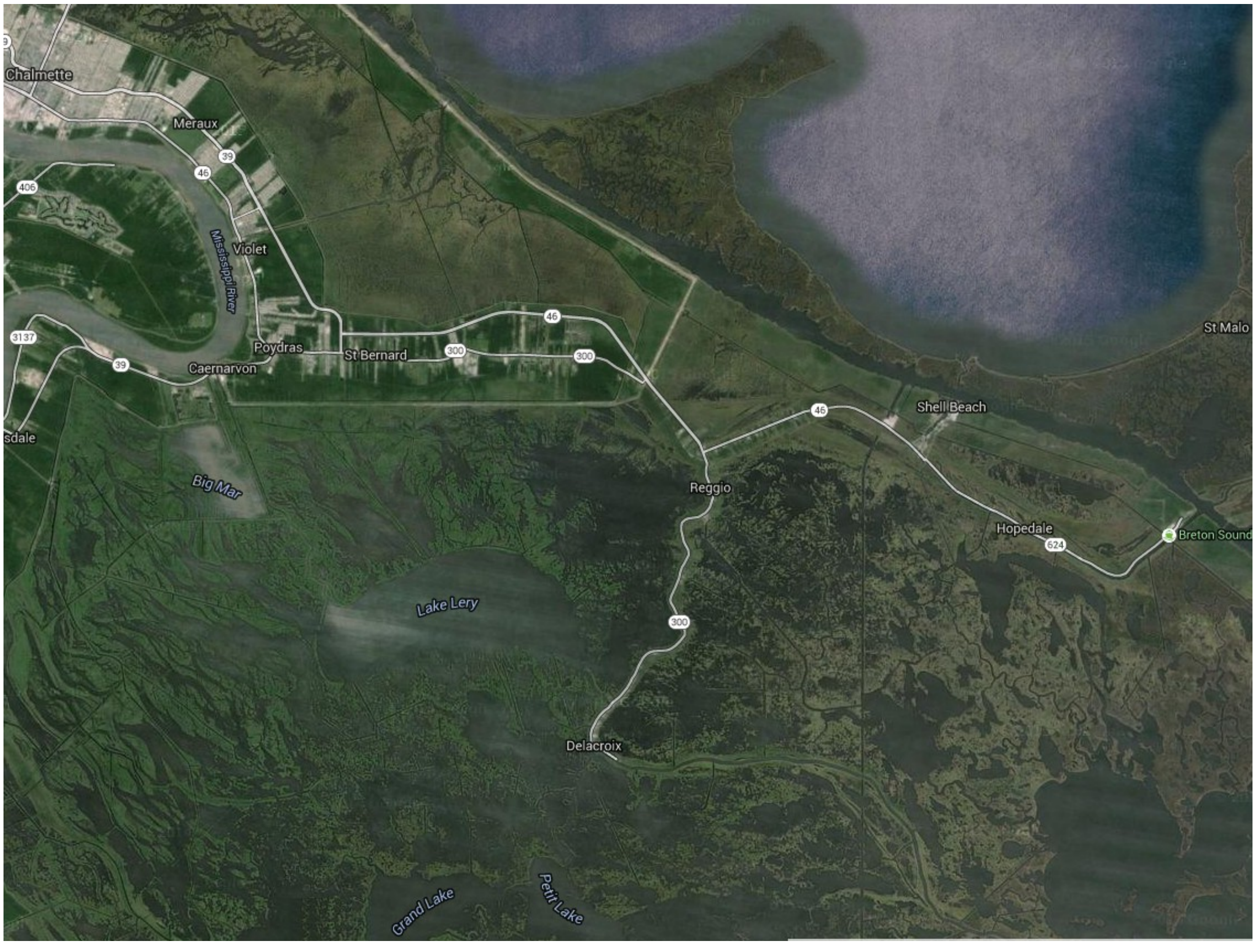

Figure 1: Map of Lower St. Bernard (Google Maps)

Traveling southeast downriver from New Orleans one passes through the old neighborhoods of Faubourg Marigny and St. Claude before crossing the industrial canal into the

Lower 9th Ward and over the parish line into St. Bernard Parish, just four miles from the New Orleans French quarter. From the suburban subdivisions and strip malls of Arabi and Chalmette—"upper St. Bernard," or, relationally, "up the road," along with New Orleans—the landscape unfolds into an expansive plain and the riverfront communities of Meraux and Violet. At a bend in the river known as the Poydras Crevasse, Bayou Terre aux Boefs flows out due east from the river. Here is the town of St. Bernard, the center of the original colony established in the eighteenth century, and the site of the Isleños museum complex, where the annual fiesta is held. Bayou Terre aux Boefs continues east past the village of Toca, then turns south, leaving the enormous protective levee encircling the upper parish. Here Bayou La Loutre splits off to the east, towards the Isleño villages of Yscloskey and Shell Beach, on the south shore of Lake Borgne. Bayou Terre aux Boefs continues south past the Isleño hamlets of Reggio, Wood Lake, and finally Delacroix, the end of the road, the heart of Isleño culture, lying over thirty miles from the New Orleans French Quarter.

For many commentators, lower St. Bernard has seemed a striking contrast to the bustling city just upriver. Minnie Howell Storck expressed such a view in a vivid 1915 ethnographic account of Delacroix.

> The old adage "extremes meet" could not be more strikingly verified than in the close geographical relation and wide sociological divergence between New Orleans and De La Croix Island—New Orleans with its 385,000 inhabitants, its miles of asphalt, its immense sewerage and water system, its great railway terminals, its splendid schools, its varied business interests, its complex social life, and—L'Isle with its 300 to 350 souls; its streets of water like Venice; its single church where service is held only once a month; its one room school, barely three years old; its dependence on a doctor, at least twenty miles away; its houses thatched with palmetto; and its two only occupations, plying the nets and hunting and trapping. (Howell Storck 1915)

My own impression, a century later, is rather of a place at once distinct from and very much intertwined with a greater New Orleans region, including New Orleans and other outlying areas to the north, south, and west, now figured as suburbs within the expansive sprawl of twenty-first-century New Orleans.

The colonists from the Canary Islands initially settled on land grants along Bayou Terre aux Boefs, with the present-day village of St. Bernard being the original colonial center. The area seems to have been ignored by previous colonists, and Bayou Terre aux Boefs is omitted entirely from early colonial maps.[4] Isleños gradually settled further out, in the most remote and robust enclaves of Yscloskey and Delacroix By the early twentieth century, enclaves like Delacroix and Yscloskey fostered a robust Hispanic culture marked by a unique dialect of Spanish, traditional occupations revolving around fishing and trapping, and a local tradition of folk songs, Isleño décimas.

What are Isleño Décimas?

Décimas documented and ensounded a unique way of life in this marsh frontier. These distinctive songs featured humorous invective, hyperbole, ironic laments of suffering and hard work, stories of fights, conflicts, and great leaders. Décima singing was a key social practice, taking place at dances, in barrooms, around the kitchen table, and to pass time on shrimping boats and trapping camps out on the marsh wilderness that sustained the Isleños. This dissertation is, in part, a story about defining décimas; the changing ideas about and roles ascribed to the genre in the late twentieth century emerge as a key part of the historical narrative developed in the following chapters. Ironically, perhaps, it's the décima's polysemy—its seeming resistance to delimiting definitions and categorizations that best describes the genre's essential characteristics.

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[4] See the "*Carte Particuliere du Flueve St. Louis*" in Hübner (2017, 284). Significantly, this particular map suggests that not only were the early French colonist unaware of or uninterested in the area, but also that they saw no potential for its future development; as Hübner observes, the map represented both an ideal vision of the colony and "funktionierte auch als Zukunftsmodell für das wirtschaftliche Potenzial Louisianas [functioned also as a future model for the economic potential of Louisiana]" (ibid., 67).

The local genre takes its name from the widely distributed and ancient Spanish verse form based on stanzas of ten octosyllabic verses set in rhyme scheme ABBAACCDDC (Gradante 2001). This ten-line based genre is remarkable for the complexity of its form, nearly pan-Hispanic distribution, and the diversity of performance practices and modes of mediation that it has embodied. These range from the written poetic genre established by Vincent Espinel in the sixteenth century, based on medieval precedents, to a wide range of regional genres of literature and song including distinctively local genres in the Caribbean and South America, often involving improvisational performance and extemporaneous composition (ibid, 2001). There is some evidence attesting to the historical practice of this form in Louisiana. The historian Carla Gerona (2014) has documented in rich detail practices of décima composition—both in oral and written form—in the Texas-Louisiana border region in the late eighteenth century. In southeast Louisiana, the evidence is somewhat more fragmentary. A single text, of a nominal décima recorded in Delacroix in the 1890s, in Samuel G. Armistead's analysis, "fragmentarily attests to the ten-verse, metrically complex form" (Armistead 2011), despite an irregular syllable count and significant departures from the conventional ten-line-based form (see chapter one in this dissertation; Fortier 1894; Armistead 1992b, 19–21). In another isolated example, the scholar of Spanish Jeanne Gillespie offers a convincing analysis of a more recent Isleño décima as evidencing possible vestigial features of the ten-line-based form. (Gillespie 2016, 38). Beyond these fragmentary cases, there are no historical examples of décimas composed or sung by Isleños in Louisiana conforming to the formal characteristics of the ten-line-based genre.

These nominal and fragmentary formal and historical connections notwithstanding, Isleño décimas are "décimas" in name only. The Spanish songs that came to be known as décimas in lower St. Bernard are formally distinct from the eponymous ten-line based genre, representing a complete lexical shift in the historical use of the term in Isleño Spanish. Armistead observed that "in the *Isleño* dialect, the term *désima*[5] can mean any type of song" (Armistead 1992b, 12). The songs tend to be set in octosyllabic quatrains often with rhyme scheme ABCB, though irregularities in meter, rhyme, and stanza organization are integral to the genre's distinctiveness. The songs' texts are characterized by funny, irreverent, ironic, salty, and even obscene lyrics depicting essentially allusive, rather than narrative, scenes; that is, the texts don't really tell a story so much as allude to events with which both the performer and audience are already familiar. These are typically set to mostly diatonic, step-wise tunes, often contrafacts of older *romances*, popular songs, and other Isleño décimas. These songs were embodied in a wide range of performance practices, including individual composition, invective improvisation, and collective extemporaneous composition.

Despite these essential features, which distinguished Isleño décimas from their namesake, and suggested a clear generic relationship with Mexican and Mexican American corridos, the Isleño décima has often been imagined as a local version of, or even merely an indistinguishable case of, the pan-Hispanic ten-line-based genre. *Grove Music Online*, for example, in an entry on the Isleño décima singer Irvan Perez, defines the Louisiana genre as "a narrative song using ten-line stanzas" (Clark 2011). The historian Samantha Perez quotes Patrica Manning Lestrade

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[5] Armistead used phonetic spelling throughout his scholarship to depict the unique phonology of Isleño Spanish.

(2004, 448)—but omits Lestrade's more nuanced explanation)—to describe Isleño décimas as "traditional songs . . . 'poems of ten octosyllabic verses' that survived in the popular Isleño dance halls" (S. Perez 2011, 79). Some commentators have suggested that it's the number of stanzas that define the form of the genre, a contention that's irreconcilable with even a cursory review of the corpus; Isleño décimas can have any number of stanzas, and most contain fewer than ten. Danielle Sears Vignes, for example, inexplicably defines the form as "a local narrative song consisting of ten to twelve stanzas rhyming in couplets" (Sears 2002, 21; see also Sears Vignes 2009). Even Isleño décima singers themselves have imagined such formal characteristics for the Louisiana genre. In *Mosquitoes and High Water* (*El Mosco y el Agua Alta*) (Kolher and Alvarez 1983), a documentary featuring a number of Isleño décimas—none of them organized into ten-line stanzas or made up of ten stanzas—Irvan Perez narrated, "The décima is a song composed in ten stanzas." Elsewhere, he qualified this statement: "The décima is composed of ten stanzas but the Isleños didn't follow the rules. They went ahead and added as many stanzas as they needed" (1997, 93). It's worth noting here that most décimas have fewer than ten stanzas; it is the *idea* of the Isleño décima's connection with the ten-line based genre that's important here, not the specifics of the genre's form.

As Philip Bohlman (2013b) observes of another complex and conflicted musical category, "any attempt to define Jewish music accounts for its contradictions, eventually becoming mired in them" (144). Rather than attempting to define the genre, it is precisely the mire of the décima's rich polysemy that I take as my metaphorical field site, wading into it in an attempt to reckon with the diverse perspectives from which the genre's meanings emerge. The Isleño décima, in this view, is an emergent category, taking shape from the sounds and signs of the long history of Spanish-language song in St. Bernard and the multiplicity of ideas about what the genre is and how it means, a flexible discursive category emerging from a diversity of perspectives over time. Over the course of the following chapters, these diverse and mutable meanings and definitions alternately seem to cohere and dissipate into the muddy waters underfoot. In the end, my aim is not to capture a discrete definition or interpretation of my own. Neither is this an effort to chart or typologize the manifold ideas about décimas that I encounter in my research. Rather I aim at an affective impression of the very diffuseness, ineffability, and mutability that I've found so challenging and meaningful in studying Isleño décimas.

Recollecting

The ethnomusicologist Janet L. Sturman, in a review of Samuel G. Armistead's 1992 monograph, *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* (Sturman 1996), commented on the "special value [of] Armistead's examination of the locally created décima, the most distinctive genre of songs associated with the Isleños, and a tradition generally unrecognized in scholarly literature" (ibid., 100). The book, Sturman believed, would "provide both an incentive and a solid framework" for ethnomusicologists to "extend Armistead's work" (ibid., 101). *Mirabile dictu*, over twenty years have passed since Sturman's review was published in *Ethnomusicology,* Armistead's monograph remains the most up-to-date and complete resource on the subject,[6] and, despite an explosion of interest in music scholarship on Louisiana, there have been no major studies of the subject by a music scholar.

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[6] Jeanne Gillespie's (2016) insightful article on the subject stands out as a recent example of scholarship on the subject.

In the meantime, the last practitioners of the tradition have passed away, rendering Armistead’s work all the more crucial to any study of the genre today. Beginning in the 1970s, Armistead brought the unique oral culture of the Isleños, most notably the iconic décima, under close analytic scrutiny and into wider circulation through a plethora of scholarly and journalistic publications (1992b, 2007; see also 1978, 1979, 1981b, 1981c, 1982, 1983, 1991a, 1991b, 1992a, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1997, 2011, 2014). This was preceded by a cursory study by Alcée Fortier (1894) and the foundational work of Raymond MacCurdy (1975; see also 1949), but it was Armistead’s decades-long fieldwork and scholarship that offers a key resource for the study of the décima and its milieu today. Armistead passed away in 2013, leaving behind an extensive archive of field recordings, papers, and ephemera related to his work in Louisiana. His collection of nearly eighty hours of field tapes represents by far the largest collection of recordings of Isleño décimas, and of ethnographic recordings relating to Isleño language, culture, and history.

Thus Armistead’s work was a key point of reference as I began my research, and Armistead—the historical person, his research, activism, and publications—played a central role in the history of the genre as I envision it in this dissertation. Armistead’s archive presented both an opportunity and a challenge. Imagined as an archive of “raw” material, it seemed a vast resource—here were hundreds of songs and scores of hours of field tapes to analyze, an opportunity to revisit the material from a new perspective. But as I began working both with Armistead’s archive and on my own fieldwork, the importance of understanding Armistead’s work on its own terms, and its impact on the history I was trying to understand, became increasingly evident. Armistead’s work was steeped in the priorities and assumptions of a specific brand of hispanist philology, and situated in contemporary scholarly debates within

Spanish language, folklore, and literature, at that time. For Armistead, the décima boiled down to a *reflection* in text of Isleño history and "self-image," which expressed "the *Isleño* view of things, their preferences, preoccupations, and concerns" (ibid., 167). These songs reflected Isleños' distinctive humor and irreverence in the face of the hardship inherent to life in this marsh frontier. Above all, they embodied what Armistead termed "the self-sufficient localisms" of the Isleños (ibid., 26). The paradigm of collecting, in which songs are collected in interviews with informants, and then analyzed as texts within a comparative pan-Hispanic world of "folkliterature," presented challenges to an ethnomusicologist steeped in the "reflexive turn" and its resounding lessons of the centrality of experience, perspective, positionality, and reflection to the ethnographic method. As my research and fieldwork took shape, Armistead's work—not just the materials of his archive, but the ethos of collecting and the specific historical circumstances he was working under—emerged as a key point of reference in the dissertation.

A substantial aspect of this dissertation, then, is as a restudy of Armistead's foundational work on the décima. It explores Armistead's expansive archive at length, and returns to the central issues in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*—questions about history, hermeneutics, locality, and identity, among others. It asks how things have changed in the forty years since Armistead began his research, as well as what hasn't changed. It also asks new questions that emerge from my perspective and my disciplinary priorities as an ethnomusicologist. In the absence of a living tradition, I engage with the available archival materials, my own experience of the genre today, and the perspectives of those who experienced the tradition in prior decades.

Recollecting, the title of this dissertation, is meant to summon the essential features of this approach. It references three central threads of restudy, collecting, and recollection. It explicitly invokes the model of ballad collecting that defined Armistead's approach and that condition my interlocutors' assumptions and expectations about my own work. Collecting here involves not only a methodology, but a mode of musical thought and container of musical meaning for myself and my interlocutors, one that defined the revival of Isleño identity that emerged in the 1970s and '80s and connected it with the long history of the imbrication of folk song and identity stretching back to the German Enlightenment. By returning to the collecting paradigm employed by previous generations of scholars and their informants, recollecting positions collecting at the center of this study. In addition to restudy and collecting, Recollecting is also meant to summon the quotodian, mnemonic sense of the word, especially with regards to the particularity and mutability of memory it implies; the phrase, *in my recollection*, of course, implies that another's recollection may differ from my own. Thus recollecting is meant to capture the interplay of memory, perspective, ballad collecting, and restudy in this approach. I introduce the term not as a discretely defined concept, but as a way glossing the multi-faceted approach, specific to this case, taken in the subsequent chapters.

Plan of the Dissertation

The chapters that follow tell a history of the Isleño décima, from the diverse musical culture from which it arose to its afterlives in the dynamic spaces of my own ethnographic present. Chapter one positions the décima within a diverse historical milieu. Challenging narratives of isolation and cultural retention that have dominated much of the discourses on the genre, I depict a history of the genre marked by a diverse lower St. Bernard intimately connected with its southeast Louisiana milieu and a circum-Gulf region. The philosopher R. G. Collingwood's notion of “imagining history,” affords an approach to the relatively fragmentary and scant evidence of the genre’s history prior to the mid-twentieth century. As Collingwood writes,

> Every present has a past of its own, and any imaginative reconstruction of this past aims at reconstructing the past of this present, the present in which the act of imagination is going on, as here and now perceived. (Collingwood 1971, 247)

History here entails a mandate of empathy, reflection, and positionality, seeming less a method or mode of thought distinct from ethnography, but perhaps rather like merely a change in perspective. This dialogue, between historical and ethnographic approaches, lies at the heart of my approach in subsequent chapters.

Chapters two and three turn to the more recent history of the genre, from the beginning of Armistead’s research in 1975 through the decline and eventual end of the décima as a vital musical practice in the first decade of this century. Armistead’s arrival in St. Bernard coincided with burgeoning interest in Isleño history and culture, what I refer to as the Isleño heritage revival. The Isleño heritage revival emphasized the eighteenth-century Canary Islands genealogy of the Isleños and a few hallmarks of Isleño culture: Spanish Louisiana cuisine; traditional occupations such as trapping and fishing; folk crafts such as net-making, decoy-carving, and boat-building; the *Isleño* dialect of Spanish; and folkloric performances of Canary Islands traditional culture. The Isleño décima would provide the thrust and potent symbolism of this revival, serving as *the* icon of Isleño identity. Décimas were featured in folkloric displays, at special community “décima nights,” concerts, international tours, in school programs, and in all manner of cultural exchanges and presentations. These provided the thrust of the political project of the revival in disseminating awareness of Isleño culture and establishing connections with other groups embracing their Spanish heritage throughout the Americas, peninsular Spain, and the Canary Islands.

Armistead was a central figure in what I describe as the transformation of the Isleño décima during this period, wherein it went from a diffuse range of musicking practices into a coherent genre capable of representing the Isleños in this new context. I draw on the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins's (1985) notion of "structural transformation," as "a pragmatic redefinition of the categories that alters the relationship between them" (ibid., 143), to explore the way Armistead and his collaborators collected, categorized, analyzed, and disseminated décimas, and, in the process, transformed the category and its meanings. Chapter two explores the way this transformation brought new relevance to the genre as part of what I refer to as a Herderian turn to heritage among Isleños in the 1970s and '80s, wherein this heterogeneous, semantically malleable, allusive, localized, inwardly directed, irreverent, and ironic genre, inhabiting diverse performance practices, was transformed into a discretely defined, homogeneous, narrative, globally situated, outwardly directed, g-rated ballad genre—an effective vehicle for the representation of an ethnic group and a revival movement.

In chapter three I refocus my analysis on this transformation to ask what was lost in this process and reckon with the historical forces that would eventually lead to the end of the genre as a vital tradition of musical practice. Here I draw on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) notion of silencing and Philip Bohlman's (2012) approach to analyzing aporia to consider the nature and meaning of the musical sounds that were lost in this process. Turning from the rather more historical approach of chapter one and the more analytical approach of chapter two, chapter three seeks to figure these two approaches as complementary lenses, in which historical and ethnographic concerns overlap with hermeneutic analysis of the décima corpus to bring both musical meaning and historical explanation into sharper focus. This concern with bringing the texts and musical meaning of the songs into conversation with historical and ethnographic methods defines the approach taken in final three chapters of the dissertation.

The final two chapters turn to the ethnographic present, a present which I understand as inseparable from the history preceding it. Chapter four considers the musical meaning of the genre in the absence of musical practice today. Drawing on the work of the sociologist Avery Gordon (1997), it figures the décima's *absence* as the object of ethnographic inquiry. The manifold musical meanings that cohere in the space of the genre's absence are considered in the context of recent scholarship on music sustainability, to argue for a more capacious and diverse music sustainability.

The final chapter returns to the questions of definitions raised above and throughout this dissertation, and the broader musical context introduced in chapter one, to consider the spaces of the décima's musical meaning in lower St. Bernard, past and present. Alongside chapter one, the final chapter is meant as a bookend to the core history of the décima narrated in chapters two through four, widening the focus to the broader musical world of the décima's contexts, and then turning to a close reading a number of historical song texts towards a deeper understanding of the genre's musical meaning and the distinctive Isleño ethos to which the songs gave voice. In the absence of a physically present musical object, my fieldwork often took shape around the spaces that my interlocutors associated with the tradition. In the context of the unfolding ecological disaster and rapid depopulation in lower St. Bernard, the dynamic spaces of the décimas past contexts present a challenging and rich terrain of meaning, which I consider in the context of scholarship in human geography, ecomusicology, and botany. Insights gleaned from these ethnographic experiences and reflections are brought to bear on an analysis of the décima corpus. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of chronotope, I apply insights from my fieldwork to close readings of the texts of historical décimas, to reveal the specific configurations of space and time that seem to unite the décima corpus, revealing he genre's embodiment of specific notions of agency, ethics, propriety, and ecology. Thus from the addled definitions discussed above and the dynamic polysemy explored in subsequent chapters, the final chapter arrives at one way of viewing the genre as a coherent and discrete musical genre, embodying a specific local ethos.

As I write this, in August of 2018, lower St. Bernard Parish, as well as the city I live in, New Orleans, and the wider world, seems in a very precarious situation. The early effects of global climate change are already wreaking havoc all over the world—the unprecedented wildfires currently raging in California and devastating flooding in Kerala are merely the most recent and salient examples. The current president of the United States seems intent on exacerbating this global ecological crisis and the outlook appears dim indeed. In many ways, lower St. Bernard is at the very forefront of the effects of the anthropocene to be felt at the local level. Ecological crisis—in the form of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, subsidence, deforestation, and stronger hurricanes—have already ravaged this place, resulting in its decline and depopulation. Without the places and communities that sustained the tradition, it's no surprise, in this context, that the Isleño décima has been lost as a vital musical tradition with the passing of the last practitioners of the genre. It's still possible, in 2018 though perhaps not for much longer, to imagine a future for this place and these songs. Current efforts to rebuild

Louisiana’s coast could be expanded, in conjunction with a global shift to reverse the current trajectory towards climate change, unprecedented sea level rise, and the end of the world as we know it. The Isleño décima could emerge as a central point of reference for Isleños as they redefine their heritage and reclaim their communities in new circumstances. In the epilogue, I imagine such future for the décima, and gesture at the genre’s relevance for future generations.

1. Reimagining Isleño Music History

Among the many Spanish-language songs that Samuel G. Armistead collected in St. Bernard Parish, categorized as “décimas” by his informants, was the following version of what Armistead described as a *corrido* entitled “La muerte de Madero” (The Death of Madero) (Armistead 1982, 1992b, 41–43):

En el mil novecientos y trece y a trece de enero en la capital de México, mataron a Molero	In 1913, on the thirteenth of January, in the capital of Mexico, They killed Molero
La noche estaba oscura y el aire, muy sereno Las calles principales de muerto estaban lleno	The night was dark and the air, very still. The main streets were full of the dead
Le dicen a Molero: —Ven aquí, te voy a decir. Te voy a da un consejo que te recuerde de mi.—	They tell Molero: “Come here, listen to what I’m going to say. I’m going to give you some advice that you remember me.”
Molero le responde, con risa y mucho gusto: —Me pueden fusilar y no firmo yo el renuncio.—	Molero answers, with a smile and very happily: “You can shoot me and I won’t sign the renunciation.”
Vuela, vuela, palomita escucha lo que te voy —Vete y dile a mis amigos que se recuerden de mi.—	Fly, fly, little dove, Hear what I’m telling you: “Go and tell my friends that they remember me.”[1]

As Armistead observed, “La muerte de Madero” is a paradigmatic example of a Mexican corrido: its narrative conventions, historical context, subject matter, rhyme scheme, and tune all conform neatly to parameters characteristic of that genre. And it is, indeed, a fragment of an obscure corrido that has endured in a few other similarly fragmentary versions from Mexico (Armistead 1982, 385–86; Castañeda 1943, 46; Henestrosa, n.d., 116–18; Hernández 1996 disc 1, Tracks 10-11) Its poetics, form, and tune place this song firmly within the corrido tradition. These include the introductory stanza with the specific date and place; the final stanza, featuring the *despedida* with the trope of the "little dove;" its octosyllabic verses and ABCB rhyme scheme; and the rolling diatonic melody and tonic-dominant harmonic motion.

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[1] Transcribed from field tape, “LA 2,” Side 1. October 26, 1975. Accessed at Armistead’s office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections. See also Armistead’s phonetic transcriptions and translations (Armistead 1982, 1992b, 41–43), which my interpretation resembles closely.

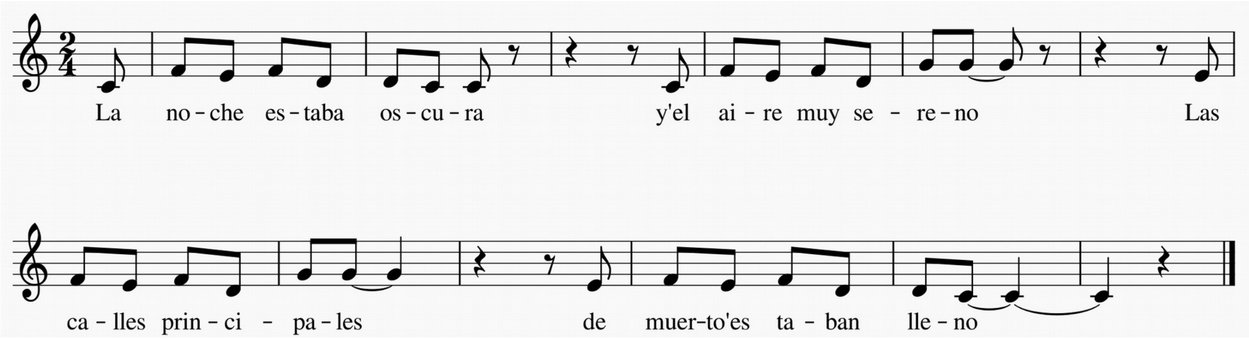
La no – che es – taba os – cu – ra y'el ai – re muy se – re – no Las
ca – lles prin – ci – pa – les de muer-to'es ta – ban lle – no

Figure 2: "La muerte de Madero" tune excerpt, adapted from Isarel J. Katz's transcription in Armistead (2007, 242)

Yet these features do not in themselves make "La muerte de Madero" stand out in the Isleño corpus. In fact most Isleño décimas share these features—suggesting an influence from the Mexican tradition in St. Bernard and common antecedents shared between the two genres. And the life of the song in Louisiana attests to the assimilative quality of the Isleño décima. The namesake of the song, the Mexican president Francisco Madero, is replaced in this Louisiana version by a local political leader, Manuel Molero, and the melody of "La muerte de Madero" became appropriated as a contrafact for other décimas composed in Louisiana.[2] Bu*t* "La muerte de Madero" *is* exceptional as an identifiable example demonstrating transmission from Mexico, with its subject matter of a specific historical event in Mexico City dating to the Mexican revolutionary period or later.

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[2] See, for example, "Setecientos setentaisiete" and "La décima de Wila" (I. Perez 1989 Tracks 2 and 7)

As a concrete example of musical exchange between Mexico and St. Bernard Parish at least as recently as the 1910's, "La muerte de Madero" poses some probing questions for our understanding of the Isleño décima and its historical context. How did "La muerte de Madero" find its way to Louisiana and what historical circumstances afforded such an exchange? As I discuss below, answering these questions seems to require unraveling the dominant historical and cultural narrative of the Isleños. In this chapter I take "La muerte de Madero" as a point of departure for reimagining the historical context of the Isleño décima prior to its canonization in the late twentieth century. I assess the existing literature on Isleño history and the décima, which primarily imagines the Isleño décima as a pure retention, sustained over the centuries only by the utter isolation of the Isleños in lower St. Bernard Parish. I argue that rather than attesting to isolation and cultural retention, songs like "La muerte de Madero," along with a wide swath of historical sources and the received corpus of Isleño décimas itself, attest to a much richer history of ongoing intercultural exchanges which shaped and informed the local genre over the decades. In this account, the Isleños' supposed isolation gives way to a story of a broadly interconnected music culture comprising both local diversity and interconnected circum-Gulf Hispanic cultures. Rather than an isolated tradition enduring over time, I reimagine the Isleño décima as a modern practice of intercultural musicking. This historical intervention in turn affords a more nuanced view of the décima as a container for a wide variety of historical Spanish-language musicking, and sets the stage for the critical evaluation of the subsequent collection, canonization, and political use of the décima in the Isleño heritage revival of the late twentieth century, the subject of chapter two.

In referring to the historical approach taken in this chapter as reimagining, I’m drawing on the philosophy of history of R. G. Collingwood (1971), who argues that at the heart of historical thought is a process of imagination. Collingwood rejects an empirical notion of historical method in favor of an expansive understanding of historical thought as fundamentally about a historical imagination inspired by authorities and sources, not beholden to them. Historical thought necessitates a critical stance towards past authorities,

> interpolating, between the statements borrowed from our authorities, other statements implied by them. Thus our authorities tell us that on one day Caesar was in Rome and on a later day in Gaul; they tell us nothing about his journey from one place to the other, but we interpolate this with a perfectly good conscience. (Ibid., 240)

Furthermore, historians’ relationship to sources are not of a different kind than their relationship to past authorities, thus “there are for historical thought no fixed points thus given: in other words, . . . in history, just as there are properly speaking no authorities, there are properly speaking no data” (ibid., 243). A letter, for example, consists of mere marks on a paper; the “data” itself must be the product of historical imagination. The historian must imagine a person making such marks as meaningful symbols in specific historical circumstances. The result is thus not a historical method unmoored by the facts of the past and the hard evidence of empirical data, but a call for a historical method with human empathy and the reflective study of the human condition at center:

> Freed from its dependence on fixed points supplied from without, the historian’s picture of the past is thus in every detail an imaginary picture, and its necessity is at every point the necessity of the *a priori* imagination. Whatever goes into it, goes into it not because his imagination passively accepts it, but because it actively demands it. (ibid., 245)

Reimagining Isleño music history then involves interpolating between the claims of isolation and purity, and the sources those past authorities drew on and new ones that have since emerged, to see what emerges from my own engagement with the Isleño musical past. As Collingwood observed,

> every present has a past of its own, and any imaginative reconstruction of this past aims at reconstructing the past of this present, the present in which the act of imagination is going on, as here and now perceived. (Ibid., 247)

Interpolating between the statements and sources discussed below leads to a reimagining of lower St. Bernard as a place defined not as a discrete place, but as a richly interconnected space. As the geographer Doreen Massey (2005) argues,

> The modern, territorial, conceptualisation of space understands geographical difference as being constituted primarily through isolation and separation. Geographical variation is preconstituted. First the difference between places exist, and then those different places come into contact. The differences are the consequences of internal characteristics. It is an essentialist, billiard-ball view of place. It is also a tabular conceptualisation of time. It runs clearly against the injunction that space be thought of as an emergent product of relations, including those relations which establish boundaries, and where "place" in consequence is necessarily *meeting* place, where the "difference" of a place must be conceptualised more in the ineffable sense of the constant emergence of a *uniqueness* out of (and within) the specific constellations of interrelations within which that place is set . . . and of what is made of that constellation. (Ibd., 68)

Just as there are no fixed points in Collingwood's understanding of historical time, there are no fixed places, discrete from a perspectival field of emergent space. In my historical imagination of the Isleño musical past, fixed categories, of ethnic groups, villages, national borders, genres of music, and musical mediation, for example, give way rather to a fluid world of bayous, bays, lakes, swamps, and marsh, in which people and their musical culture emerge in the spaces of their interrelationships rather than from the purity of isolation and separation.

A “Wild and Strange” Place?

Form the earliest examples, beginning in the late nineteenth century, scholarship on the Isleños has tended to imagine lower St. Bernard as a singularly isolated place, despite its proximity to New Orleans and the waterways of the Gulf Coast. The pioneering scholar of Louisiana, Alcée Fortier, published an ethnographic account of two visits to lower St. Bernard in the early 1890s. Fortier’s (1894) ethnography seems perched uncomfortably somewhere between elitist contempt and empathy for the Isleños and their sparse material lives. He reflected on their living conditions:

> The palmetto huts struck me with amazement — how could human beings in a civilized country live in such dwellings! There is no chimney, and the fire is made in the hut on a few bricks, the smoke escaping through an opening in the roof. (205-6)

Fortier went on to describe a “wild and strange” (ibid., 205) place, populated by a “pure race” (ibid., 208) of Canary Islands colonists and their descendants: “perfectly contented . . . children of nature . . ., [who] lived without the schoolmaster and the physician and only needed the priest for the marriage and funeral ceremonies” (ibid., 207).

A generation later, a newspaper reporter visiting Delacroix gave an even more vivid account than Fortier of the supposed isolation of the Isleños. Minnie Howell Storck (1915) described departing the last “outpost of civilization” at the train station in Reggio, below which lay only

> swamp and bayou; lone dwellings, miles apart; solitary, century-old trees hanging over the roadway and waving, warning as it were, with their long, mossy fingers; darkness and dreariness; utter loneliness and remoteness all of which gives one a feeling as of traveling to the uttermost ends of the earth. Momentarily one half expects to fall over something into nothingness. (Howell Storck 1915, 7)

At Delacroix, she went on, “[t]he scene was wild and strange.” Like Fortier, Howell Storck reflected on the “singular” experience of hearing a “Spanish song.” She credited the endurance of Isleño culture to the “isolation and seclusion” afforded by their environment, which served to preserve the traits and characteristics “of the people so that they are still essentially Spanish.” Howell Storck’s impression of the Isleños themselves went beyond even Fortier’s in its elitist exoticist persepctive:

> It is not a little remarkable how much of native dignity there is among these simple folk . . . nothing in their lives but labor, yet withal they are cheerful, kindly and contented . . . miles from a moving-picture show, and hav[ing] never heard an opera, or been to the circus. (Ibid.)

These pioneering ethnographic accounts ushered in a century of scholarship and journalism that has imagined a lower St. Bernard defined by isolation and perseverance, reinforced by the enduring trope of Isleño ignorance and backwardness against outside pressures of change and assimilation. Scholarship on the Isleños has included historical, linguistic, folkloric, and philological studies. In each of these fields, scholars have reinforced the narrative of isolation that characterized the turn-of-the century accounts described above, and understanding Isleño language and culture as retentions resulting from that isolation.

Historians of the Isleños have emphasized a narrative featuring an originary moment in eighteenth-century colonization projects, and subsequent isolation and retention of their language and culture. A substantial portion of historical studies (Scramuzza 1924; Villere 1972; Forsyth 1978; Acosta Rodríguez 1979; Tornero 1980; Vega 1998) and especially the essential work of Gilbert C. Din (1976, 1988, 2014) have focused almost exclusively on the colonial history of Spanish St. Bernard. Other historical studies have explored a submerged Spanish influence in the state’s history (MacCurdy 1951; Montero de Pedro 2000), invoking a unitary colonial Spanish origin and then retention through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulting from isolated pockets of Hispanic culture in the state. More recent scholars have lent more nuance to the colonial-oriented historiography, marshaling this core narrative of colonial migration and subsequent isolation and cultural retention to focus on the specific historical circumstances of the Isleños of lower St. Bernard (Vega 1998; Ramirez 2004b; S. Perez 2011; Harris 2012).

This literature has produced what might best be described using Kay Kaufman Shelemay’s notion of a “closed historical circuit,” (1980, 237) wherein Isleños settled in St. Bernard Parish in the late eighteenth century and remained utterly isolated there until the Second World War finally brought contact with the outside world. As in Shelemay’s study of Falasha history and liturgy, this narrative serves to isolate explanations Isleño history and culture and limits comparison with a broader historical and cultural context (ibid.). The preeminent scholar of Isleño history, Gilbert Din, perhaps best encapsulates this analysis. In his foundational historical study, Din (1988) credited the preservation of Isleño identity through the nineteenth century to “isolation and Louisiana’s poor educational system, economy, and class-ridden society” (xi). Din further argued that the small original group of settlements and a lack of additional Hispanic immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant that Isleños “had only limited influence on other people in Louisiana” (ibid., xi).

Not until the Second World War according to Din, did Isleños begin interacting in significant ways with outsiders. Even much more recent scholarship has sustained this myth. Felice Ann Coles (1993) has credited the arrival of paved roads after the Second World War as the first intervention in the complete isolation that supposedly marked St. Bernard since colonization (ibid., 121). Samantha Perez (2011) has emphasized the "self-inflicted seclusion" (41) that defined Isleño life until the Second World War, after which, "the greatest asset in preserving Isleño tradition—their isolation—was gone" (ibid., 62). For Perez, Isleño history in the twentieth century is defined by this singular teleology: "After the Second World War, in arguably the first turning point away from tradition toward modernity for the Isleños, men in St. Bernard began to look for work besides fishing and trapping" (ibid., 72), that is, work which would have taken them outside of lower St. Bernard.

Linguistic studies of Isleño Spanish (MacCurdy 1950b; Varela 1979; Armistead 1991b, 1992a, 1994b; Coles 1991, 1993, 2011; Alvar 1998, 2000; Lestrade 1999) have largely reinforced this dominant historical narrative, despite what the linguist Shane Lief (2015), in a probing study of Native American musical performances in the Lower Mississippi River valley during the colonial period, describes as the region's reputation as a "language contact area." Indeed, as Lief's study demonstrates, the area was also "music contact area," representing a "particularly rich confluence of musical practices . . ." attention to which has the potential to challenge "dubious notions of cultural 'purity' and linear development." Though some scholars have pointed to a few interesting Anglicisms and Francisms in Isleño Spanish, attesting to a more nuanced account of intercultural forces in Louisiana, the thrust of the linguistic studies on Isleño Spanish has focused on the retention of archaisms from the Canary Islands, reifying the primacy of the Isleños' colonial origins and isolation.

Scholars of folklore have largely taken this received historical narrative for granted, with the result that Isleño culture has typically been assumed to result from colonial origins and subsequent retention resulting from isolation. Scholars of Isleño folklore have generally had to balance, on the one hand, this received historiography emphasizing isolation and cultural retention, with the more complex and diverse ethnographic reality actually encountered in St. Bernard on the other. The focus has been on identifying very old songs and local songs that attest to the singularity of Isleño experience in lower St. Bernard. This view depicts Isleño décimas as representative of an idyllic, isolated way of life. More recent scholarly voices have done little to challenge this status quo, reifying an understanding of the décima as representative of an essentialist and ahistorical Isleño past.

The work of Raymond R. MacCurdy, who undertook intensive fieldwork in St. Bernard in the 1940s, laid the groundwork for this paradigm. MacCurdy set out with an initial priority of recording *romances*, examples from the traditional Spanish repertories that may have survived in Louisiana (MacCurdy 1947), and in his early publications, MacCurdy, credited the Isleños' isolation for the retention of their language and culture:

> The relative isolation of the communities of St. Bernard Parish, and the dedication of the inhabitants to occupations which keep them largely removed for long periods of time from English-speaking people have encouraged and stimulated the retention of their native Spanish language and foflkways. (MacCurdy 1950b, 21; see also MacCurdy 1948, 1949, 1950a)

By 1975, when he analyzed his theretofore unpublished collection of décimas, MacCurdy clung tenaciously to this core historiographical argument, even as he identified songs in the Isleño repertory with connections to peninsular Spain, Cuba, Mexico, New Mexico and elsewhere, and personally met residents of St. Bernard hailing from Andalusia, Galicia, Asturias, the Canary Islands, Cuba, and Mexico (MacCurdy 1975, 9). MacCurdy was unequivocal about the key role of isolation in the retention of Isleño Spanish:

> El fenómeno de la conservación del castellano como lengua viva se debe al aislamiento de estas gentes que forman pequeñas islas hispánicas en el mar estadounidense dominado por el idioma ingles. (Ibid., 11)

> [The phenomenon of the conservation of Spanish as a vital language is due to the isolation of these people, who form small Hispanic islands in the U.S.-American sea dominated by the English language.]

When Samuel Armistead initiated his intensive fieldwork in St. Bernard in the mid 1970s, he inherited both this received historical narrative and MacCurdy's initial interest in identifying the retention of Spanish *romances* in St. Bernard. Armistead's romance study was part of a broader effort to confirm Ramón Menéndez Pidal's "classic theory of the *romance's* Pan-Hispanic character" (Armistead 1992b, ix), that is, its distribution wherever Spanish is spoken. For Armistead, the issue coalesced around the sense of historical identity emerging at that time in the Isleño heritage revival. This entailed, on the one hand, a narrative of isolation that marked the rhetoric of an emerging Isleño heritage revival, and the reality he confronted in his fieldwork, attesting to diverse influences, on the other.

More recent scholarship has sustained this core narrative. Patricia Manning Lestrade (1999, 2002, 2004) attributes the decline of both Isleño Spanish and décima singing to better roads, education, and economic development since the Second World War, marking an end to the centuries of isolation that had supposedly sustained Isleño culture. Danielle Sears Vignes (Sears 2002; Sears Vignes 2009) likewise subscribes to a teleological narrative that credits Isleño isolation with the preservation of both Isleño Spanish and the décima, and the end of that isolation with their decline.

In a recent article Jeanne Gillespie has begun to push back against this historiographical inertia with a nuanced historical and textual analysis of examples of Isleño décimas. Gillespie figures the Isleño hamlets as “not an isolated enclave, but a community that enjoyed cultural influences from numerous sources at various moments in history” (Gillespie 2016, 39). In what follows, I suggest a few such “sources and moments in history” from a wide variety of historical sources, to imagine a music history of lower St. Bernard marked by intercultural contact, diversity, movement, and exchange.

In the next chapter, I bring this historical sketch to bear on the décima tradition, depicting a broad range of musicking practices that came to be categorized as décimas. I view this history through two overlapping lenses. The first is the circum-Gulf of Mexico, in which people, commodities, literature, music, ideas, and sensibilities circulated through the bayous and marshes of lower St. Bernard and south Louisiana, along the Gulf Coast states, the northern Caribbean, and Mexico. Then I tighten the focus to southeast Louisiana, highlighting Isleños’ position within a rich multi-cultural milieu, centered around New Orleans and featuring Anglo-American, French-speaking, and diverse Hispanic facets.

A Radio Crossroads

One medium that urges a reimagining of the isolationist narrative is radio. By the second quarter of the twentieth century, even the most isolated corners of the world became irradiated with voices and music originating from distant cities and continents. Isleño listeners in St. Bernard Parish would have picked up radio signals from English-language stations across the United States as well as Spanish-language radio programming originating in Mexico and Cuba. Radio receivers were central features of early twentieth-century Isleño life, especially during periods of the year spent at remote trapping camps or on fishing vessels. In 2017 when I asked Anthony Fabra, who grew up in Delacroix in the 1940s and '50s, about the significance of his family's crank-operated radio during long months spent at the family's trapping camp in the winter, he told me, "that was *ALL* we had." Fabra Remembered fondly the different kinds of broadcasting they could pick up: French-language stations from Louisiana, "Spanish music," and even a bullfight broadcast from Mexico.

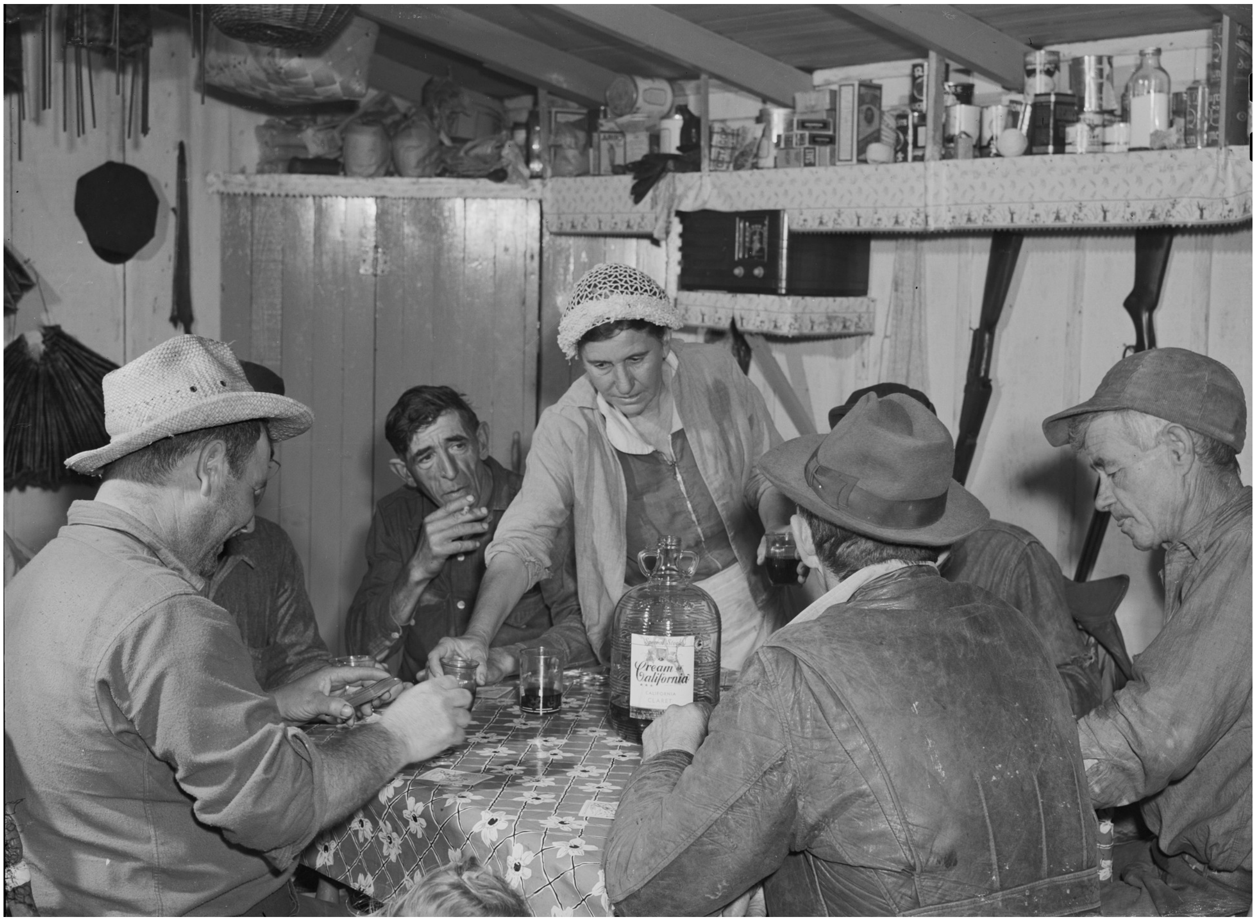

Figure 3: Isleños at camp, radio visible in background [3]

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[3] Photograph by Marion Post Wolcott, "*Spanish muskrat trappers drinking wine and playing "cache," a form of poker, in their camp in the marshes. Delacroix Island, Saint Bernard Parish, Louisiana*" (1941) Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/item/2017806204/).

Most of the Spanish-language broadcasting picked up in St. Bernard probably originated from Mexico. By 1930 Louisiana listeners would have picked up the 5,000 watts of XEW's Spanish-language programming in Mexico City (González and Torres 2011, 248). Much more powerful signals originated just across the Mexico-U.S. border. "Border blasters," radio stations established by Americans just across the Mexican border, and outside of the reach of U.S. regulators, are well known as a crucible of U.S. American musical culture—key to the development and popularization of genres such as country and western, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll (Fowler and Crawford 2002) They were also instrumental in sustaining Spanish-speaking cultures in the United States, both recent immigrants from Latin American and long-established groups such as the *Hispanos* of New Mexico and Isleños of Louisiana.

Even primarily English-language border stations, directed at listeners to the north of the border, were required to program at least twenty five percent of "national content" (Gonzales and Torres 2011, 250) and by 1937 to play *La Hora Nacional*, a government-produced hour-long program which often consisted entirely of Mexican music, on Sunday evenings. This national content included, for example, performances by the *Mexican Tipica Orchestra* (Gonzales and Torres 2011, 250) which played Mexican popular music and made a hit of "Cielto lindo" with their 1926 recording of the song, a favorite among many Isleños who grew up in the 1930s. Spanish-speaking Americans around the U.S. valued these stations for both the Spanish-language and colorful English-language programming as they nourished a shared Hispanic heritage and nurtured assimilationist impulses (Rivas-Rodríguez 2009).

In St. Bernard, this combination of Spanish-language programming and anglophone music had a lasting impact on my Isleño interlocutors. When I asked Jerry Alfonso, another native of Delacroix now in his eighties, about Isleño décimas in 2015, he generously shared his memories of Spanish songs sung in St. Bernard, and even sang a few fragments of one that he still remembered. But he was more interested in sharing with me his real musical passion—the popular music he heard on the radio as a child. He enthusiastically sang a rendition of the Mexican popular song, “El rancho grande,” as well as Jimmie Rodgers’s “All Around the Water Tank.”

Isleño Mobilities

Jimmie Rodgers was extremely popular across rural south Louisiana throughout the late 1920s and ‘30s. As the scholar of Cajun music, Sara Le Menestrel (2015), observes, his “influence would extend well beyond country music, [and] was a perennial source of inspiration [for Louisiana French music]” (59). These seemingly disparate points of reference attest to what I see as the key role of radio in the diverse intercultural nature of Isleño musical life in the early twentieth century. Isleños tuned into “El rancho grande,” Jimmie Rogers, and a wide range of related music in both Spanish and English broadcast via AM radio from Mexico, Cuba, and elsewhere along the circum-Gulf. Isleños would have been able to pick up many more radio stations in the course of their travels in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. Indeed, as Raymond R. MacCurdy (1975) surmised of his mid-century fieldwork:

> [M]uchas de las embarcaciones de los pescadores llevan radios, y por medio de estas han llegado a conocer alla, en pleno mar, las canciones de moda de los varios paises caribes. (90)
>
> [Many of the fishers’ boats have radios, and through these they have come to know, there, in the open sea, the fashionable songs of the various Caribbean countries.]

While they certainly would have been exposed to different radio stations in their travels, this was likely just one facet of the interactions that would have resulted from travels around southeast Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico in the course of fishing, trapping, and trading.

On the one hand, lower St. Bernard Parish is often noted for being “the end of the road,” which it indeed is. Route 300 runs along Bayou Terre aux Boefs roughly seven miles from Reggio through Delacroix before abruptly ending at a “Dead End” sign and open water and marsh. Yet the metaphor of a “crossroads” might be better suited to describing this place. Just as radio waves from all over North America and points south and west crisscrossed St. Bernard in the 1920s and ’30s, so have people moved in and out of lower St. Bernard since the original settlement of the area, bringing with them diverse languages and cultures. A closer look at the historical record shows that Isleños moved around in a rich regional milieu connecting the area to New Orleans, Anglo-American traditions, and the circum-Gulf, while migrants from the Philippines, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America moved in and out of the area, further enriching St. Bernard’s Hispanic culture.

From the first generation of Canary Island colonists in Louisiana, the Isleños have been a mobile people. Though they intended to travel directly to new settlements in Louisiana via New Orleans or Havana (Din 1988, 18), Isleños faced a tumultuous journey to St. Bernard, beginning with the upheavals from their homes to the port of embarkation in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. From there, Isleños sojourned in such places as La Guaira, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Havana, and New Orleans on their way to St. Bernard (Din 1988, 19–22). From that time on the historical record is rife with accounts of Isleños traveling and moving around in various contexts. Isleños served under Bernardo de Gálvez during his campaign on British Florida during the Revolutionary War (see Caughey 1934), and Isleños famously made their way upriver to Chalmette to play a definitve role in the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812 (see Din 1988, 91–92).

By the 1830s, sources attest to Isleños moving about freely in a greater New Orleans region. A reporter for the *Times Picayune* reported in 1838 of the weekly journey of Isleños by oxcart to what's now called the French Market in New Orleans. By that time each household made the thirty-mile trip approximately fortnightly, to sell their produce—onions, potatoes, pumpkins—and acquire staples like flour from town (reproduced in Prichard 1941).

This impression of a routinized and idyllic Isleño lifestyle in mid-nineteenth-century St. Bernard would be periodically shaken during the generational tumults which defined what Drew Gilpin Faust terms the "long twentieth century" (2008) in the southern United States, beginning with the Civil War. In 1861 Isleños joined their Hispanic compatriots from New Orleans and around the state, organizing their own regiments and joining others (Din 1988, 113) to serve in the Confederate Louisiana Militia, taking them around the country and exposing them to fellow Hispanic Confederate conscripts, even while New Orleans and St. Bernard remained under Union occupation throughout the war.[4]

Following the Civil War, accounts of Isleño mobility increased. In the antebellum period, most Isleños still lived on the original land grants around the colonial center of San Bernardo, along Bayou Terre aux Boeufs in and around the present-day hamlets of Poydras, St. Bernard, and Toca. Isleños were primarily occupied in farming, growing onions and other crops, and were intertwined in the regional plantation economy, often working on the sugar plantations nearby. Following the Civil War and the collapse of the regional economy, Isleños began to relocate *en masse* to the distal fishing villages in the lower parts of the parish: hamlets like Delacroix, La

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[4] For a comprehensive, if celebratory, account of these "Hispanic Confederates," see O'Donnell-Rosales (2006).

Chinche, and Yscloskey which have endured as the most robust centers of Isleño culture to the present day.d

The First World War once again brought mass mobilization to the Isleños, many of whom traveled farther than ever before during service in that conflict (Din 146–147). They returned to a booming economy in lower St. Bernard in the 1920s. Bootlegging during prohibition, high fur prices and a new cash crop in the form of muskrat pelts resulted in an increasing role for Isleños in a booming regional economy (Din 1988, 149). Smuggling liquor attests to the place of St. Bernard as a regional crossroads, and to the transnational Hispanic culture of the circum-Gulf. Connections and communications with Cuba laid the foundation for the vital trade in contraband rum through St. Bernard to the speakeasies of New Orleans (Din 1988, 150–151).

The Second World War bore witness to the acceleration of processes of mobility and exchange that had been ongoing in St. Bernard since the original colonial project, bringing Isleños to Europe and the Pacific, where their language and maritime experience proved to be valuable assets (Din 181–184). One of my interlocutors, Edward “Duggie” Robins (1926–2017) shared vivid recollections of his own perspective on the regional and global entanglements that defined life during the Second World War and afterwards. Robin was born in 1926 and volunteered at the age of seventeen so he could join the navy, rather than wait to be drafted into the army. Putting his maritime experience and fluency in Spanish to use in the war effort, Robin piloted a Higgins landing craft in the Pacific, a vessel instrumental to U.S. victory inspired by the flat-bottomed pirogues of South Louisiana and designed initially to negotiate the shallow drafts of the Mississippi Delta (Herman 2012, 204–5). Following the war, Robin made a business career as a truly cosmopolitan circum-Gulf figure. He set sail in his shrimping boat for Honduras after the war, where he lived for twelve years, running a seafood processing plant on the Caribbean coast, a ranch, and sawmill, before returning home to Yscloskey.

Mobility, so at odds with an imagined isolationism, emerges here as a defining feature of Isleño history, and this fact of life has been attested to in the décima repertory. Surrounded by waterways, which afforded movement rather than restrictions–around a region linked by bayous, rivers, lakes, bays, and the expanse of the Gulf of Mexico, Isleños found themselves enmeshed in a circum-Gulf region marked by communities connected to one another by trade, travel, and a common history.

A Diverse Hispanic St. Bernard

Isleños didn't have to travel very far to find themselves situated within a diverse multi-cultural environment. In their daily lives in and around the bayous and lakes that surrounded the Isleño hamlets, they encountered remote enclaves of Spanish-speaking Filipinos, who preceded even the Isleños' arrival in Louisiana, settling in lower St. Bernard possibly as early as the 1760s. And just a few miles upriver was New Orleans, a global cosmopolitan city that hosted large and visible Hispanic communities from the colonial period to the present day. Lower St. Bernard Parish was itself the destination for a consistent stream of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, China, the Philippines, and Latin America through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Duggie Robin was the descendant of Acadian refugees who arrived in Louisiana via Trinidad in the late eighteenth century. Robin's ancestors settled in St. Bernard and eventually assimilated into the Isleño community of Yscloskey (William Hyland, personal communication, 2015). Duggie Robin's father, the décima singer, John Robin, emphasized the multicultural milieu of lower St. Bernard in a 1975 interview with Samuel Armistead, exclaiming

> ¡Todo eran españoles! ¡Todo ayer Mexicanos, y franchesces, y puertorriqueños, cubanos y todos! [They were all Spaniards! All back then were Mexicans, French, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and everything!] Everything! The Immigration [enforcement] was nothing there! They couldn't come there! Everybody knows that was a lost country![5]

Duggie Robin was not the first in his family to travel widely. When I asked him about his family history, it overturned many of my own assumptions. Robin, of course, is not a Hispanic surname. Today the Robins pronounce their family name as in the English word for the red-breasted songbird. During Duggie Robin's childhood, however, it was still pronounced as in French, *"Robín"* And despite their latter-day prominence as Isleño culture-bearers, Duggie Robin's grandfather spoke French and was the first in his family to settle in St. Bernard. He didn't settle in Yscloskey or one of the other Isleño hamlets, but about four miles east of Yscloskey along the southern bank of Lake Borgne, at the mouth of a bayou and an ancient shell mound, in the Filipino psshrimping village of St. Malo.

Duggie Robn's grandfather's movements to St. Malo and then Yscloskey, like so many of the bits of first-person historical data I've encountered in the field, seemed to speak to a diverse lower St. Bernard defined by intercultural exchange. The available scholarship and primary sources on the Filipino settlements of lower St. Bernard Parish seem to further trouble the narrative of Isleño isolation outlined above. Though the Filipinos have occasionally been imagined as isolated, insular communities—exoticsrngo retentions of foreign cultures and colonial times sustained over the centuries by the isolation of the marshes of southeast Louisiana—a closer look at the historical record seems to suggest rather a multi-cultural setting which was part of a diverse Hispanic cultural milieu in lower St. Bernard.

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[5] Transcribed from field tape, "LA 1," Side 1. October 26, 1975. Accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections. See also Armistead (1992, 152–153).

Southeast Louisiana is home to the oldest community of Filipinos in the present-day United States. Filipinos impressed on Spanish galleons likely began settling in the distal marshes of Southeast Louisiana in the 1760s (Bautista 2002; Espina 1988), though a later date in the early nineteenth century is also possible (see Ignacio 2014). They established small fishing villages with buildings set on piers above the marsh and a large shrimp-drying platform as the focal point. Denizens of St. Bernard's Filipino enclave spoke both Spanish and Tagalog (Espina 1978, 1988; Hearn 2002a). Like the Isleños, the Filipino enclaves have been largely defined by a historiography marked by an exoticist discourse about isolation in the marshes of southeast Louisiana. In the 1880s, Lafcadio Hearn perhaps best captured this sentiment in his singularly evocative style:

> There has existed in the southeastern swamp lands of Louisiana a certain strange settlement of Malay fishermen—Tagalas from the Philippine Islands. The place of their Lacustrine Village is not precisely mentioned upon maps, and the world in general ignored until a few days ago the bare fact of their amphibious existence. Even the United States mail service has never found its way thither, and even in the great city of New Orleans, less than a hundred miles distant, the people were far better informed about the Carboniferous Era than concerning the swampy affairs of this Manila village. (Hearn 2002a, 54)

At the heart of Hearn's impression is a sense of surprise—even scandal—that such a remote, isolated, exotic, and foreign place could exist just under the nose of metropolitan New Orleans. The parallels with Fortier's assessment of the Isleños are striking, though there are some historical questions to ask of Hearn's, which perhaps reveal more about Hearn's perspective and journalistic impulses than the "lacustrine village" itself. For one, St. Malo is not a hundred miles from New Orleans—it is probably sixty miles via Hearn's circuitous Lake Pontchartrain route, and only thirty via bayou, road, or river. Furthermore, the historical data suggests that late nineteenth-century St. Malo was far from an isolated enclave—rather, as I explore below, it was intertwined with a complex regional culture involving both the nearby Isleño enclaves and New Orleans.

St. Malo's one hundred or so residents were intimately tied to New Orleans and the small towns around them. In 1825 they founded a benevolent society, La Union Filipina in New Orleans, establishing lasting connections with the city (Espina 1981, 84). Fifteen Filipino benevolent societies and social organizations would eventually be established in south Louisiana, including one in St. Bernard Parish (see Espina 1980, 1981). Ongoing immigration strengthened these regional and global entanglements. Louisiana's Filipinos did not simply arrive as a group in the eighteenth century and endure through the centuries, but were reinforced by intensive ongoing immigration which continues today (Espina 1974; Westbrook 2008). Those who could afford them had homes in New Orleans, especially in the Faubourg Marigny around the highest concentration of Filipinos in the city (Westbrook 2008). Others kept houses in the nearby Isleño villages of Shell Beach, Yscloskey, and Hopedale, when they were not at work at St. Malo. Hearn (2002a) observed that "[m]en who have families, keep them at New Orleans, or at Proctorville [Shell Beach] or at La Chinche [Hopedale]" (58), but a twentieth-century source attests to women and children also participating in fishing activities in the summers at St. Malo (Westbrook 2008). Proctorville, now known as Shell Beach and immediately adjacent to Yscloskey, is a predominantly Isleño fishing village only about three miles along the coast from St. Malo. After St. Malo was destroyed by a hurricane in 1915 (Espina 1974, 117–18), many residents resettled in Shell Beach and Yscloskey. In a 1980 interview with Samuel Armistead, Charles Robin, a lifelong resident of Yscloskey, recalled that there were many Filipinos living at Shell Beach as well as St. Malo.[6]

What emerges from these sources is a historical narrative defined not by pockets of isolated, insular groups, but by a regional milieu spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which Filipinos and Isleños trapped the same lands, fished in the same waters, lived in the same villages, and were generally intertwined in their day-to-day lives. An account from the influential Isleño Dr. Louis Ducros perhaps best captures both the distance that separated Isleños from their Filipino neighbors, and some of the common ground, literally and figuratively, which united them:

> To the French and Spanish children, the people of St. Malo were objects of an emotion between amusement and fright. Dr. Louis Ducros recalls the time in his boyhood that he first beheld one of them. “I stood in the road and gaped and gaped, and in my excitement I told a friend to look at the Chinaman. The man, Marcelino, turned on me and pointed—“Look here, boy, I’m no Chinaman. I talk Spanish like anybody else, and I’m a Christian!” (Kane 1944, 113)

References to musicking in the Filipino villages, though scant, seem to reinforce the notion of a common regional musical culture: like the Isleños, St. Bernard’s Filipino denizens at the turn of the century were noted for their love of dancing, typically to the sounds of an accordion (*The Times-Picayune* 1900), guitar (Schonberg 1995), and even a flute according to another 1900 source (Ignacio 2014). There are no accounts of a repertory of folk songs nourished by Louisiana’s Filipinos over the centuries, as there are of the Isleños’ décimas. Yet this absence perhaps affords a space to imagine a more diverse history of sung Spanish verse in St. Bernard, and one source, which does record some examples of singing at St. Malo, begins to help describe the shape of this absence.

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[6] Field tape, “LA 11,” Side 2. December 26, 1980. Accessed at Armistead’s office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

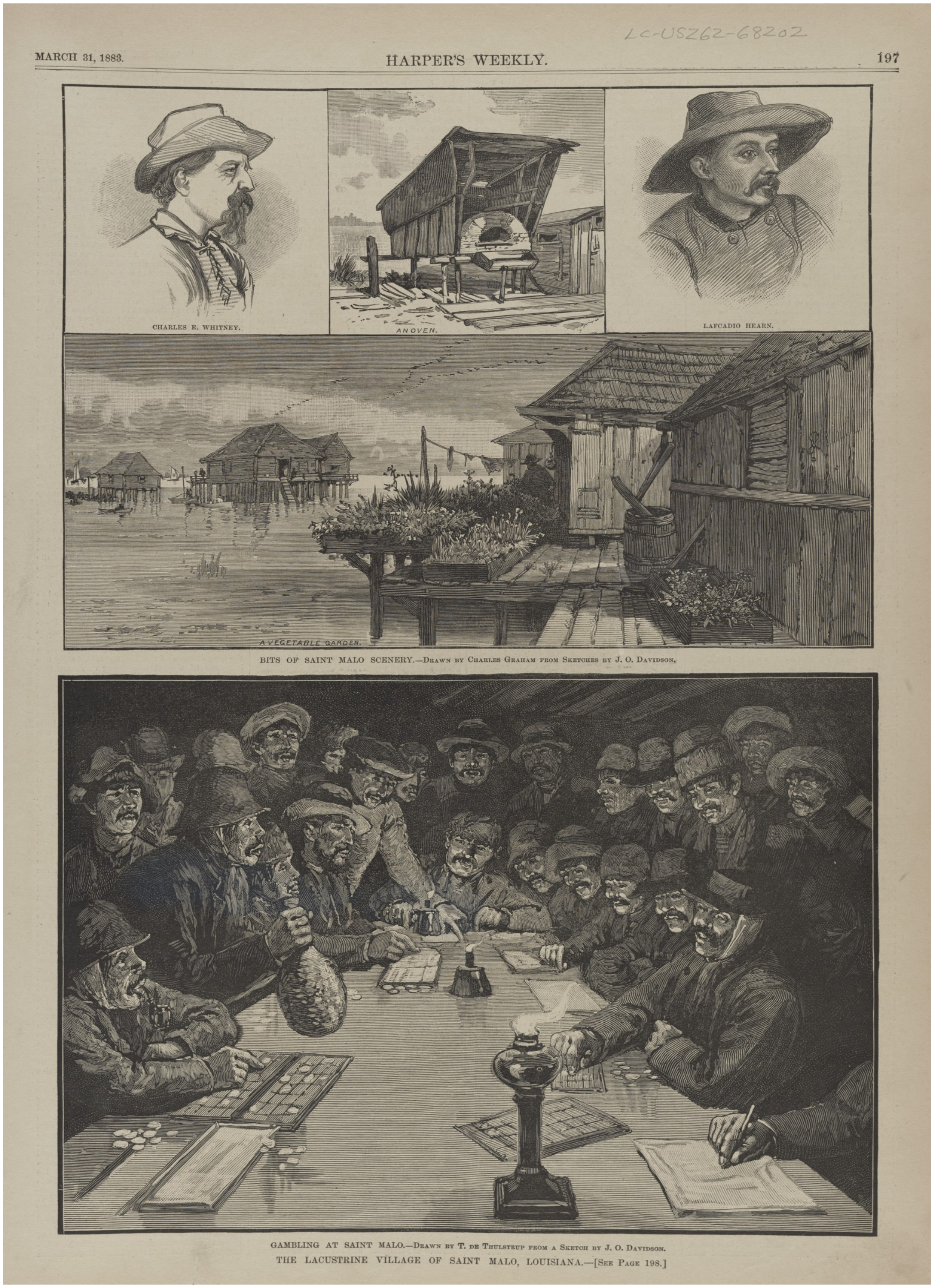
Since the late nineteenth century, observers have commented on the Filipino Louisianians' love of cards and dice (*The Times-Picayune* 1900; Hearn 2002a). The account of the historian Harnett Kane (1944) of the Isleño Albert E. Estopinal's hunting trips to St. Malo, besides offering a vivid ethnographic view of the multicultural milieu of lower St. Bernard, emphasizes the central importance of such games to social life in St. Malo:

> The Filipinos welcomed them [Isleños], took them to good grounds, and fed them dishes of rice and boiled fish, with a flavor such as he had never tasted before or later. Every night, under dark rafters from which hung carcasses of dried fish, the colonists gathered and played card games. Fish-oil lamps lighted part of the room and the winds whistled outside. Others agree that cards and dice seemed to be an obsession with the Filipinos. Excellent players, they almost always defeated their visitors. (Kane 1944, 113)

Lafcadio Hearn (2002a), writing over half a century earlier, offers remarkably rich detailed description of these musical games played at St. Malo. Hearn recorded the sung declamations of the *cantador*, Hilario, who announced the rolls of the dice with clever metaphors in sung verse for the participants:

> It is at Hilario's great *casa* that the Manila men pass stormy evenings, playing monte or a species of Spanish kemo. When the *cantador*, (the caller), sings out the numbers, he always accompanies the annunciation with some rude poetry characteristic of fisher life or the Catholic faith;
>
> Pareja da uno;
> Dos piquetes de rivero—
>
> a pair of ones (11); the *two stakes* to which the fish-car is fastened. (Hearn 2002a, 60)

This chapter began with Alcée Fortier's trip to St. Bernard in the early 1890's, wherein a late nineteenth century ethnographer traveled from New Orleans to a tiny fishing village in lower St. Bernard and recorded distinctive examples of sung Spanish verse. Though the categories, genres, ethnicities, and locations are all different, Lafcadio Hearn's 1883 trip to St. Malo is structurally identical: an ethnographer from New Orleans traveled to lower St. Bernard Parish to record distinctive sung Spanish verses in an effort to capture an affective impression of a culture, both accounts very much enmeshed within a metropolitan perspective imagining an isolated and backward exotic enclave lying just out of view of the great city.


CHARLES E. WHITNEY.
AN OVEN.
LAFCADIO HEARN.
A VEGETABLE GARDEN.

LC-USZ62-68202

MARCH 31, 1883. HARPER'S WEEKLY. 197

BITS OF SAINT MALO SCENERY.—Drawn by Charles Graham from Sketches by J. O. Davidson.

GAMBLING AT SAINT MALO.—Drawn by T. de Thulstrup from a Sketch by J. O. Davidson.

THE LACUSTRINE VILLAGE OF SAINT MALO, LOUISIANA.—[See Page 198.]

Figure 4: St. Malo and dice table[7]

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[7] In Lafcadio Hearn "The Lacustrine village of Saint Malo, Louisiana," *Harper's Weekly*, March 31, 1888, v. 27, p. 197. Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004668280/).

As I read Hearn's account of Hilario's singing, I'm reminded of so many décimas I've spent the past few years immersed in. I read Hearn's next example, which the cantador sang when a "four" was rolled:

> Número cuatro;
> La casa del gato—
> number 4; the cat's house. (Hearn 2002, 60)

and I recall a line from a riddle sung by the Isleño Joseph "Chelito" Campo at Delacroix nearly a century later:

> Cuatro gato en una casa . . . (Armistead 121)
> [Four cats in one house]

Hearn's account continues:

> A pair of twos calls to the cantadors mind two ducklings:
> De dos pareja;
> Dos paticos en laguna—
> pair of twos (22); two *ducklings* in the lagoon or marsh—the Arabic numerals conveying by their shape this idea to the minds of fishermen.

I'm reminded of a line from the famous décima singer Nicolas Perez, recorded by Raymond MacCurdy in the 1940s:

> Cien patos por un camino . . . (MacCurdy 1975. 87)
> [Five ducks by the road . . .]

I read Hearn:

> For a "sixty nine" (69), the *cantador* sang
> Seís con su nuéve;
> Arriba y abajo— (Hearn 2002, 60)
> [Six with its nine;
> Up and down]

And I think of the famous line from the décima "El trabajo del w*elfare*":

> Y Juanita, la de sico

anda p'arriba y p'abajo (Armistead 1993, 29)
[And Juanita, Sico's wife,
goes up and down.]

There's no evidence that these lines are related; nor do they offer solid evidence of one tradition influencing the other. It's up to the historical imagination to interpolate between these sources, and imagine the social world that gave rise to them. Yet here are examples of sung Spanish verse in rhyming couplets recorded in close proximity in lower St. Bernard Parish a century apart. From my perspective, the epistemological gulf that demarcates the disciplinary and cultural distinctions between St. Bernard's Filipinos and Isleños, and between dice games and folk songs, seem far greater than ontological differences between these traditions when listened to, ethnographically, as quotidian acts of musicking.

St. Malo and the other Filipino shrimping villages were thus enmeshed in a regional multi-cultural Hispanic milieu, and bore witness to ongoing immigration and movement between St. Bernard and the Philippines as well as New Orleans and the broader south Louisiana and circum-Gulf regions. And this ongoing immigration was not a culturally discrete movement of homogeneous people from the Philippines to the shrimping villages of Louisiana. As one observer put it in describing one of the Filipino shrimping villages in 1900:

> Almost a dozen different nationalities are represented. In this cramped space, living side by side, year in and year out, drinking together, eating together, marrying and intermarrying, working and gambling, are Creoles, Irish, Spaniards, Germans, Frenchmen, Portuguese, Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, Manilamen [Filippinos], and Malays from far-off singapore. (*The Times-Picayune* 1900)

Just as Filipino villages experienced ongoing immigration over the centuries, so did the Isleño villages continually receive immigrants from the Canary Islands, various regions of peninsular Spain, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Following the initial settlement of Canary

Islanders in St. Bernard in the late eighteenth century, the Isleño hamlets were an important crossroads for new immigrants and Isleños coming and going throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Louisiana saw substantial numbers of indentured sugar laborers from both Galicia and Portugal in the nineteenth century,[8] and it is likely that some of these immigrants eventually settled among Isleños in St. Bernard. In an effort to account for the many *portuguesismos* (lusisms), found in the Isleño Spanish lexicon, Samuel Armistead (Armistead 1992a) painstakingly traced each example he found to Canarian lusisms, claiming that the possibility of direct Portuguese influence in Louisiana was unlikely. The large number of Portuguese and Galician immigrants to Louisiana, and the overwhelming evidence of migration and flows in an out of lower St. Bernard suggest a more complicated story.

Isleños attested to these ongoing flows in their décimas as well. MacCurdy (1975) recorded “La Carta de mi prision” (The Letter of My Prison) (93), which recounted a prisoner’s last message to his mother, a song that his informants insisted came from Spain, perhaps recalling an experience during the Spanish Civil War. Irvan Perez (1989) sang “¡Adiós, España imposible!” (Goodby, Impossible Spain!), which recounted the economic stagnation and lack of opportunity in nineteenth-century Spain spurring continuing emigration (see Armistead’s commentary on the liner notes accompanying the CD version, I. Perez 2004)

Samuel Armistead (1991a) identified this key facet of Isleño society, and even gestured at the conflict he faced between the dominant narrative of Isleño heritage, which focused on eighteenth-century Canary Islands colonization and subsequent isolation, and the multi-cultural reality he confronted in St. Bernard:

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[8] Leo Pap (1981) accounted for some of these immigrants (24–25), though later arrivals from both Portugal and Galicia have been absent from the historiography (see, e.g., *The Daily Picayune* 1873)

> The *Isleños* are justifiably proud of their community's origins in the Canarian colonization that began in 1778, but, as the study of my field tapes has gone forward, other and **equally important** components of the Isleño-Hispanic heritage have insistently come to light. Many an *Isleño* family can recall one or more relatively recent, nineteenth-century ancestors who came to St. Bernard Parish from some area of Spain other than the Canary Islands: Galicians, Santanderinos, Andalusians, Catalonians have all taken part in forming the *Isleño* communities and there have also been on-going contacts with various Hispanoamerican areas. Though geographically isolated in the marsh lands of the Mississippi delta, the *Isleños* never broke off altogether their contacts with the mother county and, up to the early twentieth century, Spanish settlers continued, from time to time, to arrive in the *Isleño* settlements. (Ibid., 115–16)

Even as his field tapes insisted on problematizing the dominant story of Isleño history with accounts of this ongoing immigration, it was understood only within a framework of unidirectional flow from Spain to St. Bernard.

Yet immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean also contributed to this ongoing reinforcement of St. Bernard's Hispanic culture. Samantha Perez (2011) reports that a prominent Isleño culture bearer, Hector Perez, was in fact "not an Isleño himself," but was the descendant of an immigrant from Guatemala and, having moved to St. Bernard at age six, "blended right in with the people" (ibid., 112).

The New Orleans area saw ongoing connections with Cuba, Honduras and Mexico from the colonial period through present day, and endures as a hub for immigrants from those countries and other Latin American countries (Sluyter, et al. 2015) New Orleans was a center for Cuban refugees during the Ten Years' War. Leaders of the Cuban independence movement. Antonio Macio and Máximo Gómez escaped to New Orleans 1884 from where they organized alongside the city's Cuban exile community before later resuming the War of Independence in Cuba (Scott 2005). MacCurdy (1975) recorded one Cuban revolutionary song in St. Bernard, "Cubana," which celebrated the heroism of Antonio Maceo (ibid., 97).

A Regional Spanish Literary Culture

Almost every commentator has remarked that the Spanish language in St. Bernard Parish was a purely oral language, without a written tradition. In his characteristically authoritative style, Armsistead (1992) claimed of the Isleño décima that

> there can be no question here of what some German folklorists refer to as a *gesunkenes Kulturgut* (texts of learned origin which have "come down" to the folk), at least as far as this particular tradition is concerned. . . . The *décimas* were, beyond all doubt, composed without recourse to writing, for, in St. Bernard, Spanish is a spoken, not written language and all residents, even if literate in English, are generally illiterate in Spanish. (Ibid., 23)

As one might guess from his polemical stance, for Armistead the issue was part of a key debate in his field. The Isleño décima, imagined as a purely oral island of Hispanic balladry, served to support Armistead's position in a much broader paradigmatic debate in Spanish ballad studies: the "traditionalist perspective," (Armistead 1981a) that Hispanic ballads were the product of collective oral transmission evolving from medieval epic. But I have a different frame of reference, figuring St. Bernard within a south Louisiana and circum-Gulf framing rather than as an instantiation of pan-Hispanic culture, thus suggesting a different impression of the relation between Isleño décimas and the written word.

Many people in St. Bernard, both today and in the past, can't or don't read in any language. Since the 1920s and compulsory primary school education, however, most Isleños have attained some level of literacy in English. On a broader level, categories of literacy and illiteracy, while they may be essential to meaningful discussion about education and civics, pose problems for historical analysis. Consider, for example, the historian Rebecca J. Scott's account of literate emancipated slaves reading aloud newspapers for their illiterate neighbors (Scott 2005, 7–8). A simple duality imagined between “literate” and “illiterate” individuals or traditions, will fail to account for the continuum of practices through which people transmit, receive, and engage with the written word. On the question of bilingual literacy, the linguist John Barnitz (1997) observes that “there are holistic, universal similarities across all languages, facilitating the transfer of literacy abilities and processes” (265).

Comparative data from other regions suggest that the kind of musical repertories that circulated in St. Bernard tended to circulate via diverse media. In northern Mexico, for example, corridos circulated fluidly as orally transmitted folk songs, *hojas sueltas* (broadsides), phonographic recordings, radio, and, by the mid-twentieth century, on television. (Hernández 1986, 47 et passim; see also Mendoza 1954, XXXIII). And across Louisiana in the colonial period a vital Spanish musical culture was fluidly mediated by oral transmission and hand-written and printed word. In the Texas/Louisiana borderlands décimas that commented on daily life and political issues were composed, sung in saloons, written down, and disseminated in various forms (see Gerona 2014, 111 et passim).

New Orleans was the center of a vital tradition of Spanish-language publishing in the US, with scores of publications being produced in that language in the nineteenth century. MacCurdy (1951) accounted for *forty-six* Spanish-language periodicals published in the city between 1808 and 1949. Perhaps the most influential of these was the daily *La Patria*, which emerged as what Tom Reilly (1982) describes as “the voice of New Orleans’ minority Latino community during the turbulent years of the Mexican War and the filibustering expeditions of 1849–51” (326), and became the first Spanish-language daily in the United States (Reilly 1982, 327), before meeting its end at the hands of a violent anti-Hispanic riot in August of 1851 (Reilly 1982, 326; see also

Gruesz 2002, 112–20). *La Patria* published poetry in every issue, and sold their paper in lower St. Bernard and around the Gulf Mexico. This paper advertised in its first issue over a dozen sales agents all over the region, including lower St. Bernard.

The historical evidence depicting a Spanish-language literary culture in St. Bernard, while limited, affords hints at the possibility of imagining a more complex historical reality behind Armistead's totalizing claims about Isleño illiteracy. A broader impression of the broader region will help set the stage for my reimagining of St. Bernard's nineteenth-century print culture below.

The Southeast Louisiana Milieu

The sources presented above depict a diverse regional Hispanic culture in southeast Louisiana: a Spanish-language print culture centered in New Orleans distributing newspapers to St. Bernard and around the Gulf of Mexico, Isleños traveling to New Orleans to sell produce, Filipinos living among Isleño neighbors in St. Bernard while maintain homes and benevolent societies in New Orleans. It summons images of Isleños traveling and Spanish-speaking peoples moving around the Gulf of Mexico and through lower St. Bernard and southeast Louisiana.

The isolationist narrative that has defined Isleño historiography figures the décima as a product of isolation—a unique retention of a specifically Isleño colonial history. One might rather imagine the Isleño décima as one facet within a diverse range of mutually influential regional practices of sung verse. In addition to the diverse Spanish-language influences on Isleño culture, southeast Louisiana fostered a diverse population including Balkan Slavic, Anglophone, and Francophone facets.

Consider, for example, Harnett Kane's colorful, if exoticist, description of Balkan epic sung to the accompaniment of the *gusle*:

> And on special occasions, in their badly heated huts, as the flames of their candles shook with the winter winds, they took out the accordion and the gusle, the long, single-stringed instrument of their people, and played and sang. Perhaps it was "Maritza Moya," a love story of a Slavic Mary waiting on an Adriatic beach. More often it was an epic, a composition from the hearts of their fellow countrymen, a part of their ancient, tragic history. In interminable stanzas it described guerrilla warfare against the Turks, battles in which warriors were slain one by one but never gave up until the last man collapsed with a shouted message of resistance. Another had the picaresque touch, its heroes Robin Hoods who met bejeweled Turks, walking globes of fat and malice, and sent them away naked, bellies bouncing as they scurried. Or the words were grim, telling of conquerors who liberated Slav babies by tossing them in the fair and catching them on upthrust bayonets. These were the themes that brought tears to the Tocko in his Delta isolation, that saddened and then eased the pain they evoked. (Kane 1944, 97)[9]

Did Isleños join in with their South Slavic neighbors, contributing their own décimas to an evening's performances? Did they borrow a fragment from a Balkan epic in composing their own original décimas? Kane offers some insight into the interconnected social lives of Southeast Louisiana's multi-ethnic denizens, describing a visit with

> a French family with Spanish and Tocko connections . . . Afterward [after dinner] the friends and relatives came. A Tocko cousin produced an accordion, and a French grandfather sang an old peasant song. Over the wine I heard at least six languages in light-hearted conglomeration. (Ibid., 268–9)

Anglophone culture, often imagined as a hegemonic force in undermining French and Spanish language in Louisiana, has also contributed its own threads to the rich fabric of the Isleño décima's milieu. Since the sounds of Jimmie Rogers on the radio comforted Isleños at their winter camps in the 1920s and 30s, country music has endured as popular music for Isleños in St. Bernard. One can also identify Anglo-American influences in one later décima. Irvan Perez used the Anglo-American traditional song “The Old Crawdad Hole” (alternatively rendered “the Crawdad Song”)[10] as a contrafact for his décima, “The Story of My Uncle Tetico” (sung in Kolher and Alvarez 1983; see also Armistead 1992b, 22 note 10).

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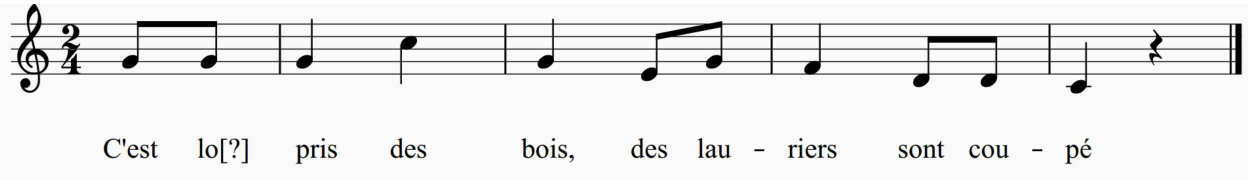
[9] Kane doesn't give a specific location, though the scope of his book is the river delta below New Orleans. "Tockos" is a local ethnonym for the Dalmatians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, Yugoslavs and Croatians who settled all over Southeast Louisiana including Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes beginning in the early nineteenth century and sustaining their linguistic and cultural enclaves through continued immigration to the present day (see Bourgogne 2014).

Before the overwhelming tide of new English-speaking settlers in St. Bernard in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Isleños were surrounded by predominantly French-speaking neighbors. Armistead found in one example what he believed was clear evidence of local Francophone influence in a particularly well-known Isleño décima. Closer analysis, as I present below, problematizes Armistead’s conclusion, pointing rather to a much broader shared Hispanic music culture that transcended the circum-Gulf and connected St. Bernard to Puerto Rico.

Armistead recorded a fragmentary version of the French *chan*son, “Nous n’iron plus au bois,” sung by a non-French-speaking Isleño, Paulina Diaz (Armistead 1992, 21–22). The provenance of Diaz’s performance is clearly true of the first two lines:



[It’s taken of the woods, of the laurels are cut down]

Figure 5: Paulina Diaz field tape excerpt[11]

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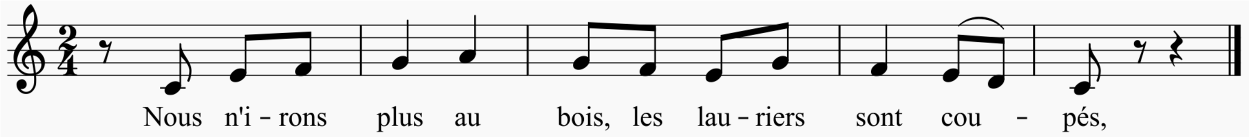
[10] I use the term “Anglo-American” somewhat loosely, primarily to distinguish English-language U.S.-American traditions from Spanish and French. This song, which first appears in (Sharp 1917) may have its origins in black music, though today its known primarily as a folk and country and western standard (see Powell 2013 for a detailed exegesis).

[11] My transcription and translation are adapted from the field tape of Armistead’s interview with Paulina Diaz on 27 March, 1976, University of New Orleans Special Collections, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park Collection (Mss 144): Tape, “Pauline [sic] Diaz, 3/27/76 (LA I)” (144-90) and Armistead’s and Israel Katz’s transcriptions and analyses (Armistead 1992b, 21–22 and 170). I’ve tried to render Paulina Diaz’s singing in standard French. Armistead observed that “[o]bviously, she did not know the meaning and most of the verses have been distorted almost beyond recognition.” But for my comparative purposes here, it is probably most effective to render an approximate transcription of Diaz’s singing in French.

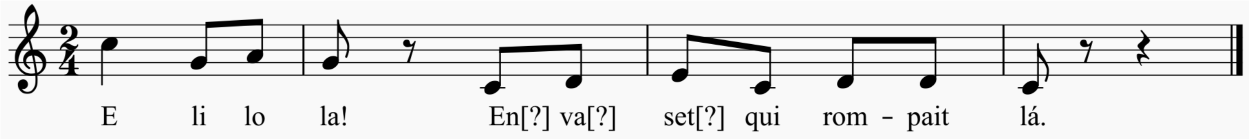
This corresponds clearly to the chanson in its standard form, demonstrating only minor differences in melodic structure:


Nous n'i – rons plus au bois, les lau – riers sont cou – pés,

[We won’t go to the woods, the laurels are cut down,]

Figure 6: “Nous n’iron plus au bois”[12]

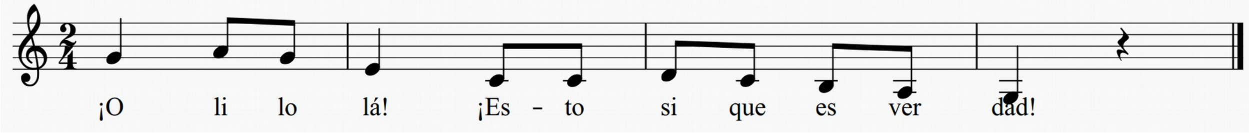
It was not these first lines, however, that Armistead saw as evidence of the influence of the *chanson populaire* on Isleño décimas. Rather Armistead’s interest lay in what he described as the refrain of Diaz’s fragment. This is a phrase that occurs later in Diaz’s performance and that does not seem to correspond at all to any part of “Nous n’iron plus au bois”:



[Eh! Lilola! In . . . who was breaking.]

Figure 7: Paulina Diaz field tape excerpt

Armistead, not surprisingly, heard in this fragment the famous refrain from one of the best-known, Isleño décimas, “El trabajo del *welfare*:”



[Oh! Lilola! That’s the truth!]

Figure 8: “El trabajo del *welfare*” field tape excerpt[13]

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[12] Adapted from “Nous n’irons plus au bois” (Vigneras 1941, 16–17 no. 16) and transposed to the key of C to facilitate comparison.

[13] Transcribed from an interview by the author with Jerry Alfonso at the Isleños Museum, St. Bernard, on March 8, 2015; transposed to key of C to facilitate comparison; Alfonso’s is a representative example of the tune.

Aside from their phonological similarities, the two excerpts depicted in figures six and seven show some significant structural differences. The two melodies imply different harmonic motion, and none of the pitches of the first phrase, “*o liola*” actually correspond between the two versions. These differences are more than superficial. They reflect fundamentally different underlying harmonic content and structurally distinct melodies.

In another version of “Trabajo del *welfare*,” even the phonological similarities seem less convincing. Irvan Perez sang the refrain as “e liloláy” in his landmark (1989) recording. And this in turn suggests some more compelling explanations for the provenance of the phrase. As Jeanne Gillespie (2016) observes, “li lo lei” is a well-known trope in Puerto Rican musics. Gillespie states that the device is “used to call the attention of the audience before a décima is ‘tossed out’ in Puerto Rico” (ibid., 30), while Licia Fiol-Matta (2017) describes “le lo lai” as “Puerto Rico’s celebrated phrase of belonging from the jíbaro corpus” (202).

A textual analysis of “El trabajo del *welfare*” lends additional support to Gillespie’s view. The song seems to have been born of collective improvisation, each stanza reflecting a different perspective of Isleños making light of trials and tribulations of a hard days work (see Armistead 1992b, 28–29). Thus it would evince strong affinity with the Puerto Rican practice of using the phrase as a transitional device before beginning an improvised extemporaneous performance. The refrain of “El trabajo del *welfare*” thus may attest to connections with Puerto Rico and may even evidence a trans-Gulf improvisatory device connecting Louisiana and Puerto Rico.

Isleños shared with their French-speaking neighbors a love for social dancing. Social dance was a key institution throughout Louisiana in the twentieth century, and it connected Isleños in St. Bernard with a regional culture of popular music and social dancing. As in

Acadiana, local dancehalls were important sites of music and socialization through most of the twentieth century among Isleños in St. Bernard Parish, involving the entire family venturing out for a night of dancing every weekend (see Brasseaux 2009). A journalist in 1915 reported:

> [The Isleños'] grand divertissement is the ball. They bring their music from New Orleans, and dance the waltz, the two-step and the mazurka . . . [and] last till broad daylight in the morning. (Howell Storck 1915)

By the 1920s jazz bands from New Orleans supplied the preferred music for dances in lower St. Bernard. Joseph Guillotte (1980) made the following connection: "Informants have stated that Negro jazz bands played at the island, a fact which gives the Isleños a small part in the nurturing of jazz" (13). Oscar "Papa" Celestine is remembered as a favorite of Isleños dancers in the early twentieth century. (see Harris 2017, 52). Thomas Gonzales, a renowned social dancer of Delacroix, recalled in an interview with me "Papa Celestino" as one of the greats whose music he remembered dancing to in his youth.[14] By hispanicizing the famous musician's name, Gonzales seems to lay claim to the emerging jazz idiom as part of his own Isleño heritage.

Jazz would give way to rhythm and blues and country and western music later in the century. Thomas Gonzales remembered dancing in Delacroix to the New Orleans rhythm and blues icon Fats Domino and the country and western pioneer Earnest Tubb. The salience of social dancing in St. Bernard underscores the diverse, intercultural milieu which has sustained South Louisiana's many musical cultures of which the Isleños of lower St. Bernard were an integral part.

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[14] Thomas Gonzales. Interview by author. Delacroix, August 11, 2016.

* * *

This chapter began with a question: what historical explanation can account for the place of a twentieth-century Mexican corrido, “La muerte de Madero,” in the corpus of Isleño décimas, a genre previously imagined as a cultural retention born of extreme isolation in the distal marshes of lower St. Bernard? Though that may indeed prove to be an unanswerable question, this chapter has opened a historical perspective from which we might imagine how such exchanges may have taken shape, by drawing attention to what the received historiography has omitted or marginalized—the absences of radio, migration, diverse Spanish-speaking populations, interacting on local, regional, and global scales.

This historical project might seem to undermine the very foundations of late twentieth-century Isleño identity: of insularity, ancientness, and a clear distinction from the Latin American Hispanic culture dominant in Louisiana today, made up of recent immigrants from Latin America. For Isleños, however, this notion of Isleño identity only emerged in the context of the Isleño heritage revival in the 1970s, in which the possibility for imagining various Isleño histories such as the one presented above was restricted in new ways. My historical project is not intended to challenge or displace the predominant narrative of Isleño history and identity, but rather to enrich it further, by confronting the absences it engenders and the silencing it necessarily entails. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to that very process of history-making, wherein Isleño culture bearers and community leaders, uniquely empowered by a respected academic, used the décima to write their history of the Isleños and their version of Isleño identity, transforming the genre and its social meaning in the process.

2. Collecting Décimas: Samuel G. Armistead and the Isleño Heritage Revival

“Para conocer un Isleño, tienes que conocer la décima.”

—Irvan J. Perez [1]

In the above quotation Louisiana’s most celebrated décima singer, Irvan J. Perez (*Irván Pérez*) (1923–2008), articulates an epistemology that seems at once provocative and commonsensical. The proposition that knowledge of a people should be predicated on familiarity with their songs lies at the heart of modern notions of ethnicity, nation, and culture. Yet the explicit understanding of décimas as the icon of the Isleños only emerges in the late twentieth century in the context of what I refer to in this chapter as the Isleño heritage revival, the sweeping movement of awareness and celebration of Isleño identity that emerged in the 1970s and has defined notions of culture, identity, and history in St. Bernard Parish since. This chapter asks how this came to be, tracing changing ideas about décimas during the early years of the revival movement.

It might be tempting to take the view expressed in the epigraph as an ahistorical constant; to imagine décimas as an eternal wellspring of Isleño heritage, serving as the timeless embodiment of an essential Isleño culture. There is some evidence that could be construed to support this view. In the very first ethnographic account of the Isleños, that of Alcée Fortier (1894), a décima is understood to represent the essential characteristics of an isolated, ignorant, uncouth, and impoverished folk. Fortier recorded and reproduced a song by his informant, Pepe Martin, entitled “Una Decima de Amor,” in its entirety, and included his own translation of the song. Though the musical sounds of Martin's singing were not recorded, Fortier's transcription affords a glimpse of Spanish ballad-singing in St. Bernard at the turn of the century:

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[1] Literally, “To know an Isleño, you have to know the décima” (narrated in Kolher and Alvarez 1983).

Una Decima de Amor

Si tu amor quieres vender
Será una fiera batalla;
Yo seré un rayo con ala
Hata (hasta) ganarte, mi *vien* (bien).
Se alguno con falsa *hasaña* (hazaña)
Hablara de tu hermosura,
Veras, en defensa tuya,
Seré un fiel león en batalla
Amor, luchando, se halla
Hata (hasta) que gane la palma;
Asi, dile que se vaya.
Yo sigo tu entendimiento,
Porque le cortaré el viento;
Será una fiera batalla.
Lo siño de *Dio* (Dios) *ven ano* (vengativo)
M'enseñara á querer.
Disen (dicen) que me ande ver
En tu *braso* (brazo) colocado.
Aquí me tienes potrado (postrado),
Dime tu fiel verdadero.
En defense de tu *sielo* (cielo)
Yo seré un rayo con ala.

A Love Song.
If you wish to sell your love
There will be a fierce battle;
I shall be a thunderbolt with wings
Until I can win you, my love.
If any one [sic] with false exploits
Will speak of your beauty,
In truth, in your defence [sic],
I shall be a faithful lion in battle.
It is by struggling that love is found
And the crown is gained;
Therefore, tell him to depart.
I shall do what you desire
Because I shall put him to death;
It will be a fierce battle.

> The avenging saints of God
> will teach me how to love.
> They say that I shall see myself
> Resting in your arms.
> Here you hold me at your feet;
> Tell me indeed that I am your faithful lover.
> In defence of your heaven
> I shall be a thunderbolt with wings. (Ibid., 208–9; parentheses in original)

Fortier, however, didn’t interpret Martin’s song as part of a discrete genre peculiar to the Isleños; on the contrary, it was seen as a kind of aberration from a transcendent formal concept not tied to an individual ethnicity or nation. Fortier interprets Martin’s “mistakes” in prosody and form as indicative of a backward and ignorant people. This is a very different conception of both the Isleño décima and Isleño culture than that encapsulated by Perez in the epigraph. Raymond MacCurdy, who conducted fieldwork in St. Bernard in the 1940s and ‘50s, understood Isleño décimas, like Spanish *romances*, as representative of the essentially “Spanish soul” of the Isleños (MacCurdy 1975, 60). The notion of the décima as a discrete local genre with unique representational power only emerged in the late twentieth century with the rise of the Isleño heritage revival, as part of an effort to spread awareness and recognition of a distinctive Isleño culture and history within the supposed multicultural panoply of Louisiana’s diverse ethnic groups.[2]

The historical and cultural milieu described in the previous chapter sustained a robust and diverse Isleño musical culture. At the heart of this culture was what would eventually crystallize as the Isleño décima: a rich tradition of sung verse, singularly suited to narrating Isleño life in lower St. Bernard. By the second half of the twentieth century, décima singing was contiguous with diverse practices of sung verse, social dance, and popular music—the lifeblood of a vital and complex musical culture. “Décima” was a complex and capacious emic category, including all manner of Spanish-language songs ranging from practices of collective extemporaneous composition to improvised solo singing with instrumental accompaniment; from medieval Spanish *romances* to twentieth-century Mexican *corridos* and songs of distinctly local composition. Its performance contexts were intertwined with daily life in lower St. Bernard: décimas were sung in barrooms, at dance-halls after late-night dances, during long hours at sea and isolated trapping camps, to pass lonely hours singing to oneself at home, and around the kitchen table at family gatherings.

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[2] This emphasis on the décima’s locality would prove to be short-lived, as subsequent chapters will elaborate.

The explicit epistemological turn to the décima, a theretofore capacious and polysemous emic category, as representative of an essential Isleño identity, emerges in the 1970s. As Isleños undertook to define a place for themselves among the white ethnic revivals that remade notions of whiteness, ethnicity, and the nation in the late twentieth-century United States, they appropriated the décima as the icon of a resurgent Isleño identity. Through processes of collection, definition, and categorization, the capacious category sketched above was transformed into a coherent genre that could fulfill this new role. This new décima was understood to “tell the story of the Isleños,” as one leader of the revival movement, Dorothy Benge, explained to me. That is, it was now seen as an icon of local history and identity, with a new focus on narrating sober accounts of hardships endured and local perspectives directed at outsiders.[3] This was a *process* of transformation, never fully actualized, wherein a heterogeneous, semantically malleable, allusive, localized, inwardly directed, irreverent, and ironic genre, inhabiting diverse performance practices, was transformed into a discretely defined, homogeneous, narrative, globally situated, outwardly directed, g-rated ballad genre: in other words, an effective vehicle for the representation of an ethnic group and a revival movement.

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[3] Dorothy Benge. Interview by author. New Orleans, May 5, 2015.

This new décima embodied the fundamental duality of the emerging notion of Isleño identity: it was understood at once as an ancient retention brought with the original eighteenth-century Canary Island colonists, *and*, as the product of the specificity of Isleño life in Louisiana, a distinctly local genre uniquely capable of narrating life in this singular marsh frontier. Thus it was seen as both a reflection of and the very substance of Isleño history *per se*, an historical narrative anchored by an original colonial moment in the eighteenth century followed by centuries of isolation in St. Bernard.

In turning attention to historical change in the signification of décimas—what might be described as the structural context of the genre's meanings—I'm drawing on Marshall Sahlins's (1985) notion of "structural transformation, a pragmatic redefinition of the categories that alters the relationship between them" (ibid., 143). It is through what Sahlins has termed a "structure of conjuncture" that "historical relationships [can] at once reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context" (Sahlins 1981, 50). Thus Sahlins's notion of transformation, through close attention to what Sahlins calls "the relations of practice itself" (ibd., 72), wherein "the categories of being and things as guided by interests and fitted to contexts [are worked out]" (ibid.), affords an approach to historical change that account for both existing structures and the historical agency of those acting within those structures, as Sahlins argues,

> On one hand, contexts of practical action are resumed by a conventional wisdom, by already given concepts of actors, things and their relations. Thus was [Captain] Cook, from the Hawaiian view, the returned god Lono. And this was surely reproduction. (On the other hand, the specificity of practical circumstances, people's differential relations to

> them, and the set of particular arrangements that ensue (structure of the conjuncture), sediment new functional values on old categories. These new values are likewise resumed within the cultural structure, as Hawaiians incorporated breaches of tabu by the logic of tabu. But the structure is then transformed. Here the cultural encompassment of the event is at once conservative and innovative. It would seem that a good Heraclitean argument can be made for the inseparability of continuity and difference (Wagner 1975). At the least, all structural transformation involves structural reproduction, if not also the other way around. (ibd., 67–68)

This chapter presents an account of the transformation of the Isleño décima My sources are drawn primarily from the papers and tapes of Samuel G. Armistead. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Armistead is a key figure in this history, both for the historical sources contained in his archive, as well as for his own central role in the transformation of the décima in the Isleño heritage revival. Armistead's rich archival legacy affords a fine-grained historical view of this transformation, revealing Armistead's collaborations with individual décima singers and the leaders of the early revival movement, especially Frank M. Fernandez, Alvin Donald Diaz,[4] and Irvan J. Perez. Building on the historical framework assembled in chapter one, I depict this local historical process of transformation in tight focus, as a case which affords remarkably sharp historical detail of a process with broad comparative implications, stretching from postmodern projects of white ethnic revival back to the very origins of modern notions of music and nation.

This specific case, within the broader historical framework of collecting as method, troubles some of the dominant views of collecting in ethnomusicology explored here, with the aim of problematizing some prominent critiques of collecting (e.g. Nettl 2005, Fox 2013, Titon 2015). In what follows I begin with the historical setting in St. Bernard and the national context of white ethnic revivals; I position this case within a broad history of collecting; finally, I tell a history of the décima's transformation resulting in its representational power for the revival movement, organized around three interconnected processes of collecting, defining, and categorizing.

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[4] Diaz's name appears in some places as "Donald Alvin Diaz." He was called "Alvin" by his acquaintances and signed his name as "Alvin Donald Diaz," and I've used that version here and throughout the dissertation; see letter from Alvin Donald Diaz to Armistead, no date. In folder labeled "Louisiana: Newspaper Arts," accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

Heritage and Revival

The 1960s and '70s bore witness to a revolution in notions of ethnicity, nation, and belonging in the United States. As Isleños recovered from the devastation of 1965's Hurricane Betsy, national and regional ethnic revivals were transforming the nation's cultural politics. The Isleños were one of the later groups to be swept up in the tide of white ethnic revival, which reshaped the terrain of identity politics in the United States. Before that time, the idea of assimilated whites identifying with an ethnic category such as Irish or Italian would have been rare, if not "unthinkable," as Matthew Fry Jacobson puts it (2006, 2).[5] Jacobson sees the white ethnic revival as a response to the civil rights movement; as whites became conscious of their "skin privilege" (2006, 2) and found white supremacy and spatial apartheid threatened in new ways, they appropriated the language and symbols of the civil rights movement, stressing genealogy, homeland, cultural difference, and other markers of ethnic identity in order to recast a hegemonic racial duality as a jumble of hyphenated ethnicities, shoring up white privilege while simultaneously obscuring it behind the screen of ethnicity. Jacobson emphasizes the significant historical departure marked by this shift:

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[5] Though in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries white laborers were often *racialized* based on their region or nation of origin, as a biracial national ideology took shape those occupying such categories tended to claim inclusion as whites (see, for example, Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1995, 2005).

> These developments mark the emergence of a wholly new syntax of nationality and belonging—a change in personal feeling for some, perhaps, but a shift in public language for all. . . . It was not the interiority but the *collectivity* of the ethnic revival whose reach in American political culture was most important—not the politics of "identity" for individuals, but the politics of "heritage" for the nation at large. Far more momentous than any individual's experience of that "single category of American" has been the shifting conception of America itself that attended this decades-long contest between "universalistic norms" and "particularist solidarities." (Jacobson 2006, 6; see also Alba 1990)

It was this collective turn to the "particularist solidarity" of heritage that provided the thrust of the Isleño heritage revival in the 1970s, and the foundation on which Isleño identity was built in the 1970s. Isleño décimas would be the very stuff of that heritage. Heritage in this sense is a complex historical concept, defined in recent decades by the late twentieth-century white ethnic revival sketched above. Given the ubiquity and power of the concept today, it may be easy to take heritage for granted. Heritage and revival, however, have been the subject of substantial critical scholarly attention which has positioned both concepts as historical constructs operating as powerful hegemonic forces.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995; see also 1998) influential neo-Marxist theorization portrays heritage as a productive force in late capitalism in which localized practices that have "recourse to the past" are commodified, exhibited, and disseminated in a virtual cultural marketplace (1995, 369). For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, heritage is best understood as a mode of production that produces necrophilic cultural objects for display, resulting from the commodification of culture through expropriation. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's view remains influential today, and commodification is certainly an apt description of one facet of the historical narrative presented below. What the present case has to contribute to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's understanding of heritage is a focus on the agency of those actually doing the work of making Isleño heritage, and the interplay of received categories of meaning and the "structures of conjunction" of agents redefining those categories to suit their aims in changing historical circumstances. For the protagonists in this story, heritage was always a *means* to an end, the end being awareness and preservation of a unique local culture. This is a shift in perspective, looking at the motivations and perspectives of individual historical subjects as the driving force of broader structural dynamics.

It may be impossible to imagine the concept of heritage without that of revival. A broad body of ethnomusicological scholarship has explored the ways music revivals have emerged in constructions of nation-states by dominant groups (e.g., Goertzen 1997; Ramnarine 2003) as well as when minority groups mobilize around revival in response to marginalization (e.g. Feldman 2006; Hilder 2012). In all of these cases some notion of heritage is revived as part of a nationalist or identitarian political project. Tamara Livingston (2014; see also 1999) has offered an explicit theorization of revival. Like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's heritage concepts, Livingston's revival theory hinges on the existence of a "revivalist market" as central to a music revival. While these views provide productive critiques of heritage and revival as late-capitalist modes of production that reproduce hegemonic notions of place and identity, this chapter aims at a more fundamental notion of heritage revival, as essential components of modern concepts of self and collective.

The historical processes outlined above rest on notions of heritage and revival that are enmeshed in a modern ideology of song, people, and nation that originated in the late Enlightenment. The very concept of "folk song" (*Volkslied*) can be traced to its coinage by the eighteengh-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. As Philip Bohlman (2013a) observes, Herder's notion of folk song "described an act of ownership whereby a collective of people . . .

asserted authority for song and musical practices from the past and claimed it for the present" (255). Herder's notion of folk song provided the ideological backdrop for the nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the projects of transnational and intranational ethnic identity which have served both to challenge and to reinforce nationalist agendas.

For Isleños seeking to define their collective identity, a Herderian notion of folk song as the embodiment of a people was key, and functioned as the central pillar of the Isleño heritage revival. As Frank Fernandez and others began uncovering the colonial history of the Isleños, and an awareness of Isleño identity and interest in Isleño heritage began to catch on in St. Bernard, a fortuitous opportunity presented itself in the person of Samuel G. Armistead. Just as the revival movement was gaining steam, a scholar wielding great authority and epistemological power arrived in St. Bernard seeking out ancient Spanish romances and yet undiscovered forms of Spanish folk literature. Armistead was uniquely capable of validating and legitimizing Isleño décimas as a genre of songs that could be deployed as the icon of Isleño identity. He was seen as an arbiter of value, holding up Isleño songs as singularly precious while simultaneously situating Isleño culture within an ancient and venerable pan-Hispanic context. Armistead and the leaders of the nascent Isleño revival movement acted within these dynamic structures to transform the décima to suit a new vision for the Isleños. Here existing categories of heritage and folk song came together with the local exigencies of identity and history; Armistead's arrival initiated a "structure of conjuncture" in which his epistemic authority joined with these existing categories and the inclinations of his Isleño collaborators (see Sahlins 1981, 48).

Collecting Décimas

The turn to décimas, then, as the icon of Isleño identity, and the formulations of heritage and identity that accompanied this turn, was an obvious but historically specific move as Isleños began to fashion a place for themselves in the new multiculturalism of the 1970s. The Isleño heritage revival seems to have sprung to life in 1975. In that year, a television documentary about Isleño culture and history entitled "Louisiana's Disappearing Spanish Legacy," (Frank Fernandez 1975), aired on the New Orleans PBS affiliate WYES, and Samuel Armistead initiated his decades-long fieldwork in lower St. Bernard. A year later, the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society[6] was established and produced its first cultural festival that year ("Society History / Historia de La Sociedad," n.d.).This was followed in 1977 by the first "pilgrimage" of Isleño club members to the Canary Islands, establishing ongoing collaboration with Canary Islands heritage and folkloric groups, the Spanish and Canary Islands government, and the Spanish consul in New Orleans (see West 2009).

It would be hard to overstate the central place of the décima in the heritage revival. Décimas were sung at nearly every major event of the Isleño heritage revival, and were often the primary focus of Isleño cultural programming. Décima performances since the 1970s contrast with the collaborative, often intimate and invective, contexts attested to in prior decades. During the revival décimas were sung in concerts at schools, as part of cultural exchange trips to the Canary Islands, at the annual Isleños fiesta, which brought visitors from across the state and around the world, and at other occasions. Irvan Perez, the best-known and most publicly visible décima singer "never turned down an invitation" to sing for a school class, according to Dorothy

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[6] It was originally known as Los Isleños Heritage Club.

Benge, a benefactor and leader of the heritage revival.[7] Décimas were performed on trips to the Canary Islands undertaken by Isleños, and to welcome guests from the Canary Islands and elsewhere, perhaps most notably when Irvan Perez performed a décima for the king and queen of Spain during their visit to Mississippi in 2001 (Warren 2008). Décimas were the focus of the television documentary *Mosquitoes and High Water (El mosco y el agua alta)* (Kolher and Alvarez 1983). Beginning in 1976 the Isleño Heritage Society regularly produced what were called "décima nights" ("Society History / Historia de La Sociedad," n.d.), special concerts of décima singers in a carefully programmed presentational format.

In addition to providing the sounds of the revival and the centerpiece of its presentations, décimas were central to the historical and epistemological project of the heritage revival. The décima functioned as synecdoche for an emergent historical narrative that emphasized an essential duality of Isleño history: originating of ancient retentions, which positioned St. Bernard within a pan-Hispanic world, and more recently marking local distinction rooted in isolation and a unique way of life. As Isleños began traveling to the Canary Islands and establishing ties with other *Canarios* around the Gulf-Caribbean basin, they also pointed to "true" ten-line-based décimas, despite it being formally and generically quite distinct from Isleño décimas, as evidence of their local genre's global context. The exact qualifications were less important than the historical force of the idea of décimas, as Irvan Perez's (1997) explanation of the issue suggests: "The *décima* is composed of ten stanzas but the Isleños didn't follow the rules. They went ahead and added as many stanzas as they needed" (ibid., 93). Thus emerged the fundamental duality of the décima in the heritage revival: that it represented both unique local circumstances *and* ancient retentions from the Canary Islands which connected it to a wider Hispanic world.

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[7] Dorothy Benge. Interview by author. New Orleans, May 5, 2015.

Décimas were thus charged with doing a lot of work for the revival movement. They would provide the very stuff of heritage, which made up the presentational displays of performances, audio, video, and print publications, and, on a deeper level, would fulfill a Herderian concept of ethnic identity that provided the thrust of the epistemological and historical project of the Isleño heritage revival. Before décimas could fulfill this expansive new role, the musical practices that comprised the tradition—the messy interpersonal world of quotidian singing and composition—had to be collected, and in that process, was transformed.

In 1956, Samuel Armistead spent an afternoon in lower St. Bernard, a visit he later described as “time enough only to hear a little *Isleño* Spanish and to take away with me the determination to explore [further], when circumstances permitted” (Armistead 1992b, ix). The brief visit made a big impression on the young scholar, but twenty years intervened—of teaching obligations and his life’s work collecting, compiling, and analyzing in comparative perspective a global body of Hispanic oral literature—before Armistead was able to undertake research in Louisiana in earnest. In October 1975 Armistead found himself in New Orleans to attend the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society. After giving his paper on “Recent Developments in Judeo-Spanish Ballad Research” (American Folklore Society 1975) in the plush Beaux-Arts conference rooms of the Monteleone Hotel in New Orleans, Armistead skipped the last day of papers and drove his rental car the thirty-odd miles to lower St. Bernard Parish.

Armistead found himself hosted by a group of men—led by Frank M. Fernandez, Alvin Donald Diaz and Irvan J. Perez—who saw his timing as fortuitous, and undertook to facilitate his research, thus seizing the opportunity to realize a Herderian vision of Isleño heritage embodied in Isleño décimas. Armistead arrived Sunday morning, his trusty Wollensack 3M reel-to-reel recorder in hand, and by one in the following morning, had collected examples from six Isleño singers. Following that preliminary visit, Armistead returned frequently; he subsequently made over a dozen field trips to St. Bernard, developing an extensive archive of nearly a hundred hours of field recordings.

Armistead's method of fieldwork was collection. He sought out informants who retained specific repertories of the kinds of songs he was seeking. He collected from these informants recordings which he transformed into literary texts, ripe for comparative philological analysis. Collecting has been the subject of a substantial scholarly critique, and even outright dismissal in recent decades. Before the turn to a methodological model of rigorous *in situ* ethnographic research in ethnomusicology, formulaic "collection" of objects of oral musical tradition was one of the paradigmatic methods in ethnomusicology. Today ethnomusicologists tend to be critical of methodologies focused on collecting, associated, as they are, with early ethnomusicology, folklore, and philology. Indeed, "collecting" seems to stand in as shorthand for the supposed worst offenses of prior generations of music scholars. Bruno Nettl expresses this view succinctly, describing collecting as "plucking pieces out of the culture for analysis and preservation elsewhere, something that sounds a bit like colonial exploitation" (Nettl 2005, 140).

Nettl's critique leaves much of the critical work up to the reader to infer. Where scholars have offered more explicit critiques of collecting, they have often focused on the inferred sentiments of collectors. Aaron Fox (2013), writing from the perspective of an activist archivist working to repatriate recordings of Iñupiat oral traditions held at a university archive, describes the "racist disdain" that the collector, Laura Boulton, held for her informants, and characterizes her methodology as essentially extractive, akin to the extraction of physical raw materials for commodification:

> The collector . . . takes possession of oral tradition in the very act of recording. This patently unfair structure has typically been used by collectors, scholars, and producers, often under conditions of colonial, racial, or class domination, to convert traditional cultural resources, as if they were raw minerals dug from unclaimed ground, into commercial and scholarly finished products. (Ibid., 534)

Jeff Todd Titon (2015) anchors his critique of collecting in terms of the "psychic impulse" of collectors (179), by way of James Clifford (1988) and a reflection on his own perspective as a record collector. Titon claims that

> collections are efforts "to make the world one's own, to gather things around oneself tastefully, appropriately. . . . The self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies—to make 'good' collections" (Clifford 1988: 215)**.** As museums appropriated objects for preservation and display, these objects came to be authentic and authenticating cultural representations, to "stand for" a "school" of painting, say, or an extinct species, or a human group's former way of life. . . . Then, too, most of us are record collectors and we need look no farther than to our own shelves. Collecting tends to reify music as a "thing." But there are good grounds for rejecting the concept of music as a "thing." (Titon 2015, 179)

The critical stance I'm sketching here has largely defined current ethnomusicologists' appraisal of collecting methodologies. Collecting is often relegated to the past and conditioned by an essentialized progressive vision of past scholarship as somehow a teleological precursor to the supposedly more enlightened scholarship of today. Collecting, however, endures, in various forms within contemporary ethnomusicology as well as in other disciplines, and the story of Armistead's work collecting Isleño décimas seems to problematize the critical stance sketched above. The effects of the collecting project undertaken by Armistead and his Isleño collaborators, rather than extract décimas from their original context, transformed both the genre *and* its contexts into a form that could continue to be meaningful and relevant for Isleños in changing circumstances. Armistead's collecting project facilitated enduring relevance of the décima for Isleños. Armistead did not often reflect on his experiences in the field, and when he did his focus remained on the texts he collected. The rare occasions that he did share such insights, however, are revealing. The following excerpt, related to Armistead's work on Sephardic balladry, affords some insight:

> Working with books is great fun and I do plenty of that, but working with people is even better, most of the time, and often even more interesting. It's also very hard work. One of the most rewarding—but also the most daunting—aspects of our field work involves this human element, getting to know and to understand the very diverse peoples from whom we have collected ballads. . . . Indeed, one of the major motivations of my work has been the awareness that these people have confided into my care the treasures of their collective memories. Most of these people are now no longer with us, but I am left with an important responsibility, a strong commitment: that their confidence in me should not have been in vain, that their ancient songs should survive into the future, in a permanent form. (Armistead 1998)

Armistead's vision of his informants living on in the ancient songs left in his charge embodies what Philip Bohlman describes as "the very paradigm shift and theoretical formation that lie at the core of Herder's folk song project: the transformation of song from object to subject" (Bohlman 2017).

There would seem to be little room for common ground here. Does collecting folk songs objectify them, transforming them from living cultural practice into moribund colonialist fetishes, or does it have the potential to transform the objects of musical culture into the very subjectivity of a people? Is the collector some kind of necrophilic haruspex, sacrificing folk songs on the altar of modernity? Or a monastic scribe dutifully preserving song texts for posterity? Or, as Armistead saw himself, a benevolent collaborator working to sustain the subjectivities of his collaborators through song into the future? Of course these aren't intended as questions with possible answers, but rather they attest to the need for more nuanced and rigorous study of collecting with attention to historical and ethnographic specificity. The present case reveals a complex historical milieu in which collecting figured centrally to an emergent understanding of Isleño identity and its relation to song.

The archival records of Armistead's fieldwork—his field tapes, notes, and correspondences—complicate the collecting paradigm emergent in the critical perspectives sketched above. Armistead's methods in the field are those of a committed activist ethnographer who collaborated with his informants to fulfill a mutual vision for sustaining Isleño patrimony for the future. Armistead's field recordings, notes, and correspondences reveal the ways the décima was imagined and deployed in the changing context of the heritage revival. My reading of this archive depicts a nuanced, individual, unique set of circumstances in the lives of this particular collector and his informants. It also points to the importance of Armistead's collaborations with his informants to the historical ascendancy of the heritage revival. Armistead established close ties with three main collaborators on his 1975 and 1976 field trips: Frank Fernandez, an educator and the first Parish Historian for St. Bernard Parish; Alvin Donald Diaz, the first president of the Los Isleños Heritage Society; and Irvan Perez, the distinguished artist and décima singer. These men contributed to a large portion of Armistead's field recordings directly and facilitated introductions and interviews with senior Isleño tradition bearers. Together, they discussed their vision of the heritage revival, in which Armistead's role as a distinguished Hispanist literary scholar, collecting and analyzing décimas as both a valuable and unique local tradition and one contextualized in a broader world of Hispanic literary traditions, was seen as an ideal opportunity for raising awareness of and legitimizing Isleño culture. What emerges from my study of Armistead's papers and field recordings is a picture of progressive and activist fieldworker, engaged in ethnographic collaboration (Lassiter 2005), dialogic editing (Feld 1987), and collaborative transcription and analysis (Widdess 1994) with his informants, decades before these became fashionable as academic buzz words. Armistead's archive is filled with letters between him and his collaborators, sharing enthusiastic ideas for the mutual project of collecting Isleño décimas.

Armistead's first field tapes from his 1975 trip reveal the excitement surrounding the budding Isleño heritage revival, the potential of Armistead's role, and the urgency of beginning to collect Isleño folklore. The tapes depict a flurry of excitement. It's often difficult to figure out who's speaking, and there is often more than one conversation going on at a time. Fernandez was unequivocal in his enthusiasm for Armistead's project, addressing Armistead, Perez, and Diaz, Fernandez is recorded on Armistead's first tape recorded in St. Bernard as follows:

> We better get organized, figure out where we're gonna go, who we're going to talk to. . . . I have all the time in the world. Let's put the names down of the eligible people who would be the most qualified to get on with this project and to help. [8]

The aims of Fernandez's, Diaz's, and Perez's collaboration with Armistead seemed clear at first. Fernandez and Diaz would introduce Armistead to senior culture bearers in St. Bernard, Armistead would collect from these informants objects of folk literature, validate them as venerable patrimony and disseminate them to a wider audience. Armistead was deeply committed to the political project of his informants. Together they sought to increase awareness of Isleño identity, bolster their nascent heritage revival, and refashion the décima as an icon of Isleño identity, representing ancient origins, pan-Hispanic contexts, and local specificity. At first glance, the paradigm of collecting described above seems like an ideally suited epistemic vehicle for this project. When Samuel Armistead began his fieldwork in St. Bernard in 1975, his informants seized an opportunity to create and popularize their vision of Isleño heritage, exploiting Armistead's unique position to *legitimize* Isleño culture as unique and valuable.

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[8] Field tape, "LA 1" Side 1. October 26, 1975, accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

Armistead's relationship with his Isleño collaborators is perhaps best encapsulated in a moving letter he submitted to the National Endowment for the Arts supporting Irvan Perez's nomination for a National Heritage Award (which he was subsequently awarded):

> Of all my informants, Mr. Perez was the very best. Not only was he a superb, knowledgeable informant, but he actually became an invaluable collaborator in the project, actively seeking out other carriers of the tradition so they could offer their contributions to the materials being collected. . . . Through his initiative and that of other distinguished citizens of St. Bernard, there has, indeed, been an Isleño Renaissance—a rebirth of interest and a renewed interest of the Spanish contributions to the culture of Louisiana.[9]

The many letters between Armistead and Perez, always addressed as "Dear Friend," contained in the Armistead archive attest to a close bond and mutual affection between them. The following excerpt from a later letter, written as Armistead's (1992) book, *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*, was being published and Isleños bore witness to increasing exposure and visibility, from Perez and his wife Louise Perez, to Armistead, speaks to the perceived role of Armistead in the successes of the Isleño revival:

> Dear Friend,
> Here are a few articles that appeared in our local newspaper. Thanks for your input. With out[10] you and your books the Isleno's would still be up the creak with out a paddle. Any thing we can be of help with please don't hesitate to ask.
> Sincerely,
> Irvan & Louise Perez

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[9] Letter from Armistead to the National Endowment for the Arts. Oct. 24 1983, in folder labeled "Irvan Perez," accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

[10] This and subsequent letters are reproduced *verbatim* without drawing attention to unconventional syntax and spellings in the text.

> P.S. Give our regard to all our friends.[11]

Alvin Donald Diaz expressed similar sentiments in a moving letter to Armistead following his visit to the Canary Islands:

> Prof. Sam Armistead
> Sorry I haven't wrote you. We just returned from the Canary Islands & Spain. I owe so much to you. I know or hear you had family problems. But I don't want to lose tract of you. I am sending some newspaper clipping of our trip. You and your research made it possible to translate our decimas, and write them down. I know you went through a lot of expense to come to New Orleans to see us. That trip to Washington D.C. you made and we had left. I know you studied in Madrid "The Archives" and even took photos.
> Your story on "An Ancient Tradition Fights to Survive" started our "Renaissance of Isleno life."
> Please write and tell me if there is anything I can do for you.
> The Dept. of State should do something to Promote the Canary Islands.
> Your friend, I remain
> Alvin Donald Diaz[12]

Thus Armistead and his Isleño informants seemed to have had a keen understanding of the role that the collection of décimas would play in fashioning a new notion of Isleño identity for the future. They each expressed indebtedness to the other, seeing themselves as collaborators in cultivating Isleño heritage for the future.

This was an improvisational, extemporaneous project. When Armistead began his fieldwork in St. Bernard he was not even aware of the unique local genre that would come to play such large role in his work. Armistead first encountered Isleño culture during his graduate studies at Princeton University in the 1950s, in the form of Raymond MacCurdy's (1950) linguistic study of Isleño Spanish. Armistead reflected on the impact of that "pathfinding" study, foreshadowing his own classification and analysis of the Isleño décima:

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[11] Letter from Irvan and Louise Perez to Armistead. February 14, 1992. Unfiled envelope, accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

[12] Letter from Alvin Donald Diaz to Armistead, no date. In folder labeled "Louisiana: Newspaper Arts," accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

> The idea that such a Hispanic speech island—a variant Hispanic “world”—should have survived in isolation in southern Louisiana aroused my curiosity to know more . . . and to search for what oral literature might have been preserved or, indeed, what new forms of folkliterature might perhaps have evolved in such a community. (1992, ix)

Thus Armistead hinted at the possibility, in hindsight, that he would discover a novel genre in St. Bernard. In his initial interests, however, he followed closely in MacCurdy’s footsteps driven by a primary concern for the comparative study of *romances* distributed across the Hispanic world. Though MacCurdy (1947) hinted that he had found “muchas las composiciones de origen local [many compositions of local origin]” (ibid., 164), in St. Bernard, this initial publication resulting from his Louisiana fieldwork presented only a comparative study of an example of the well-known romance, “La vuelta de marido.” MacCurdy addressed only linguistic issues, riddles, and folktales in his other early publications (1948, 1949, 1950b), and it wasn’t until 1975 that MacCurdy was able to publish the songs he had collected on his 1940 and 1947 field trips. Following MacCurdy, Armistead seemed to have been more intrigued by the potential for such comparative linguistic and romance study than the possibility of uncovering a new genre of ballad:

> My first field trips to St. Bernard Parish . . . were devoted primarily to a search for Pan-Hispanic traditional ballads (*romances*) (Chap. 4). My fieldwork was successful in this regard, in that I was indeed able to record a number of texts and fragments of *romances*, thus showing that, like almost every other geographic area of the Hispanic world, the Louisiana Spanish communities have also preserved the romances a constant correlate of the Hispanic linguistic tradition. (Armistead 1992, 2)

Armistead’s archive reveals, however, that the first songs he heard in St. Bernard were, in fact, locally composed décimas, and he recorded many more of these distinctive local songs than he did of examples that fit into his other categories. On his very first day of fieldwork in St. Bernard he collected what he would eventually describe as a “significant sample of . . . [a] distinctive type of ballad poetry, a form of local composition, known in *Isleño* Spanish as the *décima*." (ibid., x). Armistead was likely not expecting to discover a new "local tradition of narrative songs, which . . . had not been previously described or recognized as a distinctive sub-type of Hispanic ballad poetry" (ibid., 12). As he confronted this new genre for the first time, before the key philological work of description, classification, and comparative analysis could begin, Armistead had to deal with the issue of definitions.

Defining Décimas

The whole project of the Isleño heritage revival thus rested on a notion of décimas as a genre of ballads containing the very stuff of Isleño history and identity. As living parts of a vital musical culture, however, décimas didn't necessarily fit into the constraints required of the kinds of textual objects which could be contained in publications and concert programs. The lived experiences of musicking that Armistead and his collaborators encountered at the homes of Isleño singers were woven into the fabric of daily life, and their collecting project necessitated excising them from that context and knitting together a new comparative philological tapestry capable of depicting an emerging Isleño collective identity. If the heritage revival—a project of inventing and reproducing an ideology of Isleño identity with recourse to its patrimony—involved collecting objects of Isleño patrimony, that is, décimas, the questions of *what* was being collected, of definitions emerged as a key aspect of this project. Before décimas could be effectively categorized, analyzed, and disseminated as folklore, they had to be defined.

Armistead put his finger on a succinct emic definition in his first scholarly publication stemming from his fieldwork. He observed that "in St. Bernard, almost any song is designated by the term *décima*" (Armistead 1979, 19). Among Isleños, the term was used to include the many *corridos*, *romances*, c*oplas*, and popular songs, of Canary Islands, Iberian, or Latin American origin, current in St. Bernard. The term also applied to a range of practices beyond what could be described as discrete songs, such as extemporaneous invective exchanges, spontaneous collective compositions, or extended improvisational contrafacts.

Armistead's and his collaborators' project required a more discrete and coherent category. Armistead's fundamentally descriptive, classificatory project, and the broader epistemological project of the heritage revival, necessitated reconciling that polysemy with a more concrete descriptive definition. Rather than try to conform his study to this capacious emic category, Armistead, through his taxonomic classificatory scheme, created his own etic definition of décimas as "*narrative songs of local composition*" (Armistead 1992, 12, italics added). This delimitation made possible a fairly specific formal description on the corpus of décimas Armistead collected, as he explained,

> the Louisiana *décima* is generally composed in couplet form, using four usually eight-syllable hemistiches with assonant rhyme in the even verses. The syllable count tends, however, to be rather irregular. (Ibid., 13)

Armistead further narrowed his definition with his description of the genre's subject matter. He identified

> four types of subject matter: events pertaining to local history; humorous, ironic commentary on the rigors and hazards of local occupations: muskrat trapping, shrimp trawling, and crab fishing, for example; satirical poems about the foibles and misadventures of local individuals; and tall tales concerning fabulous fishing exploits, gigantic crabs, enormous catfish, and gargantuan schools of shrimp. (Ibid., 13)

The texts are characterized by their funny, ironic, and salty lyrics. Armistead also recognized the essentially allusive nature of décimas as well as the contradictions which attended this process of defining:

> They tell a story. However, . . . they do not really narrate; they do not tell a story; they simply evoke, allude to, or comment on a variety of details of a story which is not told at all, since it is already well known to the singer and to his audience alike. (Ibid., 17)

Even as their transformation from sound to literary text lay at the heart of Armistead's method, décimas were understood essentially as songs. Musical transcriptions of the songs made by the ethnomusicologist Israel J. Katz were included in the book and facilitated comparative analysis of the tunes.[13] Katz's transcriptions reveal a variety of mostly diatonic, step-wise, modal tunes. In the addendum to the musical transcriptions in the 2007 Spanish-language translation of Armistead's 1992 book, *La Tradición Hispano-Canaria en Luisiana*, Katz claimed that the décimas "owe their survival" (Armistead 2007, 235) to the music to which they are set—that is, as a result of the mnemonic power of song.[14] Contrafacting predominates, which facilitated both this mnemonic function and extemporaneous composition and performance. Despite the challenges of identifying origins of various tunes in the Isleño repertory, Katz identified a number of tunes of sixteenth-century (or earlier) Spanish origin, alongside those of more recent Caribbean, Acadian, and local origin, all filtered through a "varied and extremely dynamic" (ibid., 235) local Isleño tradition.[15]

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[13] An earlier manuscript of The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana included extensive musical analysis, which Armistead was forced to cut in the editorial process, as his assistant at the time, Karen Olson, explained to me in an interview at Davis. The Spanish translation (Armistead 2007) included the addition of some notes on musical analysis by Katz, but not on the scale of the original manuscript, which is preserved at UC Davis.

[14] "Los poemas . . . que se estudian en el presente volumen deben su supervivencia, en gran parte por lo menos, a las tonadas musicales mediante las cuales fueron transmitidos a través de los años" (Armistead 2007, 235).

[15] " . . . el carácter sumamente abigarrado y dinámico del repertorio isleño." (ibid., 235).

Armistead's definition emerged from the songs he recorded in the field. John Robin's rendition of "La décima de Wila," was likely one of the first décimas Armistead heard in St. Bernard Parish, and neatly conforms to Armistead's definition:

Cuando Wila se embarcó	When Wila embarked
eran las siete del día	it was seven in the morning,
—Voy para la Reburusien	I'm going to Oak River
y voy a perder la vida.—	and I'm going to lose my life."
Si Wila no se nos muere	If Wila doesn't die
y no nos sucede de nada,	and nothing happens to us
Tío Caco de ver su tierra	Tio Caco will see his land
de una punta a la otra ará,	plowed from one end to the other,
para plantar el maís tierno	for to plant tender corn
y bichuelas tiernas	and tender string beans
En la Punta de Cocodrillo	And at Alligator Point,
hay avión un chalan calado	there is a sunken barge
con un letrero que decía	with a sign that says:
—aquí murió un desgraciado.	"Here a wretch died.
No murió de calentura,	He didn't die of fever
ni de punta de costado	nor of kidney failure
murió de una mano de palo	he died of a beating
que Tio Víctor Gonzáles le ha dado.—	which Tio Víctor Gonzáles gave him."
Mandan cartas y letras	They send cards and letters
para aquel que llaman Vitor	for that guy called Víctor
Mandan a decir que Wila	They're sending them to say that
es un capitán de un vapor.	Wila is a captain of a steamboat.[16]

"La décima de Wila" was a fitting introduction. It conforms neatly to the corrido-like ABCB quatrain structure, though a couple of odd lines (9-10) disrupt this pattern, thereby demonstrating a typical characteristic of Isleño décimas. The introductory stanza, stating the time and location of the events which follow, are conventions shared with many décimas. Topically this humorous song bridges a few of Armistead's classification of décimas' subject matters. It comments on the specifics difficulties of cultivating land in St. Bernard which is often surrounded by water—thus Victor Gonzales's novel idea to bring Wila, a mule, on a barge to work an otherwise isolated spot of land; and in turn it trenchantly satires the whole event, poking fun at Gonzales's decision and the tragic results, from the perspective of his unfortunate mule. The seeming impenetrable opacity of the song attests to its essentially allusive, rather than narrative function. The listener is supposed to know who Tio Caco and Victor Gonzales are (are they one and the same?), that the barge sank, and that Wila died, and, signifciantly, that Wila was, indeed a mule, an insight revealed only by Armistead's English-language title. That the dead mule is now the captain of a steamboat is clearly outrageous and probably funny, but the meaning of the joke isn't exactly clear. Without the frame of reference of the insider audience the song is directed at, its meaning is opaque. It seems generally ironic, possibly silly, but there's no firm ground for interpretation—rather it's unsettling, like the boggy terrain that provides the setting for the song. The tune is set syllabically to a mournful descending minor-mode tune, underscoring my reading of the song as a tongue-in-cheek mock-lament directed as a humorous critique.

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[16] Transcribed from field tape, "LA 1" Side 1 . October 26, 1975. Accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections. See also the transcriptions in (Armistead 1992b; and I. Perez 1989), which informed my transcription and translation of this version.

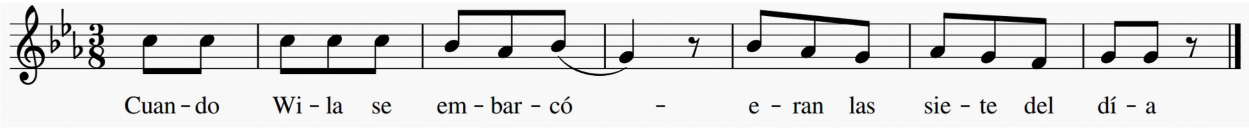

Figure 9: Excerpt of melodic transcription of "La décima de Wila"[17]

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[17] Transcribed from field tape, "LA 1" Side 1 . October 26, 1975. Accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

The definition of the décima that emerges here gave shape to what had been an amorphous set of practices. It mirrored neatly the epistemological regime of the heritage revival: décimas encapsulated both the local specificity of St. Bernard Parish, and attested to Isleños' origins in the eighteenth century. This definition emerged from the songs themselves, yet required some work, shifting an emic category towards a more specific etic definition, a precursor to the broader project of categorizing and disseminating the genre as a representation of Isleño identity.

Categorizing Décimas

Armistead's definition of the décima put it in a fraught categorical position. On the one hand, décimas emerged from a number of genres and traditions: "true" ten-verse décimas, romances, corridos, and popular songs. And it could also be thought of as a discrete category of its own, a local genre born of these diverse antecedents. It had to be all of these things and none of them, and this fraught situation, rather than being resolved, continued as these various categorical and definitional possibilities endured side-by-side, mobilized by various subjects to suit their own particular agendas. The question of categories, how and where Isleño décimas fit within a global complex of Hispanic balladry, would be central to the historical and epistemological dimensions of this history.

Armistead categorized décimas among a variety of musical, poetic, and narrative forms he collected in St. Bernard. Not surprisingly, when he set to work categorizing and organizing the folklore he collected in St. Bernard for his book project, Armistead organized his examples into chapters by genre: décimas, corridos, romances, and coplas, among other musical and literary genres, each received treatment in its own chapter, as shown in the following excerpt from the table of contents:

> Introduction
> 1. History, language, Context,
> 2. Local Narrative Songs (*Décimas*)
> 3. Strophic Ballads (*Corridos*)
> 4. Pan-Hispanic Ballads (*Romances*)
> 5. Lyric Songs (*Coplas*) . . . (Armistead 1992, vii)

"La décima de Wila," with its absurd eulogy for a drowned mule and trenchant criticism of Victor Gonzales, was a popular décima, and served as an exemplar for Armistead's *own* definition of décimas as local songs conforming to certain characteristics. Armistead recorded multiple renditions of the song by various informants. The one he included in the book, was sung by Paulina Diaz, and is similar to the version transcribed above. But the reader won't find it in "Chapter 2: Local Narrative Songs (*Décimas*)," where they might expect. Rather, it was included in Chapter 4, "Pan-Hispanic Ballads (*Romances*)." Armistead didn't place his collected examples into chapters depending on which generic definition best described the example, and certainly not based on the categories used by his informants. One might make another categorization of the songs presented in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*: décimas that were presented in the second chapter and analyzed per se, and those included in subsequent chapters and analyzed in comparative context, in order to examine the place of Louisiana in a world of Hispanic oral tradition.

"La décima de Wila" is something of a standout in chapter four, nestled among widely-distributed romances such as "La vuelta del marido" and "Bernal Frances," which contain no local references. Armistead identified a fragment of "El testamento del enamorado" within "La décima de Wila." The testament to a drowned mule in lines thirteen through sixteen, here an outrageous jab at a foolish farmer, originated in this medieval Spanish ballad as “part of the testament of a desperate, unrequited lover” (ibid., 60). This example suggests that Armistead’s categorical project seems in some ways to substantiate the colonialist critique sketched above. A slice of musical practice is extracted from the local context, and used to make a point central to Armistead’s academic field of research regarding the distribution of the Spanish romances.

Yet I would argue that this very process did more to reinvigorate the genre as a local musical practice and render it more useful and valuable to those who claimed it as their patrimony. By categorizing “La décima de Wila” in terms of its relationship to “El testamento del enamorado,” Armistead put the song to work as the embodiment of the central intellectual agenda of the heritage revival. What was an impenetrable absurdist lament now attests to ancient origins in medieval Spain, refashioned to suit new conditions of life in lower St. Bernard. Connecting “La décima de Wila” with “El testamento del enamorado” validated the song as part of an ancient and venerable lineage. Armistead, as a renowned professor of Spanish, was in a unique position to lend this credibility to the tradition, playing a key role in the project of the heritage revival.

Armistead wielded great power in his decisions about which décimas to include in which categories. While the categorization of “La décima de Wila” served to connect Isleños to a medieval Spanish romance tradition, other examples defined the boundaries of the genre in other directions. Armistead was also in a position to define the broader, emic category and select which songs should be legitimately included in the tradition. During the early years of Armistead’s fieldwork the décima was still a vital, changing tradition, not yet crystallized as a practice of times past. In choosing which songs to include in his collecting project, Armistead had a hand in determining the boundaries of the category in its waning decades as a vital practice. What is recognized today as one of the most iconic Isleño décimas, “Setecientos setentaisiete,” began as a composition by Irvan Perez, reflecting on a visit with other Isleños to the Canary Islands:

Setecientos setenta y siete,
varias familias
dejaron las Islas Canaria,
para la costa de Cuba,
de la sur de la Luisiana.

In seventeen seventy-seven,
some families
left the Canary Islands
for the coast of Cuba
and south Louisiana.

Y en sur de la Luisiana
y en tierra regalada,
se pusieron de jardineros,
para mantenerse estas familias.

And in south Louisiana
on land granted,
they became gardeners
in order to sustain their families.

Varios fueron de soldados;
pelearon por su libertá.
También salieron victoriosos
y al contra Inglaterra.

Some became soldiers;
they fought for their freedom.
And they emerged as victors
against England.

¡Viva España y su bandera!
Que con todo mi corazón
sé que somos americanos,
pero sangre de español!

Long live Spain and her flag!
With all my heart,
I know we’re Americans,
but our blood is Spanish!

Cuando el tiempo se les puso duro,
cuando no pudieron más,
se fueron de estas tierras
y con otros españoles,
se pusieron a la pesca.

When the times were tough,
when they could bear no more,
they left their lands
and, with other Spaniards,
they became fishermen.

Entre el pato y la rata,
entre el aguas y las plerías,
con la ayuda de los mujeres
se buscaron la vida.

Between the duck and rat,
between the waters and the marshes,
with the help of the women,
they sought out a life.

Con penas y tormentos
y la voluntad de Dios,
así se empuebló
de la Parroquia San Bernardo.

¡Viva España y su bandera!

¡Que con todo mi corazón,
se que semos americanos,
pero sangre de español!

With sorrows and torments
and by the will of God,
they settled the coast
of St. Bernard Parish.

Long live Spain and her flag!
For with all my heart,
I know we're Americans,
but our blood is Spanish![18]

At first glance "Setecientos setentaisiete" might seem to fit somewhat within the category of "décima," as it has been constructed so far in this dissertation. The frequency of lines that break with the octosyllabic meter, together with the two stanzas of five (rather than four) lines, are characteristic of the formal conventions typical of Isleño décimas. The formal exposition of the time and place in the first stanza, generally octosyllabic rhyming verses, and repeating step-wise descending major melody all attest, like most Isleño décimas, to a close generic relationship with the Mexican corrido. Indeed, the tune is borrowed of the corrido, "La muerte de Madero,"[19] attesting not to the pure originary history imagined in the lyrics of the song, but rather the more complex reality of diverse circum-Gulf flows and exchanges described in the preceding chapter. Armistead was enthusiastic about this most recent addition to the Isleño repertory. He told Perez in one interview that "Setecientos setentaisiete" was "the most important one of all—because you *made* it."[20] It received high praise in Armistead's book and concluded his chapter on décimas:

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[18] Transcribed from Perez's CD recording (I. Perez 2004). This transcription adheres closely to the version that appears in the liner notes. The few departures from the version in the liner notes were in order to standardize the Spanish and adjust some of the more liberal choices in the translation to adhere more closely to the Spanish. My translation here also adheres closely to Perez's liner notes and Armistead's (1992, 37-38)

[19] See chapter one of this dissertation and Israel J. Katz's transcriptions and analysis in "Spanish Language and Folkliterature of the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish (Louisiana) (1987) Vols. 1 and 2" (pp. 416–417) (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections). This is the original report written by Armistead for the Jean Lafitte National Park Service, which contains extensive musical analysis by Katz which was cut in subsequent published versions (Armistead 1992, 2005).

> Irvan Pérez's *décima*, *Seventeen Seventy-Seven* . . . belongs to a special category all its own. Inspired by a new *Isleño* cultural consciousness and deep pride in their distinctive Hispanic origins, this is, without doubt, the only *décima* which embodies data taken from written history, in offering a historical overview of the community's beginnings and its later development. (Armistead 1992, 27)

In his comments in the liner notes of Perez's recording, Armistead commented, "This is a very special décima, in a category all its own" (I. Perez 2004, 6).

Indeed, "Setecientos setentaisiete" doesn't seem to conform to the definition and categorization of the décima which Armistead himself invented for his project. It's a grand historical narrative, not a local story. It's narrative, not allusive, and reverential rather than irreverent. It's hard to imagine an ironic reading of the lyrics. Indeed it seems to lack all the characteristics of décimas that give them their ethos and specificity: irreverence, critique, invective, irony, humor. The fundamental shift evident in "Setecientos setentaisiete" seems to embody the inverse of "La décima de Wila." In the latter song, a serious lament from an ancient romance is appropriated as an irreverent and absurdist critique of a local figure's foibles; with "Setecientos setentaisiete," the genre's poetics, the nexus of sound and form that provided such a compelling platform for the décima's essentially ironic and irreverent tone, are re-purposed as a vessel of a somber and serious historical narrative imagined as defining the Isleños in the new era of the heritage revival.

With its account of the colonial history of the Isleños, a story of eighteenth-century migration, isolation, and perseverance over the centuries, "Setecientos setentaisiete" is the realization of the role of the décima imagined by Fernandez, Diaz, Perez, and Armistead. This chapter began with an interpretation of Irvan Perez's quotation in the epigraph, suggesting an *epistemological* reading—that knowledge of the Isleños as a people is predicated on familiarity with their décimas. With "Setecientos setentaisiete" Perez took this notion to its logical conclusion, *literally* containing his vision of Isleño history and identity within the text of a décima. Its privileged place in Armistead's analysis underscores the fundamentally collaborative, and political nature of the project. Décimas were extracted, collected, categorized, and redefined, all in the service of a new collaborative vision, utterly transforming the genre in the process, for preserving Isleño patrimony into the future: a strategy for survival.

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[20] Field tape, "La. 4" Side 1, December 17, 1980, accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

* * *

Through this process of collecting, defining, and categorizing, the décima was transformed. What were opaque, insider-directed, allusive songs, became containers for Isleño identity, disseminated outwards as a reflection of a people coalescing around a new awareness of their identity and unique way of life. The results of this awareness were an increasing visibility for Isleños and newfound pride in a theretofore marginalized facet of Louisiana's diverse multicultural milieu.

As décimas were refashioned into new forms to suit new circumstances, the shape of what was lost in that process also begins to emerge. Irvan Perez exchanged some essential characteristics of the genre—irony, allusion, invective, humor, opacity—for historical intelligibility and a medium with which to tell his version of the history of his people to new audiences. The performance of décimas as threads in the fabric of social life, sung at dances and casual social gatherings, or in quiet solitude on a porch or boat deck, was giving way to the formalized presentations of the revival. A complex of characteristics of décimas and the people who sang them—opaque, embarrassing, indecorous, improvisational, communal, solitary, allusive, distinctly local and impenetrable—was being lost in the process.

There's much more to make of the silencings that result from the historical developments depicted in this chapter. In this chapter, I've focused on Armistead's role as a collector at this watershed moment in the history of the Isleños and their décimas. However, these developments also meant that much of the substance of the tradition, perhaps even its most compelling and essential characteristics, were lost in the process. Reflecting on this history today, when décimas are no longer sung as part of a vital musical tradition, I wonder what other historical possibilities there might have been, and how these alternative histories might have sounded differently? In the next chapter I turn to more critical questions about the transformation of the décima in the context of the revival, asking what was lost in that process, and tracing the legacy of the early decades of the revival to the end of the décima as a vital tradition in the first decade of the present century.

3. Cleaning up the Corpus: Silencing, Aporia, and the End of a Tradition

In the early morning of November 16, 1926, the oyster lugger *Dolores* emerged from the dense fog that engulfed Bayou Gentilly and sailed into Bayou Terre aux Boefs at Delacroix. Onboard stood a heavily-armed posse: “hired guns” from across the state and even farther afield, including former Texas Rangers, deputized by St. Bernard Parish Sheriff L. A. Meraux. Machine guns had been mounted to the boat’s deck. At Delacroix, some two hundred Isleños, armed with rifles and shotguns, had positioned themselves atop the levees on both sides of the bayou, intent on defending their homes from the intruders. A fierce battle ensued. Vastly outgunned, the *Dolores* was broadsided with rifle fire and buck shot, a number of the crew being shot, one fatally, and others beaten at the hands of their opponents once they had swum to shore. The Isleños then blocked the road to Delacroix to defend against a reprisal, and some sailed to Plaquemines Parish with the intention of retaliating against Leander Perez, the local district attorney and political boss responsible for the *Dolores’s* attack, who escaped in a rowboat with his family. A standoff ensued, as Sheriff Meraux, an ally of Perez, acquired warrants for the arrest of four hundred Isleños, but feared entering the lower parish to enforce them. Order was finally restored on November 23, when a local business leader, Manuel Molero, struck a deal with agents of Perez to purchase the valuable trapping lands at the center of the conflict on behalf of the Isleños, thus initiating a scheme to lease and sell the lands back to Isleño trappers on favorable terms, thereby ending the conflict.[1]

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[1] See Gowland (2003, 435 et passim) for the most thoroughly researched study of the matter; see also Harnett Kane’s (1944, 172–80) account in his characteristically colorful descriptive style, and O’Hara (2008) for a legal analysis.

This dramatic series of events, which would subsequently become known as the Trappers' War, became a popular theme in representations of Isleños identity and history, and provided the subject matter for a décima of enduring popularity, "La guerra de los tejanos." Raymond MacCurdy recorded a version of it during his fieldwork in the 1940s (MacCurdy 1975, 111–13), as did subsequent researchers including Samuel Armistead (1979), Patricia Lestrade (2004), and Bryan Gowland (2003, 439 N 114). One of the very first publications stemming from the burgeoning Isleño heritage revival of the 1970s, a newspaper article in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* by Chris Segura (1975), included an English-language translation of some of the song's verses, expressing an explicit understanding of the song as being intertwined with the preservation of the Isleños' language, culture, and history. The song embodied Segura's view that the whole point of the heritage revival was for Isleños "to preserve their customs and their language—the language they carried with them and with which through their décimas they have preserved their unwritten history" (ibid, 8). According to this view, "La guerra de los tejanos" was the exemplar for an understanding of décimas as the keystone of Isleño patrimony—the very historical record and embodiment of a language that connected the Isleños with their ancient origins and defined their identity in the present.

Though the events of the Trappers' War remain central to representations of Isleño history today, "La guerra de los tejanos" has receded as the primary representational medium of that history. Though it was seen as the historical record of the events surrounding the Trappers' War, and, even the ideal example of the décima *qua* Isleño identity and history at the dawn of the heritage revival, it has been eclipsed in recent years by a documentary released in 2015 entitled *Delta Justice: The Islenos Trappers War* (Dubos 2015). Through the accounts of various commentators—research historians, political commentators, and Isleño informants, who recalled collective memories of the events secondhand from parents and grandparents—*Delta Justice* dramatizes the events of the Trappers' War as a story of good versus evil in which an oppressed minority triumphantly overthrows a despotic villain to reclaim their ancestral rights to their land. There's no trace whatsoever of the song that sustained historical awareness of that story in decades prior. Thus in the forty years since the dawn of the Isleño heritage revival, songs about the Trappers' War have gone from being the very embodiment of Isleño history in Chris Segura's writing to being rendered silent in the retelling of that story in 2015.

How and why was "La guerra de los tejanos" silenced in the latter-day mediation of the history of the Trappers' War? In offering some answers to that question, this chapter undertakes an investigation of the broader historical processes underlying this specific case, resulting in the receding salience of the décima and the end of this tradition as a vital musical practice in the 2000s. Avoiding metaphors about fading or cultural gray-out, fashionable scientistic concepts like ecology or sustainability (those are considered in subsequent chapters), and teleological assumptions about cultural change, I approach these developments as the products of specific historical forces that functioned on various levels to silence the Isleño décima.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) trenchant study of power and the production of history provides a historical methodology and analytical lens for my analysis in this chapter. Trouillot's concept of *silencing* affords an approach to the questions I'm raising here—questions about how sources, archives, and, in turn, histories, are shaped not just by the presences they embody, but the silences they necessarily entail:

> [T]he presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and

> monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created. As such, they are not mere presences and absences, but mentions or silences of various kinds and degrees. By silence, I mean an active and transitive process: one ‘silences a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One engages in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis.” (Trouillot 1995, 48)

Through the lens of Trouillot’s concept of silencing, I begin by exploring the political history that gave rise to *Delta Justice* and that, in my view, affords an understanding of the historical forces behind the silencing of décimas in both the documentary and in the broader milieu from which the film arose. With this theoretical approach and historical context in place, I then turn to an analysis of the recent history of the décima repertory, of the silences contained within the very songs themselves, directing this Trouillotian historical methodology towards a hermeneutics of the décima corpus as it was transformed during the heritage revival (see chapter two). This anlysis reveals the way individual songs, the musical practices, and the social meaning they contain, underwent parallel and interrelated processes of silencing in the course of the project of collection and dissemination depicted in the previous chapter.

Turning my attention to the silences that constitute the songs themselves involves an expansion of Trouillot’s historical methodology towards concerns with aesthetics, hermeneutics, and musical meaning. The objects of my analysis are silences—missing sections of tape, lost performance practices, and redacted song texts I find within the repertory of décimas as it has endured and changed over the last four decades. I develop my analysis of these rather more musical silences through Philip Bohlman’s (2012) work on the Derridean concept of *aporia* as, among other functions, “an area of impossibility and unknowability, of silence and emptiness” (136). Bohlman’s approach to “analyzing aporia” bridges diverse musical traditions under an analytical frame that takes aporetic border zones as a quality of music and musical thought that transcends space and time: the caesura of Balkan epic verse, the spaces between fullness and emptiness that form a common thread between South Asian musical thought and sacred texts, and in Viktor Ullman's *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* (The Chronicle of Love and Death of the Standard-Bearer Christoph Rilke, 1899), composed at the literal border between life and death at Terezín in 1944. Bohlman's methodology affords a framework for bringing a Trouillotian historical methodology to bear on the unknowable, silenced, and otherwise obscure products of historical power emergent in this song repertory. As Bohlman observes, analyzing aporia has the potential to expand the current limits of musical knowledge and its metaphysical context:

> It is at the aporia between the knowable and the unknowable that we enter some of the most complex border domains between music and silence, life and death, which make them all the more pressing as subjects for a music analysis that arrives at, crosses, and transcends the borders of the knowable the unknowable. (Ibid., 133)

My historical analysis of the decline of the Isleño décima takes shape through the two complementary theoretical lenses of silencing and aporia. Like the lenses of a phoropter, these two theoretical models refract my historical sources in overlapping but complementary ways, bringing a range of inter-related historical processes into focus. Together, Trouillot's and Bohlman's methodologies have the potential to afford a music historical methodology that takes the musical silences rendered by these historical developments as an object of study. Just as I draw on Bohlman's approach to expand a Trouillotian historical methodology towards aesthetic objects, I'm also gesturing at the broader applicability of analyzing aporia beyond music analysis, towards a hermeneutics of the silences inherent in the broader discursive/textual/aesthetic/musical realm of the field tapes that constitute my sources here.

In what follows I narrate a history of the decline of the décima over the forty years between Armistead's fieldwork and the release of *Delta Justice*, from the height of the genre's significance as a representation of Isleño culture and history to the end of the décima as a vital musical tradition and its receding salience in representations of Isleño identity. The chapter comprises three main examples, each representing a different kind of historical silencing, and requiring a different focusing of the theoretical lenses described above. An analysis of the political forces behind *Delta Justice* and the silence it rendered of "La guerra de tejanos," provides the first case study and a foundation for the broader historical structure of the chapter. I then turn my attention to more specific analyses of some songs, exploring the processes of selection, editing, and redacting that marked Armistead's fieldwork, fundamentally transforming the genre. Finally, I consider modes of performance of décima singing that were lost and then silenced as a diverse body of performance, as a diverse range of musical practices gave way to a paradigm of discretely composed songs and solo a capella singing. Finally, turning to the future, I imagine the place of these various examples of historical silencing in the broad historical trajectory of the decline of the décima, resulting in its end as a vital musical tradition in the 2000s and its waning local significance today.

Silencing "La guerra de los tejanos": Power and Historical Mediation

Delta Justice depicts the Trappers' War as the story of disenfranchised Isleño trappers resisting, and eventually defeating, a powerful villain in the person of Leander Perez. Their hero is Manuel Molero, who eventually rescues the situation by making a huge personal sacrifice and going deeply into debt in order to buy out the Perez factions' lands in St. Bernard and establish a benevolent rent-to-own system for the Isleño trappers. The movie juxtaposes a remarkably diverse cast of commentators: the politician Henry “Junior” Rodriguez, the political strategist James Carville, authors such as John M. Barry, Patrick O’hara and Bryan M. Gowland who have written on the subject (Barry 1997; O’Hara 2008; Gowland 2003), and local Isleños who remembered the stories told about the event by prior generations. In addition to such commentary, the film features hauntingly beautiful shots of marsh and swampland, historical photographs of Isleño trappers in Delacroix in the 1930s, and dramatized action sequences. The latter are depicted by actors playing Isleño trappers dressed up like latter-day denim-clad cowboys, inexplicably juxtaposed with historical photos of Delacroix trappers from the 1930s, who wear the sack suits and woolen work clothes that were the *de rigueur* uniforms of working men at that time. Visually, my affective response took me back to the heavily syndicated action television dramas of the 1980s that I watched as a child: series like *MacGyver* or *A-Team,* but for the more explicit depiction of gore and violence than was permissible on daytime cable television thirty years ago. The soundtrack by Holly Amber Church alternates between ethereal minimalist sustained piano chords and the twangy guitars and rattle shakes of a mid-century Western.

Released in 2015, *Delta Justice* was screened at the Isleños fiesta in 2016, followed by a range of local venues and regional and international film festivals. Released on DVD the following year, it is sold at the Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society museum, and through various local and national retailers. Since I began my fieldwork in March of 2015, months before it was released, *Delta Justice* has loomed large as a key point of reference for Isleños today. As I struggled to understand the absence of the décima in my fieldwork in St. Bernard (see chapter four), the presence of *Delta Justice* kept appearing wherever I looked—screenings at the museum grounds, DVD's for sale, and in my conversations with my Isleño interlocutors who often mentioned the film. When I watched the documentary, I was surprised and disappointed to find no reference to the song, "La guerra de los tejanos," that had previously sustained the story of the Trappers War in oral tradition over the four generations since the events took place.

In past decades, décimas were the most salient media for representing Isleño culture and history. As documented in the previous chapter, décimas were engaged as the icon of Isleño heritage during the height of the heritage revival, from the 1970s until the early 2000's. In 1983, the documentary *Mosquitoes and High Water (El mosco y el agua alta)* (Kolher and Alvarez 1983) aired on the New Orleans PBS affiliate WYES. Isleño décimas are featured at the center of a rich depiction of Isleño life in lower St. Bernard. The décimas sung in *Mosquitoes and High Water* are used as key points of reference in the program's representation of Isleño life. *Mosquitoes and High Water* tells a story of a unique local enclave struggling with the inevitable encroachment of the modern world on an isolated traditional culture. Décimas appear not just as interludes in or adjuncts to this story, but also serve as the very structure of the narrative. Above all, the film succeeds in letting décimas do this on their own terms, through the allusive, localist, and humorous perspective that defined the genre in prior decades.

The film begins and ends with the haunting baritone singing voice of John Robin of Yscloskey. The film's narrator, the décima singer and culture bearer Irvan Perez, introduces Isleño colonial history with a rendition of his décima, "Setecientos setentaisiete" (see chapter two). Perez then goes on to give one of the most compelling descriptions of the tradition I've encountered:

> Cuando pasó algo en la parroquia que se preventaba la esconder, si algún que hacia una décima sentaraba entonces hacia una décima de ella, en este acordarse que este décima fueron hecha en chirigota y también fueron hecha mas grande que lo que eran. La hicieron como no sabia lear o escribir para pasar la historia de padres a hijo y así lo manteaba lo que pasaba los últimos años a nuestras familias.
>
> When something unusual happened in St. Bernard or if someone needed to be taken down a few notches they'd make a décima about it. The writer would make jokes and exaggerate things just for fun. Because our ancestors couldn't read or write the stories were passed down from father to son, providing a living history of our culture. (Kolher and Alvarez 1983 transcribed by author; the translation is copied verbatim from the original subtitles)

Beginning and ending with Robin's décimas, *Mosquitoes and Highwater* uses Perez's characterization above as a point of embarkation for explorations of various facets of Isleño folkways. From Perez's introduction above, the film turns to a rendition of "La barca de Boy Molero," sung by Joseph "Chelito" Camp:

Boy Molero fue a la Isla;	Boy Molero went to the Island
el hombre habla con su rasón	and this is the truth:
que anda buscando gente	he looked for people
para la pesca el camarón.	to help him find some shrimp
En la Isla encontré viente	He found 20 men in Delacroix
en Bencheque veinte uno;	21 in Reggio
solamente que en el Torno	and only in the Bend
no pueda encontrar ninguno.	he didn't find a one.
Boy mandó hacer una barca,	Boy had a boat built
con una buena largura.	and it was pretty long:
¡Que cuando la proa este aquí	when the bow is in Delacroix
que la popa en Chepitula!	the stern'll be in Chepitoula!
Cuando Boy enciende las luces,	When Boy turns on the lights
y en el centro del mar,	in the middle of the sea
se queda todo alumbrado	everything lights up
como la calle del Canal.	like Canal Street! [2]

---

[2] Sung by Joseph "Chelito" Campo in (Kolher and Alvarez 1983); the Spanish transcription is my own and the translation is copied from the film's subtitles.

The narrator then segues from Campo’s humorous depiction of Boy Molero’s larger-than-life boat to a current tradition of boat-building in St. Bernard, as Perez narrates,

> Si ahora hicieron una décima, pues se decían de Joe Gonzales que vieron de una familia que hagan muy buen bote y estaba haciendo un bote de sesenta pies. Pues se que no sea tan grande como la barca de Boy Molero pero hace uno de los botes más grande en Yscloskey.
>
> If we were writing décimas today, we might write one about Joe Gonzales, who’s from a boatbuilding family and is working on a 60 ft. wooden oyster boat. Joe’s boat may not be as long as Boy Molero’s, but it will be one of the biggest in Yscloskey. (Kolher and Alvarez 1983 transcribed by author; the translation is copied verbatim from the original subtitles)

The film then goes on to depict Gonzales’s boat-building and other forms of Isleño folklife from decoy carving to hunting, trapping, and fishing, all mediated through the overarching conception of Isleño décimas as localized, reflective, allusive ways of knowing and being in lower St. Bernard.

Judging from these two documentaries, the thirty years that separated them bore witness to a fundamental change in the place of décimas in the representation of Isleño culture and history. Décimas were an asset, a resource to draw on in *Mosquitoes and High Water*, a medium through which to access, structure, and explain Isleño folklife and history. In *Delta Justice*, they don’t even warrant a mention. What explains this change?

The violence of November 16, 1926 had its origins in a booming national economy and heavy demand for furs. For generations, Isleños had been trapping the marshes of lower St. Bernard, a de facto commons, for fur-bearing animals such as otter and mink when, in the early 1920s, demand for furs skyrocketed. With limited numbers of the predator species that adorned the upper classes, the industry turned to muskrats, which teemed in the lush marsh grasses of St. Bernard, marketing the rodents’ pelts euphemistically as “Hudson seal.” Bryan Gowland, whose thoroughly researched article on the subject provides the basis for my condensed sketch here and below, describes the impact of these developments in St. Bernard:

> During this surge in demand, the St. Bernard-Plaquemines marshes became the world's most productive fur-producing area. Indeed, Louisiana produced more furs than the rest of the United States, Canada, or Russia, and the Pelican State's fur production surpassed that of Alaska by a ratio of three to one. In the 1925 season, when pelts were worth as much as $1.30 apiece, local trappers took as many as 150 muskrats a day. In such seasons, a good trapper could earn $3,000 to $4,000. As a result of such prosperity, the St. Bernard marshes became the target of unwelcome attention by outsiders, as land-grabbers and outside trappers entered the delta marsh. It did not take long for such parasites to relieve the uneducated Isleños of their sudden wealth. (Gowland 2003, 423)

While the boom in muskrat pelts was getting underway in lower St. Bernard, Judge Leander Perez was building a ruthless political machine in neighboring Plaquemines Parish that would rule the parish for nearly half a century. Perez saw an opportunity in the newly profitable marshes of St. Bernard, and collaborated with St. Bernard Parish Sheriff L. A. Meraux to buy up trapping lands and force the Isleño trappers to pay rents. A faction of trappers turned to an Isleño business leader, Manuel Molero, for recourse in dealing with Perez's and Meraux's exploitation. A complex and tumultuous legal battle ensued. Before the legal issues could be resolved, the 1926–27 trapping season commenced. Perez and Meraux brought in trappers under armed guard to trap their lands as Isleños undertook to reclaim their old trapping grounds, leading to conflict on the marshes and eventually the violence that would ensue on November 16. Having vanquished the crew of the *Dolores* that morning, Isleño trappers chased Perez and his allies across the river and routed them from neighboring Plaquemines Parish. The Isleños blocked the road to lower St. Bernard to prevent Sheriff Meraux from enforcing arrest warrants for those involved, and both sides found themselves in need of a resolution to the standoff. Order was finally restored on November 23, when Molero struck a deal with agents of Leander Perez to purchase the valuable trapping grounds at the center of the conflict, with plans to rent and sell them to local Isleño trappers on favorable terms, thus ending the conflict.

The association established by Molero to manage his extensive new holdings developed into the Delacroix Corporation, which still owns vast tracts of land in St. Bernard. While the boom in rodent pelts was short-lived, the lands proved even more valuable in subsequent decades for the oil and natural gas they contain. Oil and gas leases continue to provide profits to the Delacroix Corporation, which remains in the hands of Molero's descendants. Molero's granddaughter, Dorothy Benge, is the former president of the corporation (her son, Michael Benge is the current one). Following in her mother's footsteps, Dorothy Benge is also the most generous benefactor of the Isleño heritage revival, donating much of the land that now makes up the Los Isleños Heritage Society museum grounds, and she was responsible for the construction and relocation of many of the historical buildings that make up the museum grounds. Benge is the executive producer of *Delta Justice*, and is featured as one of the commentators in the film, in which she offers her version of the events and reflects on her relationship with her grandfather and his legacy.

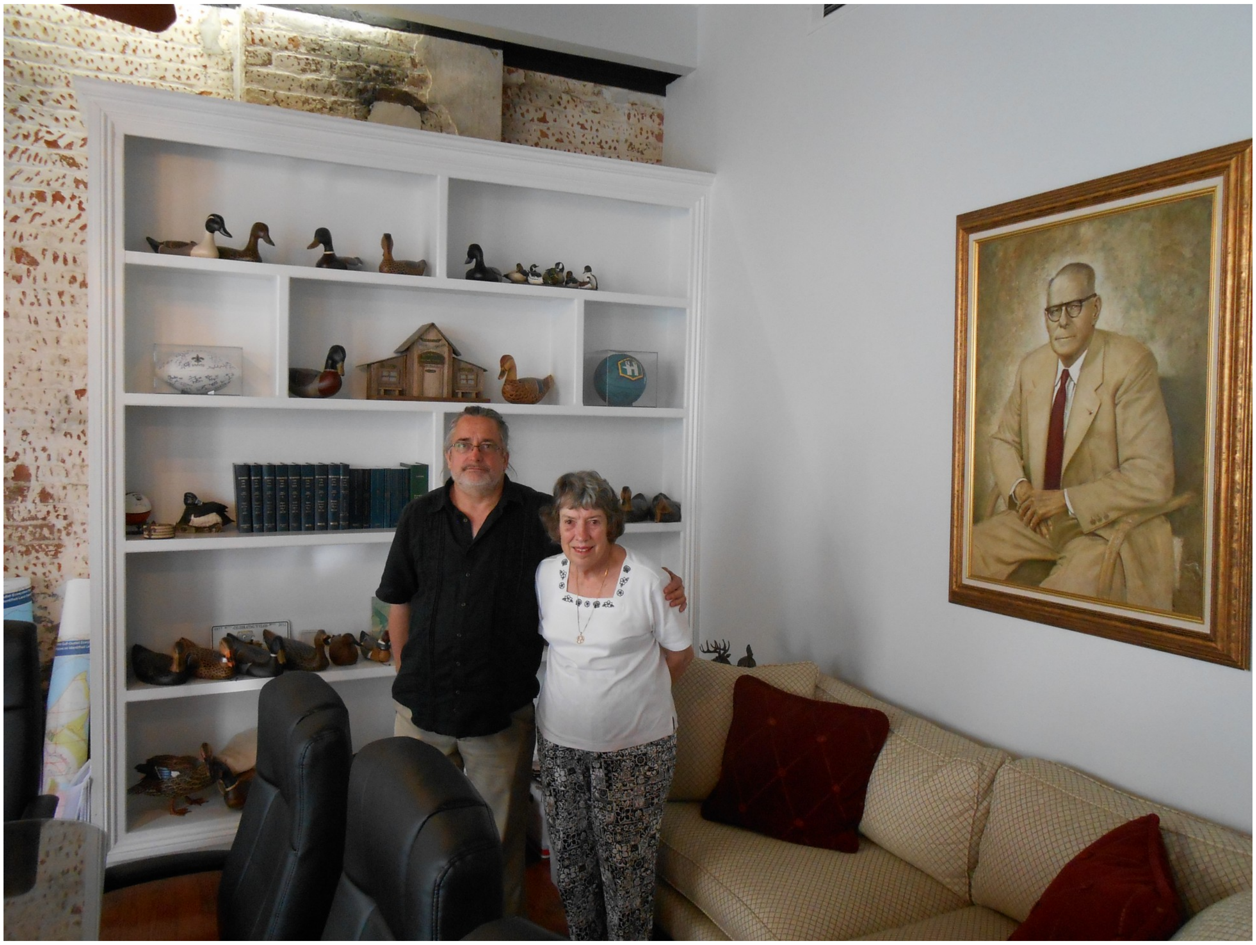

Figure 10: Dorothy Benge with Ralph Gipson and portrait of Manuel Molero, at Delacroix Corporation, New Orleans French Quarter, May 5, 2015, taken by author.

In May of 2015, nearly ninety years since the events of the Trappers' War, I met Benge in the plush offices of the Delacroix Corporation headquarters on Royal Street in the New Orleans French Quarter. Benge had been working hard to see the final stages of the production of *Delta Justice* and its release. *Delta Justice* hadn't been released at the time of our conversation, and when Benge began telling me about her views on the conflict and her work on the movie, I asked her about "La guerra de los tejanos."

WB: I believe there was a song written about this.
DB. Really?

> WB; Yes, I think so.
>
> DB: A décima.
>
> WB: Yea, a décima.
>
> DB: Yes, definitely.
>
> WB: Are you familiar with it?
>
> [I thought I had brought a copy of the song and began fumbling through my papers.]
>
> DB: Was it a good song in favor of my grandfather or was it a [Leander] Perez-written song? Because there were some trappers, some Isleños, who were not happy with the situation because they felt he should have given them the land. He had a note [loan], and he had taxes to pay. There was no way he could have done that.[3]

For Benge, the possibility that the song might reflect a critical view of her grandfather warranted its utter dismissal as a "Perez-written song." She had little interest in listening to the song or reading the song's text with me. What could the song have possibly said about Molero to warrant such a dismissal? Patricia Manning Lestrade (2004) recorded the following rendition sung by Irvan Perez in 2000:

La guerra de los tejanos	**The Trappers' War**
Ahora ponga atención	Now pay attention
Lo que yo le voy a cantá	What I'm going to sing to you
Cada vez que me cuerdo quel día	Each time I remember that day
Me dan gana de llorá.	I feel like crying.
De la guerra de lo tejano	Of the war of the Texans
Cuando vinieron a guerreá	When they came to fight
A la ihla de San Bernardo	To the island of St. Bernard
A varios se le ha olvidado	Many have forgotten
Pero a mi no se me olvidó.	But I haven't forgotten.
El que tuvo la culpa de todo	The one who was to blame for all
De ehto eran Perez y Meró.	Of this were Perez and Mero [sic: Meraux].
Nojotros ganamo la plería	We won the marshalnd,
Se la entregamo a Manuel Molero	We gave it over to Manuel Molero
Per no cumplió con la gente	But he didn't keep his promise to the people.
Puso mucho extrangero.	He put many foreigners
Ha arruinado todo lo que había.	He has ruined everything that was.
Por a causa de Manuel Molero	Because of Manuel Molero

---

[3] Dorothy Benge. Interview by author. New Orleans, May 5, 2015.

Lo poquito que quedaba	The little that remained
A Adán Sardín	To Adam Sardin
Se lo dio a loh extrangero.	He gave it to the foreigners.
Y el probe John, el de Paul	And poor John, Paul's son
Lo quitaron de la mapa	They took him off the map
Lo mandaron a Bayou Plato	They sent him to Shallow Bayou
Donde llamaba su contrato.	Where his contract called (for him).
Andaba pa riba y pa bajo,	He wandered up and down
Le faltaba namá que llorá	All he had left was to cry
—Tanto peso que yo he pagáo	"So many dollars that I've paid
Y no tengo donde trampía.—	And I don't have anywhere to trap."
Y José cobra la ihla	And José collects on the island
En la Punta Lacha, Adán,	In Point LaHache [sic: Pointe à la Hache], Adam,
Y Juanillo, el de Tio Caco,	And Juanillo, the [son] of Uncle Caco,
El que cobra en Picán.	[Is] the one who collects in Oak River.
Y el probe de Toni Molero	And poor Toni Molero
Le dieron de la ehcuela pa cá	They gave him [the area] from school to here
Pero él no va a tu casa	But he doesn't go to your house
Mientra no lo mande buscá	As long as you don't send for him.
Y no esto yo no canto má	And with this I won't sing anymore
De la guerra de lo tejano.	About he war of the Texans.
Si la cosa no se cambea	If the thing doesn't change
Adió la Isla de San Bernardo.	Good-bye Island of St. Bernard. (Ibid., 448-449)[4]

Far from the partisanship one might expect given Benge's response, the song seems to express an irreverent general criticism of power and authority and a democratic egalitarianism that transcends the politics of Molero, Perez, or Benge. Compared to the vitriol of some other invective décimas, this would seem to be pretty mild, and its broadly anti-elitist perspective is an essential characteristic of many Isleño décimas. Benge's response to my asking about the song seems to do with the criticism of Molero’s actions in the third stanza. Indeed, breaking promises and favoring foreigners over fellow local Isleños would seem to be fairly grave allegations. The genre’s essentially allusive character (see chapter three) is important to keep in mind here. It would be clear that Perez and Meraux, the instigators of the plot and the perpetrators of the violent attack on Delacroix are “to blame for all of this.” The audience is assumed to be privy to this egregious behavior; it’s the more subtle transgressions of Molero that call for specific commentary, as there were those who continued to support him despite the later protestations. Benge’s totalizing view precludes the possibility of any such subtly, ignores the song’s essentially allusive perspective, and thus renders the song a partisan relic with no place in Benge’s representation of her grandfather’s legacy and her people’s, the Isleños’, history.

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[4] Lestrade notes that the English title is "well-known among the Isleños" (see Lestrade 452 note 8), which suggests that the very title of the *Delta Justice: The Trappers' War* was a direct appropriation of the song. *Delta Justice* thus seems as an effort to entirely replace the widely anti-elitist critique of the song with its new message, lauding Manuel Molero and his legacy as the benevolent patrons of the Isleños, subsuming even the valence of the song title in the process.

Benge’s rejection and, ultimately, silencing of “La guerra de los tejanos” is understandable—she seemed to take it as a personal attack on her grandfather’s character and a critique of her view of her family’s role as benevolent patrons and leaders of the Isleños. The story of the silencing of the song, however, began before Benge’s production of *Delta Justice*, dating to the mid-1970s and the pioneering work of Samuel G. Armistead in collecting and disseminating décimas to represent the early Isleño heritage revival. Despite its popularity among Isleños and its rich historical subject matter, by the time of the early revival period, as a handful of men found themselves making decisions about how décimas would serve a new role as a representational medium of Isleño identity and history (see chapter two), “La guerra de los tejanos,” was identified as unfit for this role.

The song first appears in the historical record long before the Isleño heritage revival, in Raymond MacCurdy’s 1940s collecting trip in St. Bernard. There’s no evidence that MacCurdy had any reservations publishing the version he recorded from Martin Alfonso in the 1940s, and he made no mention of any enduring controversy in his belated publication of the song text (MacCurdy 1975, 111–112). The same year that MacCurdy's version was published, Samuel G. Armistead began work on plans to publish his own transcriptions of the song, recorded on his initial field trip in St. Bernard earlier that year. Armistead sought to disseminate his recordings of "La guerra de los tejanos" in the very first article he planned to publish from his Louisiana fieldwork. Upon returning from his first field trip, Armistead drafted a newspaper article entitled, "An Ancient Tradition Fights to Survive."[5] He introduced the Isleños' "isolation," "individualism and self-reliance," describing the "ancient heritage," "venerable culture," and "a venerable treasury of traditional songs (called *décimas*), some dating back hundreds of years to the Middle Ages and others of local composition, revealing the particular genius and philosophy of the people of St. Bernard," all at grave risk of being "lost forever with the passing of the present elder generation." The article emphasized the breadth of the tradition of Hispanic verse that Armistead encountered in St. Bernard, juxtaposing "La guerra de los tejanos" with other Isleño décimas and examples of medieval *romances* he collected in St. Bernard, all of which encompassed what he described as an "ancient Spanish tradition of narrative poetry," and a "formula for survival in a hostile world."

Armistead sent a copy of the article draft to Alvin Donald Diaz and Frank Fernandez with the following instructions: "Please make any suggestions or changes you want and return them to me (written in on the pages themselves, if you wish)."[6] Frank Fernandez returned the draft with only a couple of markings. He thoroughly blacked out the title of the song, “The Trappers’ War (La guerra de los tejanos)” and part of Armistead’s description of the song. In the margin he wrote with a heavy hand “DELETE.” In a handwritten letter he thanked Armistead for his “great contribution to the exposure of our Isleño Culture and Heritage” and requested that “La guerra de los tejanos” be censored or omitted from the article:

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[5] Manuscript paper-clipped to the December 1, 1975 letter filed in "Louisiana Talk" Folder. (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections). This case suggests a much more expansive role for musical transcription than has often been acknowledged (see, for example, Winkler 1997).

[6] December 1, 1975 letter filed in "Louisiana Talk" Folder. (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections).

> I am happy to know your feelings on controversial matters among the Isleños. I strongly recommend that the name of Manuel Molero not be used in the Trappers-war decima. The feelings are strong among the people pro and con are strong on the matter. The Molero family is a proud Isleño family which has contributed much to the community. The name Molero should be stricken from the decima.[7]

Apparently satisfied with the article otherwise, Fernandez included the contact information for the appropriate editors at the two St. Bernard newspapers and the New Orleans *Times Picayune*.

In a later conversation with Armistead, Fernandez further elucidated his view, along with Irvan Perez’s, of the political significance of “La guerra de los tejanos.” The controversial nature of the song and Fernandez’s concerns about it dissemination continued to loom large in 1980, when the fieldtape from which the following excerpt was transcribed was recorded. In the follwoing conversation between Armistead, Fernandez, and Perez in 1980, the three men reveal some of the underlying forces behind their motivations and a thicker description of the negotiations that gave rise to the silencings sketched above.

> **FF**: Ms. Molero [Marie Louise Molero O’Toole] is the one who donated the museum. Now why the heck would we want to—
> **SA**: [interrupting] —alienate her?
> **FF**: —have a song that criticized her? Why would we want to fight each other and criticize each other? For example there’s criticism in there of Judge [Leander] Perez. You could find a thousand good things that Judge Perez did for the people—the main drag in

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[7] An undated letter on Delta Heritage Academy letterhead from Frank Fernandez (Principal) to Samuel Armistead; contained in the same folder entitled “Louisiana Talk” (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead’s house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections).

> St. Bernard Parish is named after him, and all the hurricane levees that we have. He was a statesman and I don't think that we want to criticize him.
> **SA**: Absolutely.
> **FF**: And Sheriff Meraux, Joe Meraux—you know Joseph Meraux?
> **SA**: No.
> **FF**: Joseph Meraux is one of the wealthiest men in the United States and his father had a whole political era in the parish.
> **IP**: Was that Dr. Meraux?
> **FF**: Dr. Meraux. Dr. Meraux did lots of good things for the people; they loved him. Why would we want, after they're all dead—in a song here—criticize them all and make little of them, you know?
> **SA**: That's understandable.
> **IP**: If we hurt her feelings now, it would hurt everybody's feelings, including mine.[8]

It is not clear if Armitead's article was ever published. It's possible that Chris Segura at the *Times Picayune*, having just published his own story on Isleño décimas earlier that year (Segura 1975), decided not to publish Armistead's similar story. It would be four years before Armistead published the first academic article resulting from his fieldwork (Armistead 1979). That article focused on a Spanish romance he recorded in St. Bernard—revealing his early priorities of identifying examples of pan-Hispanic romances in Louisiana to support Ramón Menéndez Pidal's "classic theory of the *romance's* Pan-Hispanic character" (Armistead 1992b, ix), that is, of its distribution wherever Spanish is spoken. As an aside, he included the two versions of "La guerra de los tejanos" as examples of the new genre he had discovered, the Isleño décima, and its relationship to the Mexican corrido*:*

> The origin of the Louisiana *décima* emerges quite clearly from an analysis of their structure. They are, I believe, intimately and genetically related to the *corrido* which has dominated the oral traditions of Mexico and the Texas border for the last century. The metrics of the two forms are identical, but their similarities go even deeper and pertain also to their estructure [sic]. (Armistead 1979, 156)

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[8] Transcribed from field tape, "La. 3" Sides 1 and 2. December 17, 1980. Accessed at Armistead's office in Spring 2015 while in process at UC Davis Special Collections.

Even in this academic article, unlikely to see much, if any, circulation among his Isleño interlocutors, Armistead seems to have taken Fernandez's concerns to heart. Armistead (1979) withheld the names of his informants and, remarkably, redacted the names of Perez, Meraux, and Manuel Molero from the song texts. Armistead explained that "much bitterness resulted" from the events and reflected on his own view of his positionality vis-à-vis the songs thus:

> The issues involved are still the subject of considerable controversy among residents of *La Isla* and consequently I am honor bound not to reveal the names of my informants or to print those of certain personages referred to in the songs. (Ibid., 154–155)

So far, this chapter has traced a historical arc from the utter silencing and erasure of the song and its anti-elitist viewpoint in *Delta Justice* back to Armistead's early negotiations with the controversy surrounding this song. Tracing "La guerra de los tejanos" reveals manifold silencings working first to suppress the publication of the song, to censor and redact identifying names in the song, and finally, to replace it entirely as the popular historical record of the Trappers' War and exclude it from more recent mediations of Isleño culture and history, namely the documentary movie *Delta Justice*. Décimas, and the broader tradition they embody, were also silenced in other, less readily apparent ways. The silences of "La guerra de los tejanos" left clear evidence of their happenings: the blank spaces of the redactions of Armistead's publication, or the potent absence of the song in *Delta Justice*. In the examples to follow, the forces that worked to shape the history of the décima also acted on the substance of the songs themselves, while leaving much less evidence of their role in the process.

Editing “El trabajo del *welfare*”: Intimacy, Representation, and Curatorial Responsibility

Armistead’s decisions regarding “La guerra de los tejanos” were the product of his activist role in curating his archive and the sense of collaboration and responsibility he felt for his interlocutors. The same values of curation, collaboration, and responsibility resulted in changes to the individual décimas Armistead recorded and, by extension to the tradition in general. This process went beyond the curatorial, redactive processes evident in the history of the “La guerra de los tejanos.” Armistead and his collaborators went so far as to rewrite old décimas to suit the new role of outwardly directed representation. This was not a transparent historical process, in which previous versions would be preserved in the historical record; rather, it was intended as an ahistorical silencing, in which the very historical sources were silenced in the process of this rewriting. In short, Armistead and his collaborators rewrote décimas to suit their vision of the décima as a representation of Isleño heritage; they then sought to obscure the evidence of that process in the publications and archival documents they left behind. This took the form of edits to Armistead’s field tapes. In this process of editing and redacting, essential components of the tradition’s social meaning were lost; as the tradition was transformed to suit the aims of Armistead and his collaborators, it simultaneously faced a steady decline towards its end as a vital tradition.

“El trabajo del *welfare*,” also known as “Lilolá,” “Welfare Work,” or “the Welfare Song,” depicts the travails of Isleño laborers working for the Works Progress Administration. A popular décima, it remains the most well-known and oft-mentioned song in the Isleño corpus. Without exception, when my Isleño interlocutors remembered specific songs in my conversations with them, they recalled this song. Armistead published the following version in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*:

El trabajo del *welfare*	**Welfare Work**
¡O lilolá! Y a mí poco se me da!	O lilolá! I just don’t much care!
Y el trabajo del *welfare* es un trabajo muy regoso el pobrecito de Titico se clavó un pico espinoso.	The work you do on welfare is too dangerous for me: Poor little Titico got a thorn in his foot!
¡O lilolá! Y a mí qué se me da!	O lilolá! I just don’t much care!
El que anda con los mulos tiene la vida vendía Mulo se tira una pata, puede perder su vida	A guy who works with mules has sold his life away: If the mule lets go a kick, he can lose his life.
¡O lilolá! Y esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Juanito, el del Canal, dice que El quiere su dinero, para dárselo al cuñado, para mercar su sombrero.	Juanito from Violette says he wants to get his money, to give it to his brother-in-law, to buy himself a hat.
¡O lilolá! El que ya está coplá!	O lilolá! He’s really fixed for sure!
Y el pobre de Pirilla, que anda arriba de Lucía, que El que tiene que ajustá, hasta buscarse su vida.	Poor old Pirillia is after Lucía; he has to change his ways, till he can earn a living.
¡O lilolá! Y esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Para yo pasar trabajo, me quedo quieto en mi casa El pobrecito de Pirilla se cortó un pie con el hacha.	To go through all that work, I’d rather stay back home. Poor old Pirilla cut his foot with an axe!
¡O lilolá! Esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Y Lulo de Tío Jacinto	Lulo, son of Uncle Jacinto,

me vino a pedír un sombrero,	came to borrow my hat:
porque va con un golpe sol	He’d gotten sunstroke
al medio de un solajero	from working in the sun!
¡O lilolá! Y a mí poco se me da!	O lilolá! I just don’t much care!
Este Lipe el de Joe	That Felipe, son of Joe,
es un poco fanfarrón.	is sort of a show-off.
Que se hizo el sin vergüenza;	He got out of hand
el *boss* le dio un pescozón	and the *boss* slapped him down.
¡O lilolá! Esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Y el *truck* de Joe Gonzales	Joe González’s *truck*,
que los lleva y los trae	which takes them there and back:
que la máquina no anda	Its motor doesn’t work
y no tiene buenos *tire*	and the tires are no good.
¡O lilolá! Esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Fuéronsi hablar	They went to try and talk
con el pobre de Vicente	with poor old Vicente,
para ver si el quería	to see if he was willing
llevar y traer la gente	to take the folks to work.
¡O lilolá! Esto sí que y es verdad!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Y Juanita, la de Sico,	And Juanita, Sico’s daughter,
anda pa arriba y pa abajo:	is walking up and down:
—Si no le pagan a Sico,	“If they don’t pay Sico,
Sico va dejar el trabajo.—	Sico’s going to leave off work!”
¡O lilolá! Y a mí poco se me da!	O lilolá! I just don’t much care![9]

It’s easy to imagine why this song resonated so strongly with Isleños, past and present. Residues of performance are evident in the text, which summons images of weary Isleño laborers gathering around the kitchen table or in a barroom, each in turn contributing a few lines to a collective extemporaneous composition emerging from their shared memories of the day’s work.

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[9] Reproduced from (Armistead 1992b, 28–29). Minor changes have been made here to Armistead’s orthographic transcription, rendering it slightly closer to standard Spanish; the English translation is copied verbatim.

Its present form seems as a fossil eventually crystallized from its origin in a collective improvised performance. A sense of camaraderie and competition emerges in this reading of the text, each singer trying to outdo the last with a more trenchant or outrageous verse—their shared irreverence and irony affording an experience of communal catharsis during hard times. These anonymous singers produced their trenchant critiques of an exploitative and brutal system through the Isleño décima's characteristic mode of irreverence, irony, humor, and hyperbole. In these ways it embodies some of the genre's most distinctive characteristics. The bouncy melody of the refrain underscores this irreverent, celebratory affect (see chapter one). Compared to the broader corpus, though, this one is relatively tame. Its tone is plaintive more than invective; and its criticisms are directed generally rather than against the misdeeds of this particular boss or someone else seen to be wielding undo authority or otherwise misbehaving.

In the citation following the song text, Armistead writes that the song was "sung twice" by his informant, John Robin, at Yscloskey, on October 26, 1975, hinting at the interpersonal ethnographic exchange that gave rise to the text above, but leaving further details entirely up to the reader's imagination. When I began my study of Armistead's field tapes, I imagined my work like a kind of archaeological excavation, scraping away the layers buried beneath the texts of *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* to uncover something of the interpersonal ethnographic interactions, musical sounds, and deeper meanings underlying them. Armistead's cryptic citation drew me in like the ancient rune in an *Indiana Jones* movie. The reality of my experience, however, was more akin to a forensic investigation (marked by a dearth of evidence), than my fantasy of an archaeological dig. The Armistead tapes comprised a challenging archive. The speed of the tapes was inconsistent, rendering some voices a garbled baritone. Armistead and his interlocutors switched fluently between Spanish and English, each language posing its own challenges to an uninitiated listener. Even as I became better at following these tortuous multilingual peregrinations, I realized the conversations were often riddled with seeming non sequiturs and meta-discursive side conversations, *sotto voce*, about the tape recorder and the recordings themselves as they were being made. Most of the tapes were in seemingly terrible condition, with frequent pops distorting the input of my painstakingly adjusted digital recorder.

Weeks turned into months as I struggled to make sense of this archive and imagine how to turn it into usable data for my dissertation. Gradually, the meaning of the tapes began to take shape, not through the often garbled presences of the voices they contained, but from the silences the disorienting pops and confusing sequences of sounds seemed to obscure. During the interviews Armistead would frequently stop and start his tape recorders. Typically this registered as simply a “pop” sound between two seemingly disconnected sections of tape. I’ve also come to believe that the tapes, in their current form—copies of cassette tapes at the University of New Orleans Special Collections and Armistead’s own personal copies at the University of California at Davis—were edited after they were recorded. Armistead’s research in St. Bernard was funded by the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, and entailed the preservation of Armistead’s field tapes in the University of New Orleans Special Collections Department. The edits could have been made during copying—the copy would just need to be stopped and started during recording, and the sound would register similarly to the stopping and starting of the tape during the interview. I began to listen again to the distortions I heard on the tapes and the bewildering conversations not as incomprehensible nonsense getting in the way of my analysis of the matter of the field tapes; rather, I listened to them now, following Trouillot and Bohlman, as the aporetic ruptures that marked the silences rendered by these edits. Thus my analysis rests on the assumption that the tapes were edited for content before they were deposited in the archives in their current form, and I take the silences rendered by those edits as the objects of my analysis.

It's not clear who was responsible for this editing. Armistead's work was funded by a grant from the Jean Lafitte National Park, and Armistead sent his field tapes to the program director, James Isenogle, to be copied and deposited at the University of New Orleans library.[10] Armistead copied his original reel-to-reel tapes to cassette before sending them to Isenogle, and it is possible that Armistead edited the tapes before they were sent to Isenogle. Isenogle made copies, sent the originals back to Armistead (the versions I now believe to be the copies held at UC Davis). The analysis below doesn't hinge on this order of events—rather it's the fact of the silencing and its role in the history of the décima that concerns this history.

Armistead's curation of his archive reflects his essentially collaborative approach to his fieldwork in Louisiana. Armistead can be heard discussing in the tapes how his informants wished to be represented in this project. He encouraged his informants to alter or cut verses of songs which embarrassed them and didn't fit the emerging vision of the décima *qua* Isleño identity. Listening to the tapes, I found Armistead's early interviews consisting largely of him listening to his informants' goals and aspirations and discussing how Armistead's work might further those goals. Armistead listened patiently while his informants explained how they wanted to be represented in his work, often reworking or omitting off-color or vulgar verses from their songs. Some of the more controversial topics are completely redacted, but other examples reveal a collaborative process in which this repertory was reshaped and refined during the interview process to suit the goals Armistead's informants and their aspirations for the nascent Isleño heritage revival. The subsequent editing of portions of his field tapes containing the objectionable material before depositing copies in the archive might best be understood as an extension Armistead's collaborative approach to his fieldwork and the curatorial role he assumed in representing his informants.

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[10] Letter from Armistead to James L. Isenogle, dated March 4, 1982; in file folder "Sam's Report to Isenogle 1980-81" (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections).

"El trabajo del *welfare*" brings to light an especially illuminating example of how these processes played out, and the broader implications for the décima's history since the 1970s. This analysis reveals a parallel mode of silencing to that of the canonization (and exclusion) of certain repertories by political forces in the heritage revival discussed above. Here the silencing begins with negotiations in Armistead's interviews about respectability, propriety, representation, and politics, and came to be realized with the editing of the field tapes and publications of new, sanitized, rewritten versions of Isleño décimas intended to define the genre for future generations.

Why, as Armistead's citation indicates, did John Robin sing "El trabajo del welfare" twice for Armistead's recorder at Yscloskey in 1976. Were they different versions? How were those choices made? What kind of musical object was "El trabajo del welfare" before Armistead transformed it first into an audio recording and then into text? Answers to such questions are left to the reader's imagination. Close listening to the field tapes suggest that Armistead's citation obscures a much more complex interpersonal exchange that gave rise to the song text as it appears in the book. My analysis of the field recording of that interview suggests that Robin sang it at least three times as he, Frank Fernandez, and Armistead equivocated about whether and how to include, edit out, or rewrite some of the more objectionable of the song's verses.

The interview from which Armistead extracted the song text of “El trabajo del *welfare*” for *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* was one of the first he conducted in St. Bernard, and “El trabajo del *welfare*” was one of the first songs he recorded. Listening to the tape, Armistead’s excitement at discovering this new genre of ballad is palpable. His interlocutors are similarly enthusiastic. One hears conversations, songs, song fragments, stories, and banter, all interspersed with the sounds of tape stopping and starting. Nestled among these discursive fragments, and long before a more complete rendition of the song is heard, Robin is heard reciting, in a rushed, hushed, voice, the following stanza:

El que anda con los mulos	[He who works with the mules
tiene la vida vendía:	has sold his life away:
Que el mulo se tira un pedo	for if the mule farts
rieja de perder la vida.	he risks losing his life.][11]

Robin immediately qualified the fragment, while Armistead seemed intent on encouraging him to continue singing regardless of his reservations about the material:

> JR: And I don’t like to make that, you know what I mean?
> SA: Yea that’s all right.
> JR: I’m trying to figure a way of leaving it out.
> SA: You can just leave it out, I mean, it doesn’t make any matter.

At some point between that moment in 1976 and the publication of *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* in 1992, the stanza, rather than being “left out,” was altered as follows:

El que anda con los mulos	A guy who works with mules
tiene la vida vendía	has sold his life away:
Mulo se tira una pata,	If the mule lets go a kick,
puede perder su vida	he can lose his life. (Armistead 1992, 29)

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[11] Field tape recording “LA 1.2 John Rubin” (MSS 144-91), Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library Special Collections Department, University of New Orleans. The translation is my own.

It's not clear who made the change or under what circumstances, but it did reflect John Robin's concerns about the propriety of the verse, and his apparent impulse to find a suitably nuanced way of omitting it. It illustrates Armistead's sense of responsibility to his informants and his generally collaborative approach to fieldwork, as well as the broader agenda, detailed in the previous chapter, to transform the décima corpus in order that it might serve as an outward representation of Isleño culture and history. There's another, less obvious silence behind the textual representation of "El trabajo del *welfare*" in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*, with further implications for the way the essential musical meaning of the song was transformed in the process of Armistead's collecting project.

Before Robin's first rendition of the song for Armistead, amid a flurry of skips in the tape, the following exchange can be heard:

> [*tape skips*]
> **JR**: and everything and then —
> **SA**: That's alright
> **JR**: [*sung:*] *O lilolá!* Y a mí poco se me da!
> [*spoken:*] Y Juani—ohhh, no no. They got a thing about them fellas, let's see.
> [*tape skips*]
> **JR**: you see there, I want to leave off this—(*unclear*)
> [*tape skips*][12]

This sounds like the beginning of the final stanza as it appears in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*, which reads,

Y Juanita, la de Sico,	And Juanita, Sico's daughter,
anda pa arriba y pa abajo:	is walking up and down:
—Si no le pagan a Sico,	"If they don't pay Sico,
Sico va dejar el trabajo.—	Sico's going to leave off work!" (Armistead 1992, 29)

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[12] Field tape recording "LA 1.2 John Rubin" (MSS 144-91), Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library Special Collections Department, University of New Orleans.

When Robin does get to singing a more complete rendition of the song, he sings the final stanza as it appears in the book, but then seems to be interrupted by Frank Fernandez. The exchange that follows gives some clues as to how the published version took shape and what may have been silenced in the process. The following is my transcription of the field tape. It seems incoherent, nonlinear, aporetic; but it's that very incoherence, it seems to me, that affords some insight into the silencing that resulted in the published version of the song:

JR: [*sung*:] Y Juanita, la de Sico,	[And Juanita, Sico's wife
anda pa arriba y pa abajo:	walks up and down, saying:
—Si no le pagan a Sico,	"If they don't pay Sico,
Sico va dejar el trabajo.—	Sico will stop work."]

[**FF** and **JR** *laughing*]
FF: ¡*O lilolá!* ¡A mí poco se me da!
JR: Yea! You know what it means there, eh?
FF: Si hay cosas que no sabe lo que son, pregunta a decirme [If there are things that you don't know what they are, ask me].
JR: ¡(*unclear*), como a del mulo! [like the one about the mule!]
SA: Tengo que recopilarte que repitir [I have to collect it to repeat it].
FF: Cuando lo escucha en la maquina te puede recordar [Whatever is heard by the machine is recorded].
SA: Una cosa tengo que decir [One thing I have to say]— it's not very polite, if someone else talks when he's singing, it goes in the machine and then I can't get anything . . .
JR: Well that's right. The funny thing that's good is not necessary there, I guess you mean.
SA: No, what I'm saying is any noise in the room I can pick it up. I can pick up your conversation elsewhere in the room and it'll screw up the—
FF: But that sounds really good.
SA: Can I go over that with you word by word so I can get the . . .
JR: Which one?
FF: E lilola.
SA: E lilola.
FF: La última. [the last one]
[*Tape skips.*]

JR: [*singing:*] ¡*O lilolá!* ¡Y a mí poco se me da!	[O lilola! I just don't care!
El trabajo del *welfare*	The welfare work
[es] un trabajo muy regoso	is very dangerous work.
el pobrecito de Titico	Poor Titico's little boy
se clavó un pico espinoso.	Stuck himself with a thorn.
¡*O lilolá!* Esto si—	O lilola! That—][13]

The men then discuss each stanza in turn, answering Armistead's questions in order that he could assemble an accurate transcription and translation of the song. When they arrive at the final stanza, Robin again seems to be interrupted, this time by Armistead. It's a disorienting moment. The men talk about the mule discussed above, and another song ("La guerra de los tejanos"), which was also the subject of controversy (see above), all while the final stanza of "El trabajo del *welfare*" seems to hang uncomfortably in the air; a close listening to this subsequent portion of the tape affords the possibility of imagining the silences it obscures.

JR: [*singing:*] Y Juanita, la de Sico,	[And Juanita, Sico's wife
anda pa arriba y pa abajo:	walks up and down, saying:
—Si no le pagan a Sico,	"If they don't pay Sico,
Sico va dejar el trabajo.—	Sico will stop work."]

SA: Sico es otro? [Sico is someone else?]
JR: El otro [the other guy]. And his wife was going up and down the road and saying "if they don't pay him, Sico's gonna quit the job!"
SA: Tambien esto entiendo, sí. [Also this I understand, yes]
FF: Pa dejar el trabajo. [he's going to leave the job]
JR: Pa dejar el trabajo.
SA: Sí sí sí. Puede ser, lo que iba pedir es que me de otra vez lo de los tramperos porque habia algunas palabras ahi que no hay [It may be, what I was going to ask is that you tell me again the one about the trappers because there were some words there that weren't there]
FF: La palabra de Manuel [the name of Manuel] . . .
JR: Maneul—bueno. Yo tuve que dejar ahí como dejar en la eso fuera . . .
[I had to leave it out like I left it out in the . . .]
SA: Sí
JR: . . . "I left something out.
SA: Usted deje lo que guste. [Leave out whatever you like]

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[13] Field tape recording "LA 1.2 John Rubin" (MSS 144-91), Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library Special Collections Department, University of New Orleans.

JR: I didn’t want it. Because just like it says,
El que anda con los mulos, [He who works with mules]
tiene la vida vendía: [has sold his life away]
—don’t put it on there.
SA: No, no, no. No.
JR: Si el mulo se tire un pedo[for if the mule lets go a fart]
Rieja de perdir la vida.[He risks losing his life]
JR: I think that’s not nice.
FF: If the mule farts he’s gonna lose his life.
JR: You understand? I left that out!
SA: Yea, yea. Yea.[14]

What I’d like to suggest is that Robin is interrupted before he finished the song. What became the final stanza in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* was in fact the penultimate stanza. Robin is interrupted, and the men talk about other instances where the objectionable content of décimas necessitated censoring, editing, or redacting portions of the song, such as the earlier stanza about the mule or “La guerra de los tejanos.” In other published versions of the song (I. Perez 1989, 1997; MacCurdy 1975, 119), as well as in a fragment that Martin Alfonso sang to me in St. Bernard (see chapter four), the stanza about Juanita precedes another stanza, in which Mimiro censures and threatens Juanita’s husband, Sico, that his wife’s behavior is inappropriate and deserving of a violent response from her husband:

Mimiro le dijo a Sico	[Mimiro said to Sico:
—De eso tú no hagas caso,	Don’t pay attention to that,
que si fuera en plaza tuya,	If I were in your place
la estropeara de un sopapo.	I would smack her on the head.
O li lo la, a mí poco se me da.	O li lo la, I just don’t much care.]

(MacCurdy 1975, 119)

I infer that, as he did with the verse about the mule, Robin probably recited the verse to Armistead, elsewhere, recorded on a now-lost section of tape, or sung while the recorder was switched off. Perhaps Robin expressed discomfort with the verse, with their casual and graphic depiction of gendered violence, as he did with the flatulent mule. Perhaps Fernandez intervened later and asked Armistead to exclude the verse, as he had regarding “La guerra de los tejanos.” Armistead, perhaps recognizing the rather more objectionable nature of this verse, apparently did a better job of both editing those portions of the tape out, as the stanza in question doesn’t appear at all on the archival copy of the tape, and resisted referring to it at all in his publications.

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[14] Field tape recording “LA 1.2 John Rubin” (MSS 144-91), Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library Special Collections Department, University of New Orleans.

Taken together, these seemingly innocuous changes actually fundamentally transform the song. The two stanzas constitute the clearest moments of cultural intimacy in the lyrics. The quip about the dangers of a mule’s flatulence infused the entire song with a funny, intimate, and ironic tone that conditioned the other stanzas—stanzas that seem to imply a more serious sentiment on their own. Hyperbole was one of the central tropes in the genre. By changing “pedo” to “pata” this instance of such a fundamental trait of the genre is lost. Flat tires, injuries suffered on the job, the very real dangers of a mule’s kick, and late paychecks: these are challenges that could be remembered alternately as terrible hardship or funny shared catharsis. The hyperbolic warning about the dangers of a gassy mule renders the song a witty jab at labor conditions under the WPA, while Mimiro’s posturing over Juanita’s apparent transgression of allowable gender roles demarcates an intimate space marked by *machismo* and a nostalgia for a violently enforced patriarchal code of normative gender roles. The sanitized version produced in *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* reads rather as a sober lament of terrible hardship. An intimate political critique that fostered communal catharsis gave way to a serious “down-and-out” narrative of hardships suffered, ideally suited to represent this little-known minority group to a broader audience.

Assembling “La barca de Boy Molero”: Performance Practices

So far, this chapter has explored the way individual songs were silenced by the political forces of the heritage revival, and the way individual verses were altered, effecting a transformation of the essential character of individual songs and, in turn, reshaping the genre as a whole from embodying an intimate, ironic, anti-elitist perspective to a staid representation of an idealized Isleño identity and history. In these analyses, décimas have appeared alternately as an historical medium, interpersonal discursive matter, and, finally, text. Décimas were also musical practice; “El trabajo del *welfare*” embodies a shift from a collective extemporaneous improvisational composition to a fixed song, suitable for textual reproduction in a book and the kind of representational power required by the Isleño heritage revival. The poetics of “El trabajo del *welfare*” suggests the song’s genesis in improvisatory extemporaneous group composition—a social practice of collective catharsis through irreverent irony and humor. By the time of Armistead’s fieldwork, the song had crystallized into a fairly discrete composition, and performed, recorded, and published as a kind of memorialization of its collective provenance.

Indeed, the shift away from participatory, collective, extemporaneous composition has been the subject of intense scrutiny by my interlocutors. Before the new formalized spaces of décima performance arose in the 1970s, décimas were sung casually in barrooms, around kitchen tables, to pass time relaxing on one’s porch or during the monotonous work of shrimping, or to break the silence of the marsh wilderness during long winter months spent at remote trapping and hunting camps. As Armistead related,

> Irvan Pérez recalled very specifically how certain individuals would sit down of an evening around the kitchen table, perhaps over a bottle of wine, and after a few hours would have composed, collaboratively, a *décima*, that one or another of them would, at some later date, sing in public. (1992, 23-24)

The composition and performance of décimas could also take a much more public form. One salient performance context of décimas before the revival period was that of community dances, held at the famous dance halls of St. Bernard's recent past. More than any other context, my interlocutors related happy memories of late-night dances, such as those described in chapter one, wherein after the dancing had ceased, the participants would remain to eat, drink, and sing décimas. As in Acadiana, local dance halls were key sites of music and socialization through most of the twentieth century among Isleños in St. Bernard Parish, involving the entire family venturing out for a night of dancing every weekend (see Brasseaux 2009). One of my interlocutors related that in his youth, Caernarvon, an Isleño village of "maybe fifty families," had *four* bars that served as dance halls on the weekends;[15] there were many more in the larger town of Delacroix (Harris 2017). Décimas, of course, were not the featured musical event—jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, country and western, and rock and roll bands were hired from New Orleans and further afield, and many Isleños I've spoken with related their enthusiasm for dancing. After the dancing, though, as Irvan Perez remembered,

> Sometime around midnight, not before the end of the dance but around 12 o'clock, everything would stop. Everybody was fed either gumbo or whatever food they had and then the *décima* singers would start composing and singing. And if you didn't like what they did, well and done, you could go ahead and compose one about them. They didn't mind (Perez 1997, 93–94).

Some Isleños described the practice as singing "in rounds," exchanging extemporaneously composed stanzas or songs, often divided with men on one side and women on the other—reflecting the gendered divisions that likely occurred during the dance proper (cf. Brasseaux 2009). Jesse Alfonso put it most succinctly in an interview with me:

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[15] Michael Martin. Interview with author. March 7, 2015, St. Bernard.

> They used to go at the dance halls, the women on one side and the men on the other side. And then they'll sing songs to each other. The women'll sing them to the men and the men'll sing them to the women. They'll make them up right there.

By the time of Armistead's fieldwork and the dawning of the heritage revival, such practices had ceased, and new contexts for décima singing—now the purview of only the older generations who still knew the language—had developed. Beginning in 1976 the Isleños Heritage Society produced what were called "décima nights," special concerts of décima singers in a carefully programmed presentational format. While Isleños would previously have gathered in barrooms or around kitchen tables to casually banter and sing décimas, the budding revival movement sponsored official "décima nights," with preprogrammed singers and tightly controlled schedules. Armistead attended a décima night in Reggio on March 27, 1976, and observed: "No one improvised; all the songs—versions similar to those I had or would collect from the same singers—were sung from memory" (1992, 23). A meticulous ethnographer, Armistead took detailed notes that evening, marking the time each singer took the stage and what they performed.[16] This program demonstrates the contrast in the performance contexts of the décima between the pre-revival and revival period. The notes depict a rapid succession of individual singers, each performing a décima or two before turning over the stage to the next singer. This was a fundamental change: from a diverse community-based participatory musical practice, to a highly structured fixed presentational display.

Thus décimas came to be understood as discrete songs, enduring over time, composed and sung by individuals for listening audiences, while earlier practices of collective extemporaneous composition endured only in writings on the subject and in the memories of individual Isleños. There were other significant shifts to the décima as musical practice, not all of which as readily available to historical inquiry as the performance contexts discussed above. Armistead depicted décimas as song texts and makes reference to their musical origins in singing and composition by individual informants. There's no mention of instrumental accompaniment in any of Armistead's writings on Louisiana. Perhaps Armistead simply found the issue irrelevant to his philological concerns, or assumed that unaccompanied solo singing was the primary medium of décima singing. The silencing of musical accompaniment had become so complete in recent years that Jeanne Gillespie claimed in a 2016 article that "in contrast to the corrido tradition, Isleño décimas never include musical accompaniment" (Gillespie 2016, 39).

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[16] Handwritten notes entitled "LOS ISLENOS HERITAGE DECIMA NIGHT / SAN PEDRO CHURCH SAT. MAR. 27" in "Louisiana Phones" folder (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections).

Given the diverse practices of sung verse and instrumental accompaniment widespread in St. Bernard (see Chapter one), and throughout Louisiana and the region, it should come as no surprise that Isleños in fact did not uniquely eschew the practice. Guitar accompaniment, for one, was attested to by two of my informants. Anthony Fabra remembered his next-door neighbor, "Sico" Morales, singing décimas and accompanying himself on guitar to pass a relaxing afternoon on his front porch in Delacroix. John Robin was also a guitarist, and, as his son Edward "Duggie" Robin fondly recollected to me, often accompanied himself on guitar.[17] There were also well-known accordionists and harmonica players in St. Bernard—it's not clear whether or not they accompanied décima singers, but, given the broader musical milieu depicted in chapter one, there's no reason to imagine they didn't. Charles Frank (1985), described the décimas, apparently based on an interview with Joseph "Chelito Campo," as "old Spanish songs, which they play to the accompaniment of a dulcimer" (ibid., 95). Collective composition and musical accompaniment emerge as coherent aspects of the décima's performance practice that were silenced during the transformation of the tradition during the revival years. Décimas, as social practice, also went through a more fundamental transformation in this process, one that, like the obscure verses of “El trabjo del *welfare*,” requires a more focused analysis of the songs themselves to illuminate..

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[17] Edward Robin. Interview with author. August 2, 2016, Yscloskey.

This chapter began with reference to the television documentary *Mosquitoes and High Water (El mosco y el agua alta*), and Joseph “Chelito” Campo’s rendition of “La barca de Boy Molero,” as an example of the effective use of décimas in the new contexts of the heritage revival, a strategy for sustaining some essential characteristics of the genre’s social meaning in the new representational forms of the heritage revival. The verses of “La barca de Boy Molero” appear on a field tape Armistead recorded with Campo in December of 1980. They are interspersed with scores of other stanzas, sung to the same tune, stretched out over an extended, meandering interview. The tune is a borrowed from the popular song “Cielito lindo,” and the field tape seems to depict Campo enjoying an afternoon spent sitting in his backyard, making up funny new lyrics to the tune. Close attention to the performance in the documentary, reveals that the section presented as “El barca de Boy Molero” was actually the product of a few nonadjacent stanzas edited together after the fact.

On the field tape, Campo sings a hyperbolic narrative about Boy Moldero’s boat, from which the stanzas included in the documentary were extracted. But the verses of “La barca de Boy Molero” are embedded within a much longer, conversational exchange in which Campo sang extended verses to the same tune on a wide variety of subjects—all embodied by Campo’s witty and trenchant ironic tone. For example, Campo sang the following ditty, an intimate jab at the residents of hamlets further up the road from Campo’s home of Delacroix (La Isla), which are followed here by two of the stanzas which were edited together with the other stanzas that composed the song as it appeared in *Mosquitoes and High Water*:

El tornero nace en el torno	The Tornero is born in the turn [Toca];
en Shell Beach, el shell-beachero	In Shell Beach, the Shell-Beachero.
en el Bencheque, los benchequanos	In Bencheque, the Benchequanos;
an la isla, los ilseros.	In the Island [Delacroix], the Isleños.
El tornero es el jardinero	The Tornero is a gardener,
en Shell Beach son pescadores,	In Shell Beach they're fishers.
En Bencheque son tramperos,	In Bencheque they're trappers,
y en la Isla, casadores.	and in the Island, hunters.
No te fie del tornero;	Don't trust the Tornero
Tornero es un cebollero.	The Tornero is an onion grower.
[*aside, spoken:*]—plantan el cebollo, eh?	-they plant the onion, eh?—
Pone les culo derecho del sol,	He puts his ass upright in the sun,
que parece un candalero.	that it seems like a candlestick.
Boy Molero fue a la Isla.	Boy Molero went to the Island.
el hombre habla con su rasón	The man says, reasonably,
que anda buscando la gente	he's going looking for people
para pesca el camarón.	to go shrimping.
En la Isla tengo veinte,	In The Island I have twenty,
en Bencheque veinte uno.	in Bencheque, twenty one.
solamente que en el Torno,	Only in Toca,
no pude encontrar ninguno.	I didn't find a single one.[18]

It's easy to imagine why the producers of *Mosquitoes and High Water* didn't select these "R-rated" verses for their program. The verses they did cobble together are relatively tame, and contain references to toponyms in New Orleans that the audience might recognize. At this point in the historical narrative of the dissertation, many of the themes here will be familiar: Campo's inwardly directed, intimate, local, allusive, and somewhat amorphous extended musical practice, rooted in a circum-Gulf musical culture, is transformed into a neatly contained, discrete song directed at an outside audience. And Campo’s singular musical practice—sitting in his yard making up funny verses to the tune of “Cielito lindo”—has been lost in the process. Campo’s is a kind of musical expression that can’t be institutionalized in a heritage revival, captured in a book, or used to represent a people; the best parts are fleeting and embarrassing—to transcribe in a dissertation or even to talk about—given the salty jokes involved. Yet it represents the essential characteristics of the décima—the very features that made it socially meaningful—and what was necessary to purge in order to render it suitable for the commodification and dissemination required of the genre in the new context of the heritage revival.

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[18] Field tape recording "LA 6a.1 1.2 Chelito Campo" (MSS 144-10), Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library Special Collections Department, University of New Orleans.

* * *

This chapter began with a question about the recent history of the décima: Why are there no references to “La guerra de los tejanos” in *Delta Justice*? From there I’ve narrated a history of the silencing of the Isleño décima since Armistead’s very first field trips, which coincided with the very beginnings of the nascent Isleño heritage revival. The theoretical lenses of silencing and aporia afford a methodology that brings into focus the forces behind the historical presences I take for sources and songs and, in turn, historical and musical knowledge. In the present case, these silences have taken on manifold forms within different frameworks and wide-ranging historical contexts. Silences, in the form of political forces, interpersonal relationships, and the requirements of intelligibility and reproducibility of musical heritage, have left their mark on popular representations of Isleño history, ethnographic interviews and their archival records, and the songs and musical practices themselves that composed this tradition.

It is likely that none of the silences explored here are exceptional or unique to the present case. All musical traditions are transformed when they're re-purposed for new representational roles in different media. And all ethnographers, arguably, engage in the same kinds of curatorial decisions that I've uncovered in the Armsitead archive—in choosing whom to interview, what questions to ask, what to do with the resultant recordings, and how to represent their interlocutors in writing. There were also, arguably, much larger forces at work. Given the decline of Isleño Spanish beginning in the early twentieth century, and the gradual transformation of the Isleño hamlets since, the end of the décima as a vital tradition might have been inevitable. On a broader level, forces in American society in general and in the Isleño heritage revival in particular have emphasized other kinds of media and forms of patrimony than folk songs: material culture, foodways, film, television, and books, all serve social functions that folk songs once did, and perhaps it was inevitable that once their essential functions were replaced by new media and modes of sociability that they would fade from quotidian practice.

Regardless of the causes, the result has been the end of the décima as a vital tradition and its absence from the lives of Isleños today and from places depicting Isleño history and heritage in which décimas were once prominent. In this and the preceding chapters, I've tried to depict a vivid image of the décima as part of the fabric of Isleño life, giving way to the absence one confronts today, in *Delta Justice*, for example. Yet the outline of the shape of that vivid image endures in the contrast between the salient presence of décimas in St. Bernard's past and the potent absence one encounters today. In the next chapter I turn to this ethnographic present, wherein I take these absences as the object of my ethnographic research, asking what I can learn from the shape of this absence, about how the genre means today and how the décima might continue to mean in the future.

4. Recollecting Décimas: The Shape of Musical Absence in Post-Katrina St. Bernard

“That’s all lost,” replied Charles Robin III, shaking his head, when I asked him in May 2015 about Isleño décimas.[1] For Robin, who counts well-known décima singers and other prominent Isleño tradition bearers among his family members, the tradition is unequivocally lost. Yet over a year after this first encounter I found myself sitting with Charles in his second cousin Edward “Duggie” Robin’s living room, listening to recordings of Duggie Robin’s late father singing décimas as we discussed their meaning and even remembered and recited a few song fragments ourselves. Drawing on this and other experiences from my fieldwork in lower St. Bernard, this chapter explores the décima’s meanings today, in the absence of vital practices of musical performance and transmission, in the context of the broader historical narrative of this dissertation.

The Isleño décima ceased to be transmitted and performed only within the last two decades. As chapters two and three depict, the tradition had experienced something of a resurgence in the thirty years leading up to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Beginning in the 1970s, Isleños had turned to their décimas as the cornerstone of Isleño patrimony, as the embodiment of their culture, record of their history, and the privileged medium for representing Isleño identity. Décimas were the very stuff of Isleño heritage—sung in educational programming, folkloric displays, and on stages ranging from the annual fiesta to the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and Carnegie Hall. This flurry of interest in the genre produced a collection of songs (Armistead 1992), a television documentary (Kolher and Alvarez 1983), and a published recording (I. Perez 1989). Even by the time of this newfound interest, however, the décima's fate may have already been sealed. The last generation to grow up speaking Isleño Spanish was born in the 1940s. Despite efforts to preserve and sustain both the Isleño décima and Isleño Spanish, by the early 2000s the outlook would have seemed dim. The last Isleños who knew the language were in their sixties and older, and there was only a handful of décimas singers left.

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[1] Charles Robn III. Interview by author. May 3, 2015, New Orleans.

Despite these trends, the resurgence of interest in the genre in the 1970s and '80 and efforts at sustainability and preservation in the 2000s offered at least a vision of a future for the décima as an enduring icon of Isleño culture. That vision came to an abrupt end on August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina made landfall in lower St. Bernard. The effects of the storm left the parish entirely inundated; the population was dispersed, and the most robust enclaves of Isleño culture such as Delacroix and Yscloskey were ravaged and have been left all but uninhabited. What efforts there were to sustain the Isleño décima for the future were quashed. Delacroix might have five families living in it as of this writing, down from a population of a thousand at mid-century (MacCurdy 1949; Nolan 2010). This destruction and dispersal coincided with the passing of many of the last generation of culture bearers who retained fluency in the Isleño dialect of Spanish and the décima tradition.

Predictions of the Isleño décima's eventual demise as a living tradition date to the very earliest historical mentions of the Isleños and their unique way of life. Rather than viewing the end of the tradition in the early twentieth century as a point of historical rupture, in hindsight a clearer historical image seems to emerge of a continuation of processes of change dating back to mid-century and earlier. From the earliest available accounts of Isleño culture, commentators have been surprised at the endurance of this robust local Hispanic culture, and often commented on the likelihood of future influence from the dominant culture and loss of the Isleños' distinctive way of life.

The authors of an 1838 article in the New Orleans *Weekly Picayune*, recounting a trip to lower St. Bernard perceived, already at that early date, that the "singular" qualities of the Isleños' unique way of life would not endure indefinitely:

> Having intimated a few days since that we had a notion of giving some account of the "*Isleños*" . . . we shall attempt, *cur. cal.,* (with running pen,) to snatch from oblivion a few facts respecting a little colony long standing, before all their distinguishing marks are lost in the overwhelming tide of improvement, innovation and all kinds of Americanism.[2]

The ethnomusicologist Israel J. Katz identified what he termed the "decaying aspect," evident in his analysis of the décima repertory collected by Armistead:

> [A]n interesting aspect of the Isleño tune repertoire appears to have surfaced, indicating an indiscriminate interchange of melodies among the varied text types. This probably has as much to do with the personal veneration for certain tunes as it has for the faltering of memory, especially when attempting an immediate recall of tunes for particular traditional texts. This aspect along [sic: alone] is strong evidence for the decay of what was once a vital tradition, wherein the tune-text relationship was inseparable.[3]

Armistead himself seemed inclined to reserve his most alarmist predictions of the decline of the distinctiveness of Isleño culture for his publications to directed at general, rather than scholarly, readers. In his preliminary newspaper article, "An Ancient Tradition Fights to Survive,"[4] reporting on his fieldwork, Armistead, in a departure from the tone of his usually more reserved scholarly writing, called readers' attention to "a venerable treasury of traditional songs (called décimas), some dating back hundreds of years to the Middle Ages and others of local composition, revealing the particular genius and philosophy of the people of St. Bernard," all at grave risk of being "lost forever with the passing of the present elder generation. . . . Now, when these venerable traditions—songs, stories, and legends—are threatened with extinction, every possible effort should be made to record and save them, for the benefit of future generations." There are hints, however, of this preservationist bearing even in Armistead's scholarly publications, for example when he commented that

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[2] *Weekly Picayune*, October 22, 1838 (Vol. I, No. 35) in Prichard (1941). See also MacCurdy (1949, 22).

[3] "Spanish Language and Folkliterature of the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish (Louisiana) (1987) Vols. 1 and 2" (pp. 416–417) (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections). This is the original report written by Armistead for the Jean Lafitte National Park Service. The published version of *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana* (Armistead 1992) represents a condensed version of this report, and omitted Katz's musical analysis.

[4] Manuscript paper-clipped to the December 1, 1975 letter filed in "Louisiana Talk" Manila Folder. (accessed at Annier Lauie Armistead's house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections); see also chapter three. This case suggests a much more expansive role for musical transcription than has often been acknowledged (see, for example, Winkler 1997)

> despite the apparently transitory nature of Spanish occupation and the overwhelming modern preponderance of the French and Anglo-American populations, the Hispanic presence in Louisiana has, nonetheless, been maintained through the centuries with surprising durability. . . . There can be no doubt that Spanish is currently in grave danger in St. Bernard. (Armistead 1992, 2-4)

For Patricia Manning Lestrade, writing in the early 2000s, the decline and inevitable end of both Isleño Spanish (Lestrade 2002) and the décimas (Lestrade 2004), with which the language was intertwined, emerged as the central object of analysis, as she documented the "last of the Louisiana décimas" and scattered efforts to preserve what was left on the cusp of Hurricane Katrina. Even as recently as these publications, however, Lestrade found cause for optimism, imagining other possible futures for the tradition:

> Irvan Perez, probably the best-known Louisiana *décima* singer, has taught some of the songs to a younger enclave member in an effort to preserve them. The group of *décimas* he chose was a combination of songs thought to be of Canary Island origin and others that were composed locally. Among them are "La huerfanita," "Una tarde fresquita de mayo," "Adios Canarias," presumably from Spain, plus "El trabajo del *welfare*" and "Un sabadito a la tarde" of local origin, each selected for its theme or artistic appeal. The topics, covering enclave history and struggles, are still vital today to the preseveration of *Isleño* heritage. (Ibid., 448)

By the time of my own fieldwork in post-Katrina St. Bernard, it would seem that the time for any such optimism, hope that the Isleño décima might be sustained as a vital, active tradition of musical practice in some form, had passed. The present scene in Lower St. Bernard is a sober counterpoint to the one depicted in chapters one and two. The revival of Isleño heritage which began in the 1970s resulted, by the turn of this century, in a transformed but robust Isleño culture enduring in lower St. Bernard Parish, the décima serving as its most beloved icon, even as the region continued its gradual economic and demographic decline. Hurricane Katrina in 2005, nonetheless, marked the end of an era. Navigation channels and oil-industry canals funneled storm surge into the parish, contributing to the decades of coastal erosion that left the parish with less of a buffer to absorb storm surge; improperly built and maintained levees gave way, causing catastrophic flooding of between five and twelve feet throughout St. Bernard Parish.

With the parish entirely inundated for months, the population was dispersed, and the most robust enclaves of Isleño culture such as Delacroix and Yscloskey were ravaged and have been left all but uninhabited. Ongoing damage wrought by the oil industry such as the Murphey Oil spill in 2005 and the Deepwater Horizon Disaster in 2010 further undermined the fishing and trapping industries that had formed the economic foundation of Isleño communities in the twentieth century. This destruction and dispersal coincided with the passing of many of the last generation of culture bearers who retained fluency in the Isleño dialect of Spanish and the décima tradition.

The results of these developments are palpable as one drives through this fractured landscape on the empty four-lane road to Yscloskey and Delacroix. Erosion has resulted in an alarming rate of land loss, clearly visible as the Gulf creeps inland and lakes, canals, and bayous soak up surrounding land. What just a few years ago were woods and thriving hamlets are now open water and marsh. One passes abandoned school buildings, and miles of dead cypress swamps, contrasting with towering luxury fishing "camps" interspersed by the occasional raised trailer homes which house the few full-time residents. Most would agree that in the near future lower St. Bernard Parish will lose its few remaining permanent residents before eventually disappearing into the Gulf.

The lives of the people I speak with in St. Bernard remain fractured as well. The storm scattered families, burdened people with destroyed homes, extreme commutes, and unemployment. Chronic health problems spiraled out of control; economic precariousness gave way to poverty and permanent relocation. The measures of events like Hurricane Katrina—in billions of dollars of damages, homes and lives lost—gives a false impression of the quantifiable nature of the human effects of such tragedies. In other words, in 2016 Hurricane Katrina is *still an ongoing tragedy* in southeast Louisiana.

Isleño décimas are absent from this post-Katrina milieu. They're no longer sung on-stage at the Isleños fiesta or in special recitals or concerts, as they were in recent decades; the days of décima-singing as a part of quotidian life, to pass the time at work on a shrimp boat or at a remote trapping cabin, or as the focus of an evening spent gathered in a barroom among friends, are long past. The present chapter takes this absence as the object of ethnographic study, relating my experience of the décima's absence in St. Bernard today and my interactions with my interlocutors that took place in the space of that absence. This ethnographic present, as it is imagined here, is situated not in hiatus with what precedes it, but inseparable from the essentially historical narrative developed so far in this dissertation; the décima's absence today is thus understood as part of the broader historical process narrated in the previous chapters. My examination of this absence reveals a fertile and multi-faceted terrain of musical meaning that endures even in the absence of musical practice.

In what follows I begin with a discussion of my approach study of musical absence, really a strategy for developing a vocabulary with which to relate the affective experiences of my fieldwork, drawing primarily on the work of the sociologist Avery Gordon (1997). Then I share some of my early fieldwork experiences, wherein the décima’s absence began to take shape. When I subsequently brought with me to my fieldwork historical recordings from the archive of Samuel Armistead’s fieldwork, conducted some forty years prior, an approach I term “recollecting,” new perspectives on the shape of the décima’s absence began to emerge. I ask how the present case, especially the specific understanding of musical absence developed here, might speak to recent burgeoning of interest in music sustainability within ethnomusicology. This consideration of sustainability affords both a historical perspective, probing at questions about how and why the genre reached its present nadir as a vital musical tradition, and, simultaneously, how it might endure as a locus of musical meaning for those who continue to claim it as their patrimony, present and future.

Toward an Ethnomusicology of Absence

What might an ethnomusicology of absence sound like? Marceline Saibou’s (2016) study of discourses of absence in Togolese popular music provides a compelling point of departure for imagining such a field. Saibou takes as her object of study the absence of a distinctly Togolese national popular music, a salient issue encountered in her fieldwork in the early 2000s. Drawing on the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, and his “ontological interpretation of absence and presence as two variations of a single basic phenomenon” (ibid., 11), Saibou develops an experiential approach to musical absence in Togo:

> Heidegger’s interpretation of “absence” as a phenomenon of perception enables us to treat “absence” as a tangible object of inquiry. The methodology then is to juxtapose the contrasting reality with that which is present in absence—that is, the ideas that underlie, the experience that accompanies, and the actions that arise from, a perception of absence. (Ibid.)

Saibou draws on this understanding of absence as a phenomenon of perception to explore the absence of a Togolese national music genre where Saibou and her informants expected or desired to find the presence of such a music. This approach produces a compelling study of musical absence in the ethnographic present and a historical perspective on the forces in Togolese history that gave rise to the absence that Saibou and her interlocutors confront today.

Saibou’s object of study appears as a tangible phenomenon of perception, of a music that *should be* but *hasn’t yet* materialized. Musical absence can also take shape around the very intangibility of a music that *was* but *is no more*. In his ethnography of the Jewish musical past of the Austrian province of Burgenland, Philip Bohlman (2008) explores the potential of fieldwork to confront “the Jewish musical life of a past that no longer existed in the present” (ibid., 248). Bohlman’s ethnographic perspective is oriented to the past, a past which, in its absence, appears as multiple and subjective; he argues that “ethnomusicological fieldwork, because of its concern with the narrative and performative agency of music, provides diverse ways of encountering these many pasts” (ibid., 256). Encountering musical absence in the present, then, can illuminate a historically obscure past.

My own approach takes something from both Saibou and Bohlman, towards the study of a musical absence in the present, in the form of a music that was but *is* no more. How, in other words, does the musical absence rendered by the end of a tradition mean in the ethnographic present? I take the affective dimensions of absence—the uncanny experience of encountering its very intangibility as such, as my object of study. Here it's a genre's ability to contain meaning through its very state of absence, in the ethnographic present, that's taken as the object of study.

To develop a vocabulary for this particular approach to the study of musical absence, I draw on the sociologist Avery Gordon's (1997) theory of haunting. Haunting, Gordon writes,

> describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities. . . . The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. . . . Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (Ibid., 8)

Absence, in Gordon's conceptualization, might be understood as the *immaterial* manifestation of a haunting. Absences leave shapes—outlines of a presence—that can be experienced as such. For Gordon, this metaphor of a shape left by an absence affords both a historical methodology and a kind of hermeneutics. Gordon locates a powerful metaphor in the writing of Patricia Williams (1991), who describes her search for her enslaved great-great grandmother in the historical record as "finding the shape described by her absence" (in Gordon 1997, 6). Gordon writes, "*finding the shape described by her absence* captures perfectly the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" (1997, 6). Taking music for one such force suggests that one might stand to learn as much (or more) from musics that are silenced, dead, or lost—in daily life or in the historical record—as the musics that make up the sounds of lived experiences.

This notion of experiencing the shape of an absence—the affective, perceptual dimension of this metaphor—is what drives my own approach to musical absence. As the sociologist and poet Celina Su observes of life amidst the absences of the postmodern neoliberal city, “we trace the dust lines left behind from the appliances, fumble for the brick foundations between the steel beams, peer at serrated stairlines where the wall paints stopped” (Su 2013, 103). Su brings into focus the quotidian lived reality and the ubiquity of haunting *qua* absence in modern life. These are visual metaphors but parallel aural affects are not of a different kind. Consider the feeling of absence when a nearby air-conditioning condenser suddenly shuts off, or the sense of unease a city dweller might feel when first confronted with the silence of an isolated rural retreat. The experience of a shape of an absence transcends rigid sensory categories.

Studying an absence, especially of an ephemeral object like music, can feel like very unstable terrain. What emerges from my fieldwork is not a clearer understanding of a solid, unitary notion of this genre; rather as I get closer to the décima through my fieldwork, the genre seems less solid, more unsettled, amorphous, and polysemous. As the absences outlined by the décima appear as fluid, inhabitable spaces, the boundary between the object of study—a musical tradition—and the subjects I interact with become blurred. In this way musical absence seems much as the ghosts of Gordon’s hauntings. As I confront the absence of the décima through interactions with different people in the course of my fieldwork, I find the shape outlined by this absence to vary from person to person. It is this polysemous complex of interpersonal musical meaning that accumulates in the absence of musical practice and that affords access to the expansive notion of musical meaning that I explore in this chapter.

Encountering Musical Absence

Six years since my first visits to St. Bernard described in the introduction to this dissertation, I returned to the Los Isleños Society Museum for the 2015 fiesta to begin my fieldwork, this time prepared to look for the shape left by the décima's absence. The heritage on display at the fiesta revolves around the hallmarks of the Isleño heritage revival: craft displays, historical film screenings, and folkloric musical performances. Décima singing featured prominently in pre-Katrina fiestas, where local singers would perform on stage between performances by visiting decimeros from the Canary Islands and elsewhere, folkloric performances, and official pronouncements and exchanges. But by 2015 décimas were absent from the musical sounds and dances that appeared on the fiesta's stage. Unsounded and unmentioned, the fiesta carried on without any acknowledgment of the previously central place of décima singing at the fiesta.

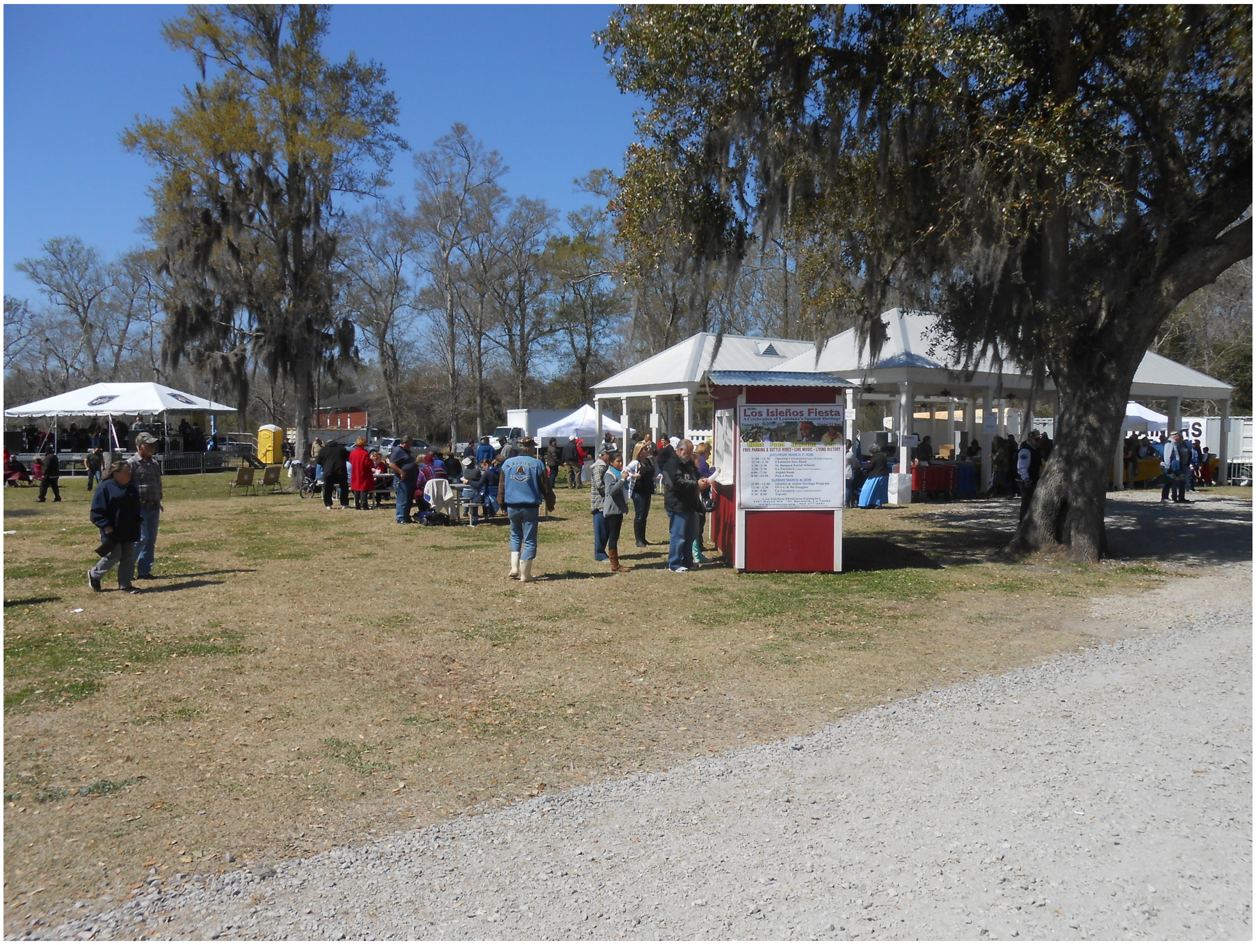

Figure 11: 2015 Los Isleños Fiesta. March 7, 2015, taken by author.

On the first day of the fiesta I wandered the grounds, unsure of who might be willing to talk to me or how my questions would be taken—one of the many challenges of studying an absent genre of music. I meekly approached a man sitting at a table carving a paddle. Michael "Mike" Martin (*Miguel Martín*),[5] had arrived early at the fiesta to set up a display of his carpentry work on a busy stretch of the museum grounds. He sat carving paddles from cypress using traditional tools—spokeshaves, planes, and sandpaper. I introduced myself, asking Martin about these labor-intensive hand tools. "Because that's what the people here want to see," he grinned. Martin admitted that at home he uses power tools, and he uses an electric band saw, not hatchets and drawknives, to shape the “blanks” that he carves by hand into finished paddles here at the fiesta. Cypress, it turns out, isn’t a very good wood for paddles compared to conventional choices like alder or ash. It’s prone to break, though it is plentiful here and much easier to work. A friend ribbed Martin, criticizing his choice of material: “That’ll break *real* easy!” If Martin wanted a functional paddle he would buy a new laminated one from the store: “It’s about making something with your hands,” he explained. “You know you can go and buy a paddle for about seven or eight bucks. [That]’s not what it’s about.”[6]

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[5] Many Isleño use both English and Spanish versions of their names in different situations. Martin introduced himself to me using both.

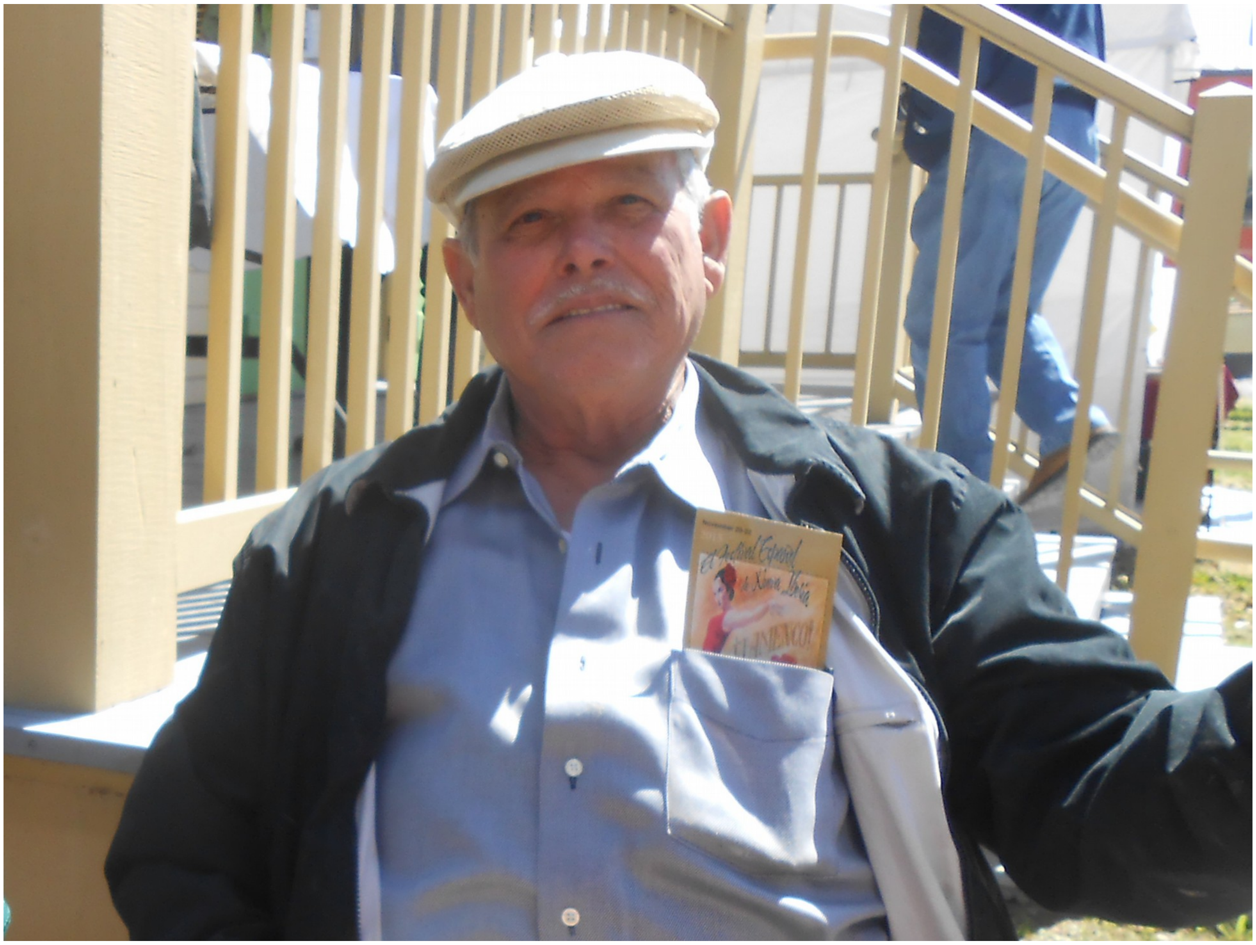

Figure 12: Michael Martin at the 2015 Isleños Fiesta. March 7, 2015, taken by author.

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[6] Michael Martin. Conversation with author. March 7, 2015, St. Bernard.

Martin's response to my interest in décimas was not encouraging. There wasn't really anyone around who sings them. He knew of one living person with a significant repertory, but he's up in age, and prefers to be left alone. Martin was good friends with Irvan J. Perez (Irván Pérez), Louisiana's most famous décima singer, who passed away in 2008, leaving a painful void for many here. Perez was *the* star of the heritage revival. He was one of the founders of the Los Isleños Heritage Society in 1976 as well as of the Canary Islands Descendants Association, which split off from the Los Isleños Heritage Society in the early 1990s (see West 2009). He was on the first official visit to the Canary Islands in 1977 and many subsequent ones, where his décima performances for local audiences were a celebrated feature of these cultural exchanges. In 1990 Perez performed at Carnegie Hall, subsequently at the Wolftrap National Folk Festival, and for the king and queen of Spain in 2001 (Warren 2008). In 1988 he recorded *Spanish Décimas from St. Bernard*, the only published recording of Isleño décimas, released on compact disc in 2004 (I. Perez 1989, 2004) and was featured in the television documentary, *Mosquitoes and High Water* (Kolher and Alvarez 1983).[7] In light of Perez's death, and the lack of knowledgeable culture bearers of Perez's generation still active, I'm not likely to learn much about décimas at this point, according to Martin. My best shot, Martin advised, is with the "old-timers," displaying their crafts in the "trapper's cabin" across the way.

The tiny cabin, one of six permanent structures on the museum grounds, is a recreation of the rough-hewn cabins used during trapping season on the marsh. Visitors are greeted by the inverted skins of nutria and muskrats drying in the sun, their splayed corpses filling a bucket on the porch. Inside, three men, Anthony (*Antonio*) Fabra, Jesse Alfonso, and his brother Jerry

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[7] Perez was also renowned for his duck decoy carvings, known for his characteristic "brightly colored style" (Frank 1985, 24).

Alfonso, had displays set up of their photographs, duck decoys, carvings, model boats, and other crafts, greeting the visitors who filter in and out of the cabin throughout the course of the fiesta. Despite my gentle protestations that I was not a ballad collector, Martin introduced me to Anthony Fabra, gesturing at my audio recorder, as a student who needed to record décimas.[8]

Fabra, like many I spoke with, did not claim a deep knowledge of the tradition, stating, “the only thing I know is what that old man sang to me.” Fabra’s conception of the décima revolves around memories of his childhood in Delacroix in the 1940s. His grandfatherly next-door neighbor, “Sico” Morales played guitar, sang décimas, and told stories to Fabra on a regular basis. Fabra remembered visits with Morales at least two or three times per week, often sitting on Morales’s porch, waiting for Morales to see him and come out to sing. He now regrets that he didn’t pay closer attention. He doesn’t remember the songs, but remembers enjoying their time together and values the experience. For Fabra these memories of past décima singing are inseparable from an idyllic Delacroix Island. His childhood home, along with those of Morales and his other neighbors, were washed away in Hurricane Katrina. With no photographs and only his own memory to reconstruct the place, Fabra made an oil painting of his childhood home from memory, which he shared with me, pointing out his and Morales’s house, and the porch on which they sat while Morales sang décimas to him. “What’s there now?” I asked him. Only a single oak tree endures as a landmark, which Fabra used to orient his perspective.

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[8] Michael Martin, Anthony Fabra, and Jerry and Jesse Alfonso. Conversation with author. March 8, 2015, St. Bernard.

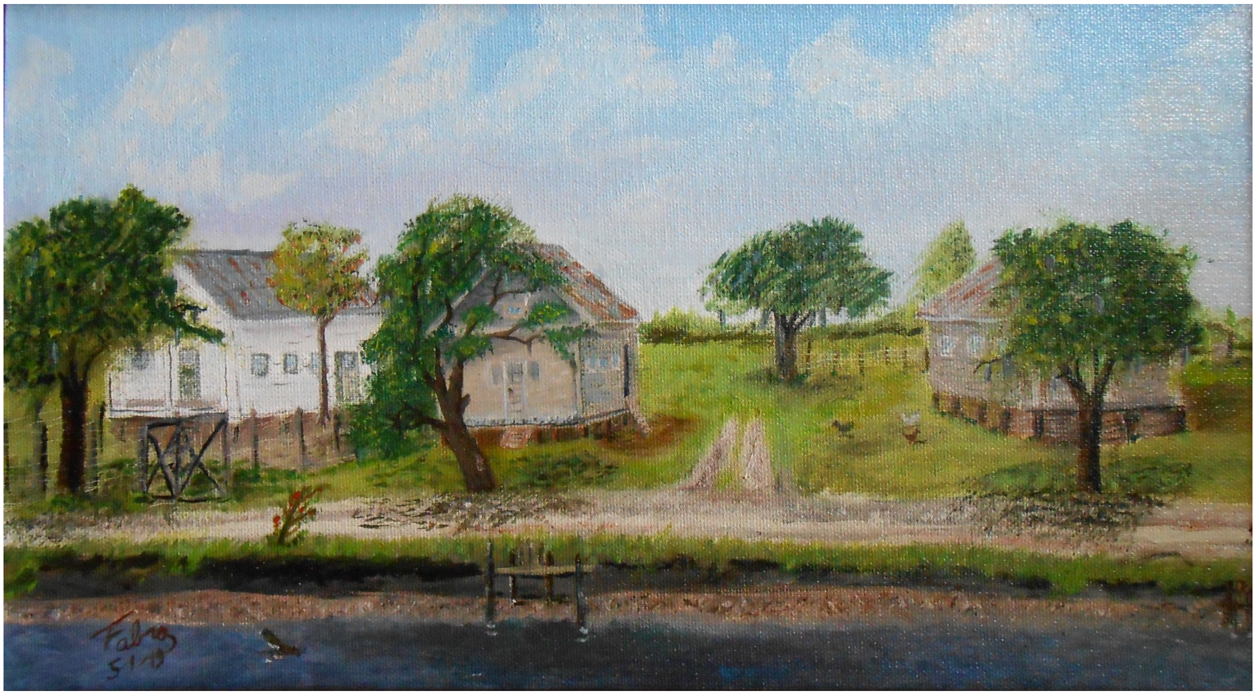

Figure 13: Oil painting by Anthony Fabra of his childhood home in Delacroix.

As we spoke, Fabra tried to encourage friends in the trappers' cabin to contribute to my research. Fabra was keen to see to it that someone would sing a décima for me, even as I tried to insist that I was merely interested in learning about décimas and didn't necessarily need to record them. Fabra insisted that Jerry Alfonso, eating a lunch of fried shrimp at a table in the cabin, would contribute something. Alfonso was keen to talk about his musical past in the context of reminiscences about a life spent trapping and fishing on the marsh. Almost immediately, he broke into song, sharing a fragment of the popular décima "El trabajo del *welfare*", which, with ironic wit and hyperbole, recounts the travails of Isleño laborers working for the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Alfonso sang two fragmentary stanzas, in a rough, staccato style, keeping rigid metrical time, and breaking abruptly to explain in English as he sang:

> [spoken:] The décima they made down there was called "*¡O Liolá!*" This guy was working for the welfare [the Works Progress Administration] . . . They made him cut

wood with an ax, and he cut his foot right by his little toe. And he cut it bad. And they made a song out of it: “Before I go work at the welfare, I would stay home.” And it goes like this:
“Before I go work at the welfare, I would stay home.
[sung:] *Ante yo di a welfare*
me quiero quieto a mi casa
porque pobre de Jimito
te cortó un pie con el hacha
[spoken:] *El hacha*, means the ax; and *pie* is the foot
[sung:] *¡O lilola! ¡Esto sí que es verdád!*
[spoken:] And this lady here used to go walk up and down the road and up and down the road. And they used to call her Juana. I don’t remember her first name but she was married to John Campo—they used to call him Juanito Campo—John Campo. And they had another man named Alfred but they called him Mimiro. They nicknamed him. And he’d tell Juanito Campo, “if I had a wife like you, I’d hit her!” And it goes like this [pausing to remember]. Her husband’s [John Campo’s] name [nickname] was *Sico*.
[sung:] *Juanita la de Sico*
se pasea pa arriba y pa abajo
Yo tuviera [spoken:] And Mimiro said [sung:] *¡Yo tuviera en tu plaza,*
la estropeara de un sopapo!
¡O lilolá! ¡Esto sí que es verdad![9]

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[9] I believe it will be most productive to let Alfonso’s translations, interspersed with his singing, stand on their own, without additional translation or comment. Alfonso’s explanations, as I interpret them, were meant to make the Spanish verses relevant to a non-Spanish speaking audience.

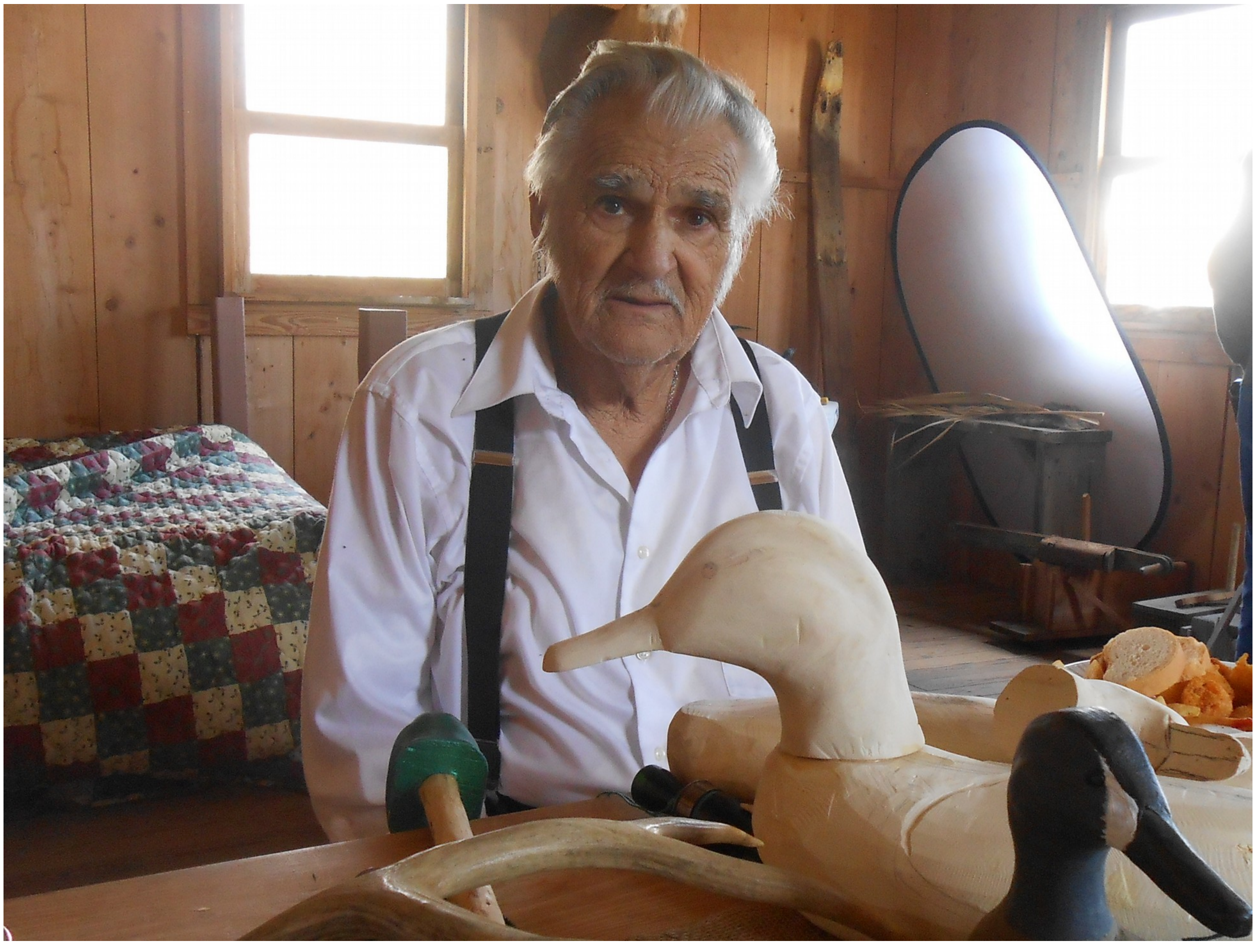

Figure 14: Jerry Alfonso with carvings in the trappers' cabin. March 8, 2015, taken by author.

I was unsettled and surprised to hear this verse, enthusiastically depicting such violent enforcement of what was deemed acceptable uxorial behavior. When I compared Alfonso's version with the one sung for Samuel Armistead by John Robin forty years earlier (see chapter 3), I found that Robin chose to end his version of the song with a much different account of Juanita:

¡O lilolá! !Eso sí que y es verdá!	O lilolá! That sure is the truth!
Y Juanita, la de Sico,	And Juanita, Sico's daughter[11]
anda p'arriva y p'abajo:	is walking up and down:
—Si no le pagan a Sico,	"If they don't pay Sico,
Sico va dejá'l trabajo.—	Sico's going to leave off work!"
¡O lilolá! ¡Y a mí poco se me	O lilolá! I just don't much care!

da![10] (Armistead 1992, 29)

When I dug deeper, into MacCurdy's mid-century fieldwork, it became apparent that Robin omitted a stanza in the above version, and that Alfonso's rendition appears to be a conflation of two different stanzas. Alfonso combined fragments of the two final verses in MacCurdy's version into a single stanza. MacCurdy's (1975) version, sung by Laurencio Morales in the 1940s closes with the following stanzas[12]:

Y Juanita la de Sico	[And Juanita, Sico's wife
andaba pa arriba y pa bajo:	was walking up and down:
—Si no nos mandan el check,	"If they don't send us the paycheck,
Sico va a dejar el trabajo.—	Sico is going to leave the job."
O li lo la, a mí poco se me da.	O li lo la, I just don't much care.
Mimiro le dijo a Sico	Mimiro said to Sico:
—De eso tú no hagas caso,	Don't pay attention to that,
que si fuera en plaza tuya,	If I were in your place
la estropeara de un sopapo.	I would slap her.
O li lo la, a mí poco se me da.	O li lo la, I just don't much care.]
(MacCurdy 1975, 119)	

Irvan Perez (1997) reproduced a similar version to MacCurdy's, asserting that the song as it was passed down reflected a collective composition born of invective exchange. Perez qualified the stanza in question:

> They talked about a woman who said that if they didn't hurry and pay her husband, he was going to quit. Another individual told him if that was a wife of mine, I would slap her around for making that kind of remark. But this was just a story. Our people didn't believe in slapping wives around. It was all in a song and in jest. (I. Perez 1997)

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[10] Reproduced from (Armistead 1992b, 28–29). Minor changes have been made here to Armistead's orthographic transcription, rendering it slightly closer to standard Spanish; the English translation is copied verbatim.

[11] Armistead's interpretation of "*la de Sico*" as "Sico's daughter" rather than wife seems to be an error, though it also serves to obscure the ethic of marital violence expressed in the original version of the song.

[12] Laurencio Morales, the "Sico" mentioned in the song, and "Sico Morales," who sang to Anthony Fabra on his porch may indeed all be one and the same person. Fabra couldn't remember "Sico's" given name.

Alfonso, then, struggling to remember a fragment of this stanza, combined fragments from two adjacent stanzas, verses that others chose to either leave out or qualify as jest. Its current form—as an enduring fragment of an otherwise absent tradition—actually affords access to aspects of the genre that had been silenced while it was being practiced. It is only by listening closely at the shape of its absence, gleaning the fragments that collect in that space, then, that the décima once again reflects the intimate, embarrassing, patriarchal, and violent aspects of daily life as it once did. During its years of salience as the icon of Isleño culture, this verse was silenced or qualified according to a politics of respectability, as décimas were at once cherished as *the* medium of Isleño history and simultaneously censored to reflect an idealized vision of that history. As it recedes from both this privileged representational position and from daily practice, a space opens up for recollections of an older, more diverse, contestable, and multivocal tradition.

Fabra, meanwhile, listened attentively from his corner of the room. As my conversation with Jerry Alfonso turned to discussions of hunting stories and duck calls, Fabra interjected to insist that Jerry's brother, Jesse Alfonso, would sing a décima for me. Jesse Alfonso was seated at his own display table across the cabin. Fabra shouted, "Jesse! Sing him a song! Jesse knows them décimas! Jesse, sing him a song! Put a couple of décimas in there [in my recorder]! Come on, man, you can do it!" Jesse Alfonso responded characteristically with humility and a sense of humor: "I can hardly talk! Let alone sing a song!" Jesse Alfonso and I spoke for about half an hour—about life in Delacroix, fishing, dancing, and décimas. Upon Fabra's urging, he recited a few fragments of a well-known décima, paraphrasing a few examples of especially funny invective verses and laughing heartily.

Fabra once again intervened:

AF: He didn't sing for you? You couldn't get him to sing?
WB: Well, he doesn't want to sing.
JA: No, *he*'s [Fabra's] the one!
AF: *He* knows a bunch of them
JA: He knows . . . *He's* the one that taught *me* some of them! He's the one that can sing!
AF: He's crapping on you but he can sing!
JA: No. It's him! He was singing right before you came here. Right before you came in he was singing!"
[All laughing.]

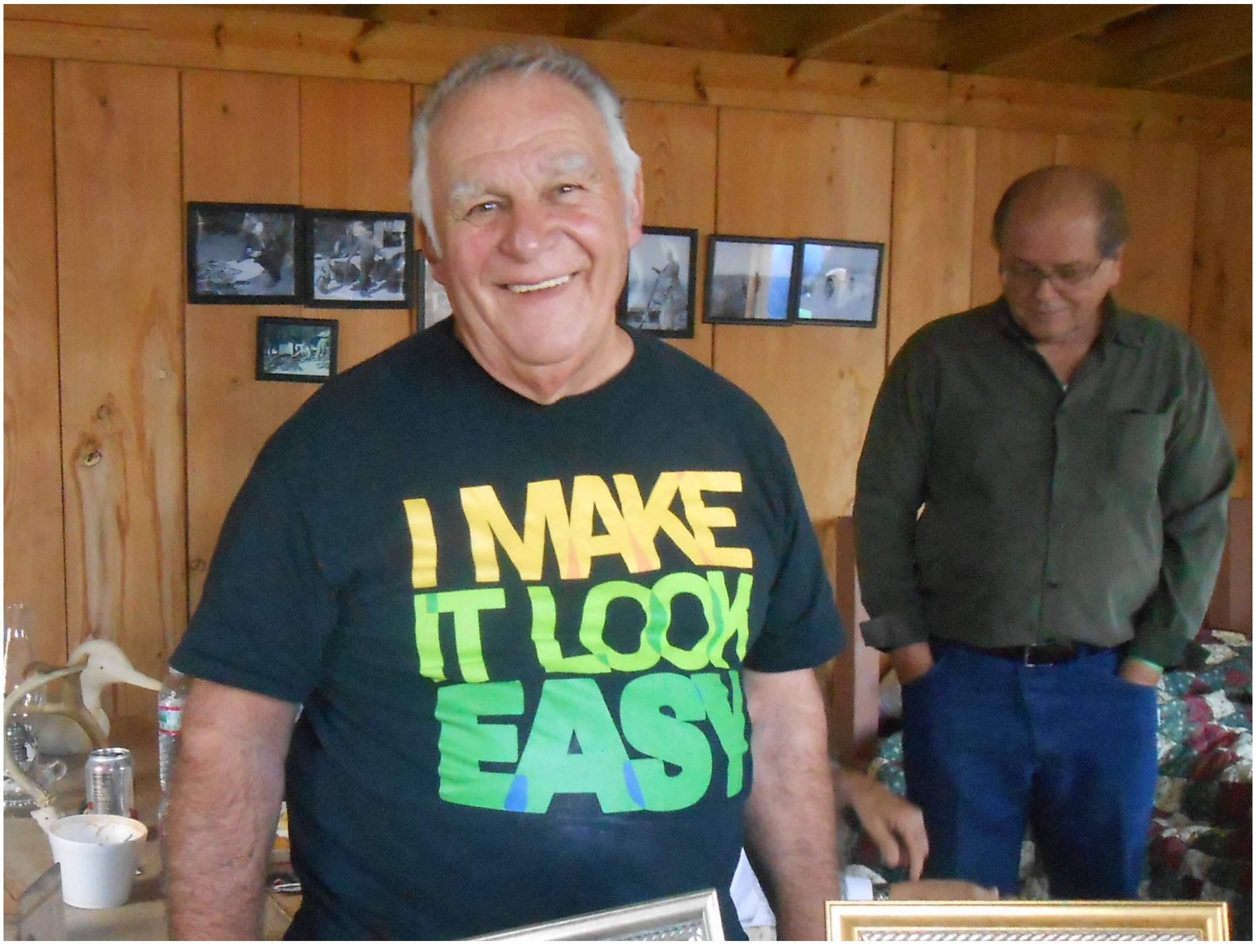

Figure 15: Jesse Alfonso (left) and Anthony Fabra in the Trappers' Cabin, March 8, 2015, taken by author.

The shape of the décima's absence is inhabited differently by different individuals at the fiesta today. For Fabra, the décima is defined by a Delacroix Island that is no longer there, represented by the tree in his painting. For the four of us talking and laughing in the cabin, décimas continue to mean in many the same ways that they have in past decades: affording a medium for humor, friendly invective, and pride in specific values of cultural knowledge and belonging (for some), including, for Jerry Alfonso, a patriarchal ethic of violently enforced gender norms. Joking about who can and cannot sing the songs today serves to bolster a community's sense of ownership of their shared patrimony. The shape left by the décima's absence in the trappers' cabin outlined a paradisaic vision of a Delacroix that is no longer there, while the memories of three men steeped in the tradition—though not practitioners themselves—seemed to give a renewed presence to what is often a much more immaterial specter. Above all the shape of the décima's absence reveals the diverse enduring meanings of the décima for those who still claim it as their heritage.

Recollecting Décimas

Following this and a handful of other short trips, I spent a year away from St. Bernard—writing and defending my dissertation proposal in Chicago, and conducting archival research focused on ethnographic recordings of décimas made by the hispanist scholar Samuel G. Armistead in the 1970s and '80s. In Spring of 2016 I was finally able to return to Louisiana for long-term fieldwork. When I returned to the field I brought with me historical recordings of décimas from this archival research. How might the shape outlined by the décima's absence be sharpened by the material presence of these voices from the past?

The use of archival recordings in fieldwork has a long history in ethnomusicology. One might point to examples from the early comparative musicologists (see Koch 2013) to the work of Frances Densmore (Philip V. Bohlman 1990; Henson 2008). This field technique[13] can serve both to develop metadata pertaining to those recordings and produce new ethnographic data per se. It has been a key component of restudy in ethnomusicology. The essential study by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (1991) demonstrates the potential for ethnomusicological restudy for understanding musical change and its underlying value systems.

This technique provides the foundation for my approach to the ethnographic study of absence, an approach I term *recollecting.* Recollecting is meant to capture the interplay of ballad collecting, restudy, and memory work, entailed by this ethnographic approach. In addition to referencing the memory work involved with such a project and the methods of restudy discussed above, recollecting keeps ballad collecting at the heart of my fieldwork, and acknowledges the central place of ballad collecting in the way my interlocutors relate to me. I introduce the term not as a discretely defined method or analytic, but as a way glossing the multi-faceted approach I'm developing here. Fist, I'm using the term in the quotodian, mnemonic sense of the word, especially with regards to the particularity and mutability of memory it implies; the phrase, *in my recollection*, of course, implies that another's recollection may differ from my own. In other words, the method begins with asking different people to recollect their individual memories of the décima. Recollecting also refers to a return to ballad collecting as a mode of musical thought and container of musical meaning for myself and my interlocutors. Rather than resist the paradigm of collecting that seemed to define my interactions in the trappers' cabin, recollecting is a way to engage with it towards a deeper mutual engagement with my interlocutors. By returning to the collecting paradigm employed by previous generations of scholars and their informants, recollecting positions ballad collecting at the center of my fieldwork, acknowledging the central place of ballad collecting in the way my interlocutors relate to me and the archival recordings we have recourse to. Thus recollecting is meant to capture the interplay of memory, ballad collecting, and restudy in this approach. Perhaps bringing Armistead's décimas to the table as a way of mediating my interactions with my Isleño interlocutors could serve to deepen our engagement and bring the shape of the décima into sharper relief. Recollecting, then, is shorthand for an approach that brings these three methodological paradigms—memory work, restudy, and ballad collecting—together in my fieldwork.

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[13] See (Merriam 1963) for a discussion distinguishing field *technique* from *method*.

This new chapter in my fieldwork began with a conversation I had with Charles Robin III. I had been busy with my archival research, listening to and recording Armistead's field tapes held at Davis, California, and the University of New Orleans when I met Robin by chance at his booth at the 2015 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, where he displays model boats, photographs and other artifacts relating to the life of a commercial fishermen in lower St. Bernard. I asked Robin if he was related to John Robin, a highly regarded décima singer who contributed a large portion of Armistead's collection. He responded enthusiastically: "That's my Uncle Johnny!" John Robin was his great uncle, and Charles Robin was surprised to learn of the extensive recordings made by Armistead of his uncle's décimas. He asked if I would share with him any tapes of his great uncle that I found.

It wasn't until over a year later that I was able to meet Robin again to share the fruits of my research. On a hot summer day in 2016, I followed Robin's directions down a long gravel driveway in Yscloskey. I was surprised to find not a house, but Robin's shrimp boat, docked in the bayou by a grassy lot strewn with fishing gear, boat parts, and tools. I found Robin sitting on the ground, his back to me, mending a large net spread over the grass, country music playing loudly from a portable radio. Hearing me approach, he greeted me without turning around, "You found me!"

Robin and I sat down in cold air-conditioned cabin of his trawler. Robin's son, taking a break from the hard work of refinishing the damaged hull of a friend's boat, sat in the corner listening to us talk. Robin began our conversation, like almost everyone I've spoken to, with an assertion of the décima's absence while gesturing towards the genre's significance for Isleño culture: "We lost that, that culture."[14] And yet, like my experiences in the Trappers' Cabin, the shape of the décima's absence seemed to afford a space of rich musical meaning as I sat with Robin on his boat. Robin has not experienced the tradition the way the Alfonso brothers and Fabra did—he's a generation younger than them, doesn't speak the language, and doesn't remember the songs like they did. Like Anthony Fabra, though, he associates the tradition with a highly regarded décima singer from his past, his uncle, John Robin:

> My uncle Johnny, I remember him singing décimas. the thing was they never had TV, they never had radios. Something happened during the day—they made a song about it. They made a song about it, you know. That was the beauty of it.

Décimas for Charles Robin are not an obscure lost song tradition so much as a way of relating that is integral to his sense of self. Décimas are "about stories, who you are, where you come from, personal expression." For Robin, there's little to differentiate the essence of John Robin's décimas from the stories Charles Robin's father told him and that he and his siblings tell their children:

> My daddy, they used to tell us stories all the time. But that's what keeps the things going, what kept you who you are and where you come from and what was your name. By golly we *knew* who *we* were!

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[14] Charles Robin III. Interview with author. August 2, 2016, Yscloskey.

Robin continues telling stories to his children, understanding it as a key practice in shaping their sense of self and place in the world. Others in his family, like his brother, also sustain such practices. And just like the décima singers who improvised and altered songs as they were passed on, Robin's brother "will add things" to the family stories he tells his kids.

Robin understands his work as a culture bearer today, such as his craft displays at the Jazz and Heritage Festival and other venues, as part of this story-telling tradition, emphasizing the importance of this practice to sustaining his identity:

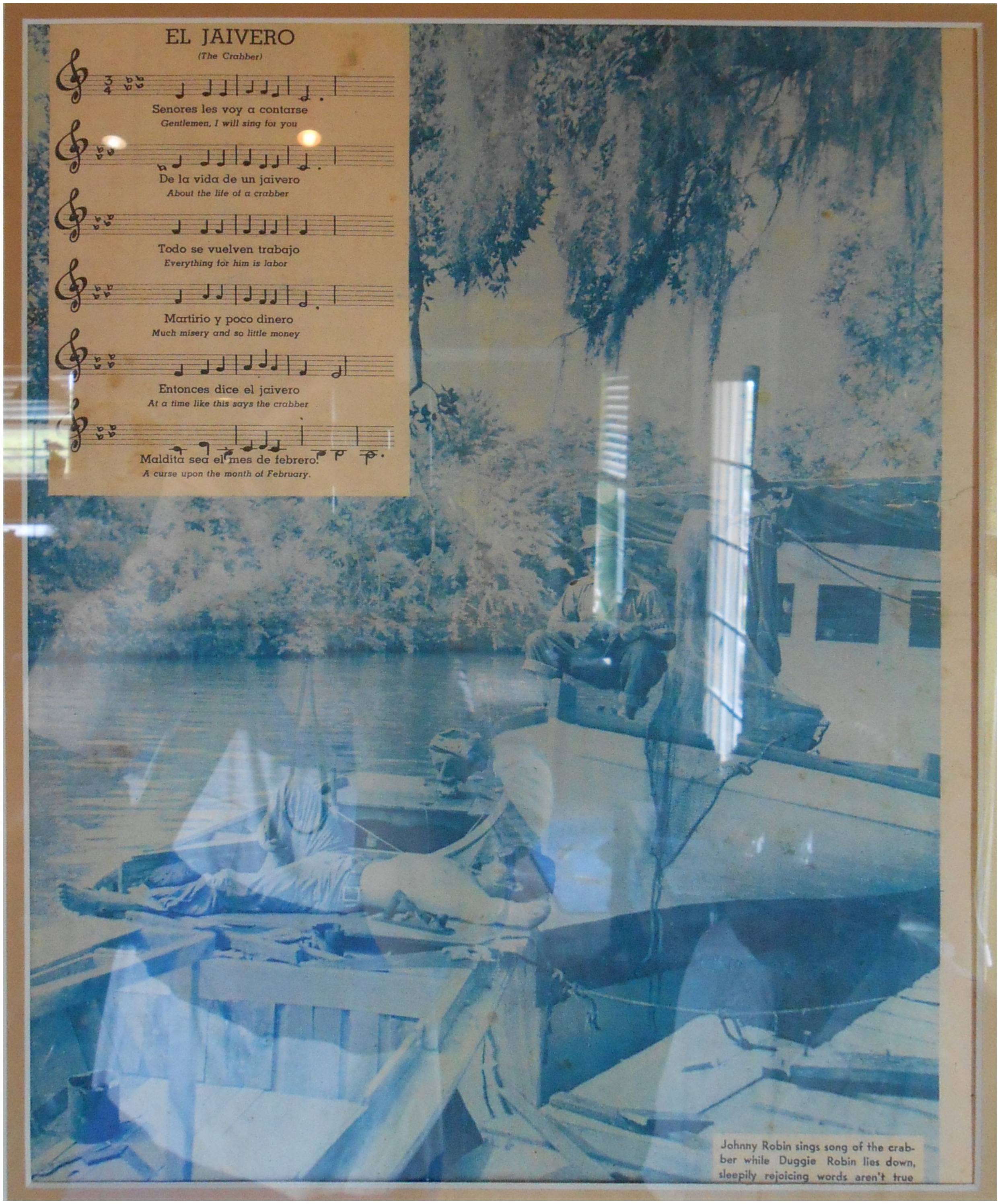
> if we don't tell our stuff, our stories . . . that's how it goes, each generation passes it on; the stories keep getting passed on. So you never forget where you come from; you never forget who you are.

Robin takes ownership of the décima in a way no one else I've spoken to has—even while he is seemingly further removed from the musical practice of décima singing than older culture-bearers who retain greater knowledge of repertories and more memories of the tradition. For Robin, the significance of décimas has little to do with whether or not the songs are sung anymore. The essence of the décima—so central to his understanding of self and place—endures even when the songs ceased to be sung, in the quotidian practice of telling his children stories expressing who they are and where they come from—an integral part of one's sense of self and place in the world.

I handed Robin a copy of Samuel G. Armistead's collection of Isleño folk literature, *The Spanish Tradition in Louisiana*. Robin had never heard of the book, which features both his grandfather, Charles Robin I, and great uncle, John Robin, as key informants. He delved into the book, telling me the name of the shrimp boat pictured on the front cover. Skimming through a few of the plates, he related the names of various informants pictured, commenting on the scenery, “That’s what Delacroix Island used to look like right there. It was beautiful—all these old trees here, the houses all up and down the bayou. Things sure have changed, man.” Eventually we turned to some of the texts of décimas collected by Armistead. Robin read through the English translations, finding them relatable and funny. Reading one décima about shrimping, Robin explained the differences between the seines described in the text and the nets used today. Lessons like these are included in the craft displays Robin presents at the Jazz and Heritage Festival and elsewhere; he has a model boat which depicts the way shrimping was done before the advent of modern trawling techniques. So despite being younger than Fabra and the Alfonso brothers, and not speaking the language, Robin lays claim to the décima in a way others I spoke to hadn’t. Indeed, Armistead’s method of collecting, his entextualized, translated remaking of décimas as folk literature, reinforced Robin’s notion of décimas as stories that define who Isleños are and where they come from.

When Robin and I set up my playback equipment and began to listen to the recordings of his uncle’s décimas I had brought, we only got through a few seconds of the first song before Robin interrupted. His second cousin, Duggie, the son of John Robin, whose disembodied voice filled the small cabin with song, would want to hear this. Standing up to leave, he said excitedly, “Come on let’s go take a ride over there!”

Across the bayou, Edward “Duggie” Robin was sitting on his porch when Charles Robin and I pulled up. As we entered the house, Charles Robin pointed out a framed photograph on the wall. It depicts John Robin, singing and playing guitar in a small boat while his son, Duggie, reclines on deck, listening. A caption in the corner contains a stylized transcription of a verse of a well-known décima, *La Vida de un Jaibero*, which described the hardships of crab fishing. In the opposite corner is a caption which reads, “Johnny Robin sings song of the crabber while Duggie Robin lies down, sleepily rejoicing words aren’t true.” The framed photograph is a kind of meta-narrative, making explicit an ironic interpretation of the lyrics, revealed in the tranquil scene depicted in the photograph. As my day of fieldwork wore on, the shape of the décima was becoming increasingly fluid—from recorded sound to translated text in a book, from an enduring ethos of story-telling to a framed monument.



EL JAIVERO

(The Crabber)

Senores les voy a contarse
Gentlemen, I will sing for you
De la vida de un jaivero
About the life of a crabber
Todo se vuelven trabajo
Everything for him is labor
Martirio y poco dinero
Much misery and so little money
Entonces dice el jaivero
At a time like this says the crabber
Maldita sea el mes de febrero!
A curse upon the month of February.

Johnny Robin sings song of the crabber while Duggie Robin lies down, sleepily rejoicing words aren't true

Figure 16: Photograph with caption of Duggie Robin with father, John Robin playing guitar. The author and Duggie Robin are visible in the reflection, taken by author.

Duggie Robin poured three generous shots of chilled *ron miel* as we sat down around the kitchen table and set up my playback equipment. I enthusiastically pulled up my recording of *La Vida de un Jaibero* sung without guitar accompaniment by John Robin for Armistead's reel-to-reel recorder in 1975. Duggie Robin smiled broadly as the song played, translating and explaining for his cousin:

> He's singing about crab fishing with the *palangre*! Palangre is a long line. That song is all about a crab fisherman. How poor he was fishing! *I* fished crabs for a penny a pound. Oysters, at first picking them up by hand: a dollar and a quarter a sack!

Both men found the song instantly relatable, explaining the specifics of the work described in the song and relating to the hardship involved. We played another song, "¡O lilolá! (El trabajo del w*elfare*)*,*" the same popular décima which Jerry Alfonso had sung for me on in 2015. The two cousins grew excited when they recognized the song:

> **CR**: What he's singing about?
> **DR**: How poor he is! But he don't give a damn! *A mí poco se me da*! Means no difference to me!
> **CR**: That's how it is now!
> ...
> **DR**: He's saying no matter how hard it is it don't make any difference!
> **CR**: It don't!

After a final shot of rum, Charles Robin needed to get back to mending his nets. As we stepped out on to the porch, we're greeted with the refreshing blast of a warm southern wind, and Robin began to sing:

> **CR**: *A strong breeze from the South / blows the candy right out my mouth!*
> **WB**: You're singing décimas now?
> **CR**: Yea! That's what they did—they'd make 'em up about anything!

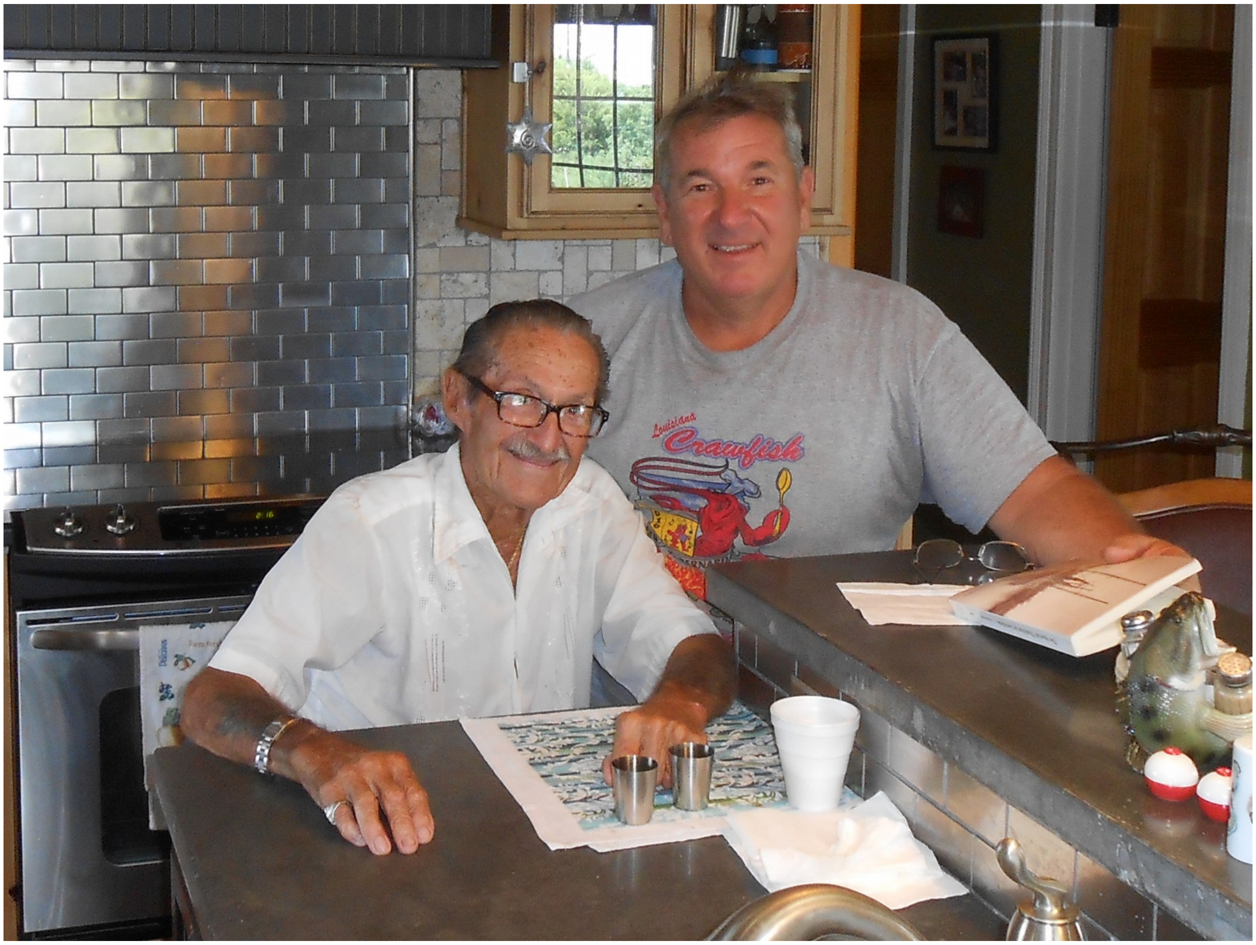


Figure 17: Duggie Robin and Charles Robin III in Yscloskey, August 2, 2016, taken by author.

Charles Robin’s initial affirmation of the loss of the décima tradition and the culture which sustained it gave way to a rich engagement with the material presence of décimas, in the form of recordings, a photograph in Duggie Robin’s kitchen, and his own claim to the tradition in the form of a ditty sung after an afternoon spent immersed in the songs. Anthony Fabra’s and the Alfonso brothers’ banter, about who does and doesn’t sing décimas, likewise affirms the enduring meaningfulness of the décima, accessed through the shape of the genre’s absence today. But these interactions contrasted with a much less rosy perspective held by others I spoke with, who were often unequivocal in diagnosing the tragic end of the tradition as a kind of loss akin to the destruction rendered by Hurricane Katrina.

Seeing What Was

Lloyd “Wimpy” Serigne was the president of the Los Isleños Heritage Society during my first visit to St. Bernard in 2009. When I met him then, Serigne was enthusiastic about the accomplishments of the heritage movement, the success of the fiesta, and the restoration of the museum grounds following Hurricane Katrina. When I reached out to him years later to ask him about my newfound interest in décimas, Serigne rather expressed a sense of loss and defeat, placing the loss of the décima alongside the death of the last décima singers and the destruction of his hometown of Delacroix. Conflating the death of Irvan Perez with the loss of the tradition, Serigne responded to my initial inquiry about décimas by stating solemnly, “Our décima singer is gone.”[15]

For Serigne the state of the décima in 2015, represented by the death of Irvan Perez, is one of many aspects of Isleño culture and life in St. Bernard that has been lost. Like Fabra, the Alfonsos, and the Robins, when I asked about his own memories of the décima, Serigne spoke about growing up in an idyllic Delacroix Island:

> Delacroix isn’t Delacroix anymore. When I go down there and see what it is, it gets depressing. Because we had—it was a place that was wonderful for a child to grow up in because you had so many things to do. We had a lot of woods behind the houses. We’d go play in the woods all day long. They had different kinds of fruit—wild fruit that would grow different parts of the year. . . . We didn’t have want for anything.

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[15] Lloyd Serigne. Interview with author. March 8, 2015, St. Bernard.

Serigne expressed a profound sense of loss regarding these changes—specifically the effects of Hurricane Katrina's destruction. I asked Serigne what Delacroix is like now. "It's all gone," he related dejectedly:

> Today I go to Delacroix Island there's no woods, most of the land is gone. Most of the people are not there anymore—I think they have five people who are originally from there. It's all . . . luxury houses [for out-of-town sport fishermen] . . . It's just not there . . . take a ride down to Delacroix now and you don't see a soul.

For Serigne, remembering décimas entails confronting the contrast between the tragedy of Delacroix today and his happy memories of his childhood in the place, as he explained it, "I see what *was*; people today—like my nephew, he's pretty young—he sees what *is*." To *see what was*. Serigne expresses with trenchant clarity the possibilities of confronting an absence—of seeing and hearing past the oppressive dualities of past and present, subjectivism and positivism.

I asked Serigne if the loss of the décima is the same kind of loss as the devastating material losses wrought by Hurricane Katrina. "Of course it is," he shot back, "to *me* it is." Eventually Serigne shared fragments of an invective and personal décima that his father had sung, a song I'd never heard of. Serigne was unsure of a few words, but his delivery was full of the sweeping glissandi, the airy and effortless vocal technique, and the distinctive Isleño dialect which marked Irvan Perez's style of singing.

Our conversations never developed the humor or camaraderie that I felt in the trappers' cabin or with Charles and Duggie Robin. In those places, the shape of the décima's absence continued to mean very much like the songs had in past decades, bringing my interlocutors together in friendly banter, laughter, reflections on the past, stories, good-natured invective, and connections with a shared past. With Serigne, talking about the tradition rather brought the fact of its absence into sharp—and painful—relief. The décima's absence is intertwined with a tragic sense of loss: of Irvan Perez, Delacroix Island, and the Isleño dialect. Serigne told me that he's trying to learn another décima,

> but it's not ready yet; I hate to sing it because I might get a few words on it [wrong] . . . there's still quite a bit of memory of the décima for sure. I know just a little part of one that my dad used to sing. Yes, it's fading away just like the Spanish language. Yes, we have a problem keeping it going.

The shape left by the décima's absence that emerges in this fieldwork is inhabited by different perspectives with different ideas about the décima's ontologies and meanings. Even the nature of its absence or presence varies. Thus the varied forms wherein my informants locate meaning in the décima today—books, photographs, paintings, memories, song fragments—and the wide range of opinions regarding the status and meaning of the décima today reflect the décima's essential polysemy. This polysemy, all the more palpable in the décima's absence, suggests an ontology of the décima as essentially relational, as affording a modality for different subjects of knowing their world, their selves, and their heritage in different ways. The most inclusive understanding of the décima that one might take away from this is as *a way of being* or *a way of knowing* in the world through music.

Isleño Décimas and Music Sustainability

When I began my study of the Isleño décima I was moved by the tragic aspects of the genre's recent history. This was once a vital tradition whose critical stance, egalitarian ethos, and localist perspective had given voice to a unique way of life in the remote hamlets of lower St. Bernard. The forces acting to end the tradition seemed clear. They began with the hegemonic forces of Americanization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and culminated with the utter destruction of the region wrought by the effects of a rapacious local oil industry and global climate change, in the form of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. As I began to make sense of this history, I also read with interest scholarship in the burgeoning field of music sustainability. Building on theoretical insights from ecomusicology and applied ethnomusicology, the new music sustainability seeks to provide a rigorous comparative model for collaborative projects aimed at sustaining endangered musical traditions. I imagined a role for myself in working to sustain a future for the décima, and a place for the décima as a case study in this field.

In the last decade music sustainability has emerged as a vital field, reviving a neglected but previously central preservationist thread in ethnomusicology, while drawing on the fields of ecology, environmental science, ecomusicology, and applied ethnomusicology to develop a new language of sustainability and distance itself from older models of preservationism. As Catherine Grant (2015) observes, the current mood in ethnomusicology seems to remain cold to such an intervention: “Ethnomusicologists still tend to be uncomfortable with even the rhetoric of endangerment or loss: it’s too romantic, too colonial, too Eurocentric, too paternalistic” (ibid., 3-4). Insights drawn from ecomusicology, applied ethnomusicology, environmental science and linguistics have helped shift the question towards what Grant describes elsewhere as “the ability of a music genre to endure, without implications of either a static tradition or a preservationist bearing” (Grant 2013).

Thus scholars of music sustainability have emphasized a shift in the object of music sustainability away from the old paradigm of *preserving* a musical object from the past, towards *sustaining* a musical resource as part of an ecosystem in the present. Jeff Todd Titon proposed the following influential notion of music as resource:

> If we think of a music culture as something here, living, a renewable daily resource among us, we move into a discourse of sustainability, people in partnership, taking on the privilege and excitement and reaping the rewards of stewardship (Titon 2009, 135)

This view, of music as a resource in need of stewardship, has endured as a central insight in subsequent scholarship on music sustainability alongside an explicit conception of sounded musical practice as the object of sustainability. “Music practice” has emerged as the central focus of music sustainability in the field as it has cohered around the international research project S*ustainable Futures for Music Cultures: Toward an Ecology of Musical Diversity (2009-2014)*. The edited volume (Schippers and Grant 2016) stemming from the project focuses explicitly on case studies of “music practices” (Schippers 2016, 2) in order to develop “a model to guide the practical applications of understanding the ecology of music cultures in relation to music sustainability” (ibid., 2).

Given this focus on music practices, the music sustainability model would seem to offer little to contribute to the sustainability of a genre that is no longer practiced. As a musical practice, the Isleño décima has been lost, enduring only in scattered fragments, remembered by Isleños who do not even consider themselves practitioners of the genre. Thinking of décimas as a resource within an ecosystem would seem to offer little recourse, as the communities that once sustained the tradition become increasingly fractured as the actual physical environment of lower St. Bernard is eroded. Encountered as the shape of an absence, the décima takes different forms depending on perspectives of the individual subjects for whom it is meaningful.

The absence of sounded musical practice affords its own kinds of musical meaning. The study of musical absence reveals that musical meaning can endure beyond musical sound, in the individual perceptions of those who continue to claim the genre as their patrimony. What might the sustainability of a musical genre look and sound like when, as the case of the décima suggests, a genre might be nothing less than a *way of being* in the world, a way of knowing who you are and where you come from, as Charles Robin understood it? What if music as practice and material sound are merely the material manifestation, the audible exterior, of deeper, culturally specific, realms of musical meaning? What if musical sound is *only* the tangible crust, the visible exterior of a world of musical meaning made up of a fluid mantle and core of musical thought, perspectives, values, epistemologies, ecologies, stories, and feelings?

Imagining a music sustainability capable of reckoning with such a wider world of musical meaning would require a reckoning with insights from the related fields of applied ethnomusicology and ecomusicology. Klisala Harrison (2015) observes that

> musical sustainability initiatives and evaluations pursue the values—although ethnomusicologists usually do not identify these as such—of sustaining musical genres and instruments. . . . These opinions may seem difficult to disagree with, but they do not acknowledge the value systems of all people who either cause a need for, or undertake, sustainability activism and scholarship. (96)

Harrison's call for an "ethnomusicology of values," in which "applied ethnomusicology projects should be evaluated in terms of how they navigate the value systems of the people they engage" (ibid., 93), would require a radically open-ended approach to music sustainability, engaging with the heterogeneity of values and a polysemy of musical meaning as they emerge in ethnographic fieldwork. Such an ethnomusicology of values would necessarily have to avoid what Ana Hofman (2010) has referred to as the "reductionist approach;" Hofman argues that "the researcher should accept cultures in all of their heterogeneity and be open to their various interconnected and often incomprehensible discourses" (ibid., 25). According to this radically local approach to an applied ethnomusicology of values, music sustainability would have to work on the level of the individual, asking how music means to individual subjects and what sustainability might look like in such a specific context.

The current model of music sustainability offers a well-positioned point of departure for imagining a more inclusive approach capable of addressing these concerns. One might begin by abandoning the possibility of constructing a "framework" or "model" for music sustainability that can be applied to different music practices, and embracing a more flexible and capacious approach, perhaps along the lines of Aaron Allen's and Kevin Dawe's notion of ecomusicology as a "field" (2016, 10–12) rather than discipline—a diverse living field of sustainability, a field not fenced in by rigid methods, goals, or values, but one growing freely out of the fertile soil of ethnographic specificity and individual values. Helena Simonett observes in the case of Yoreme ceremonial music and dance, that "the kind of sentient ecological knowledge necessary for meaningful musicking and dancing does not manifest itself in outward appearance alone" (Simonett 2014, 125). If, as the Simonett observes, "musical meaning does not emerge from notes, motives, melodies or rhythms that one can learn to re-create, but from the experience of inhabiting the world" (2016, 103), music sustainability might have to take the very experience of inhabiting the world as its object of study and activism.

What might this sound like in practice, in the case of the Isleño décima, for instance? When a genre seems as nothing less than a *way of being* in the world, a way of knowing who you are and where you come from? Sustaining the décima for future generations will entail reckoning with the multiple and fluid modalities of musical meaning emergent in the shape of the absence of a vital tradition of musical practice. It will require listening beyond sound—to the fragments of musical meaning that collect in the shape of the absences rendered by musics that might no longer be materially present. Recollecting offers a point of departure. By engaging with a history of ballad collecting and the memories of people for whom Isleño décimas are still meaningful, some fragments of individual values, locally specific meaning, and diverse worlds of musical thought begin to take shape.

* * *

The shape of the décima's absence in lower St. Bernard today appears sharpest in unexpected places. On the main stage of the fiesta, where décimas were once featured as the embodiment of Isleño heritage, there's no mention of the tradition today. But in more peripheral spaces, among my interlocutors in the Trappers' Cabin and Duggie Robin's kitchen in Yscloskey, for example, the décima's meanings endure: in photographic monuments to a décima-singing family's past, in good-humored invective barbs exchanged among old friends, in an ethos of story-telling, and as the embodiment of irrecoverable historical rupture and loss. Working to sustain such spaces of musical meaning may afford future generations the possibility of finding meaning in the tradition. This will require listening to the shape of musical absence, and learning to locate, value, and sustain musical meaning in unexpected places.

Emerging from this engagement with the shape of the décima's absence are also hints at broader implications, about the ways in which my interlocutors and I experience interrelationships of music, sound, space, and time in lower St. Bernard, and how the study of décimas might afford insights into those relationships. The following chapter takes these relationships as its focus, exploring the décima's spatiality and chronotope—the specific configurations of space and time that emerge from both the lived experience of musical life in lower St. Bernard and from the song texts of historical décimas themselves.

5. Décima Spatialities

In the metaphorical shape of the décima's absence, an abiding, expansive, and dynamic realm of musical meaning emerges. Despite the destruction of lower St. Bernard in 2005 and the end of the décima as a vital tradition shortly thereafter, former and current denizens of the old Isleño villages continue to relate to the genre as intertwined with the spaces of lower St. Bernard around which their memories of the songs coalesce. This chapter turns its attention to such spaces, exploring how the distinctive spaces of lower St. Bernard mean to my interlocutors in relation to the décima and its broader musical milieu. In the context of the unfolding ecological disaster in lower St. Bernard, the dynamic spaces of the décima's past present a challenging and complex terrain of meaning. I reflect on insights gleaned from these ethnographic experiences in the context of scholarship on space, sound, and ecology, and bring these reflections to bear on an analysis of the décima corpus. Here a distinctive chronotope of the genre, its specific configurations of space and time, entailing notions of agency, ethics, propriety, and ecology, poses an alternative to the addled definitions and dynamic polysemy explored in the preceding chapters. The spatial approach developed in this chapter rather suggests way of hearing décimas as a coherent and discrete musical genre embodying a specific local ethos.

With the historical approach taken so far in this dissertation I've sought to trouble the hegemonic understanding of the genre as a static, ahistorical tradition, rather drawing attention to the décima's dynamic and mutable historical dimension. This framing kept the changes and enduring features of the genre at center, from a facet of everyday life in the robust community depicted in the first chapter, to its transformation in the heritage revival and end as musical practice. This music historical transformation mirrored dramatic historical changes in St.

Bernard, and the fundamentally historical framework taken in the preceding chapters has offered a perspective on the genre that affords understandings of its dynamic musical meanings while keeping at center the genre's relationships to its pasts, presents, and futures. This attention to what the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) terms "the fullness of time" suggests that without attention to the interrelationship of past, present, and future, "the present loses its integrity, breaks down into isolated phenomena and objects, making of them a mere abstract conglomeration" (ibid., 146). Bakhtin's intervention, however, was not merely a call for the historicity of genre, but rather served to emphasize the central role of "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (ibid., 84), or *chronotope*, in "defin[ing] genre and generic distinction" (ibid., 85).

The temporal and spatial relationships of the Isleño décima were central to the way the genre had been figured: the songs' ancient provenance (or recent composition), their connections with Spain, Latin America, or other regional traditions, for example. But the defining characteristic of the Isleño décima is the spatial dimension of its local emplacement in lower St. Bernard. Throughout the preceding chapters, structured as they were by the historical passage of time, another dimension, that of space, has acted on and shaped this fundamentally historical framework. Décimas, according to Armistead, are concerned with the "local history," "local activities," and "local people," (1992, 24) of lower St. Bernard, and revealed, above all, "the self-sufficient localism of the *Isleños*," (1992, 26) that have defined the Isleño enclaves of lower St. Bernard. Indeed, taken together, the previous chapters attest to the centrality of place and space, both explicitly and implicitly in this history, in emic understandings of the décima's meanings, in my ethnographic experiences in lower St. Bernard, and in the song texts themselves. Thus it's the dynamic spaces of lower St. Bernard out of which the décima's historically dynamic forms and musical meanings have emerged. A wide range of commentators, have emphasized the distinctiveness of the places and spaces of lower St. Bernard, often in exoticizing perspective, and always indexed, at least in passing reference, by song.[1] And my own perception of lower St. Bernard is of a specific local place, marked by diverse peoples coming and going over the centuries, embodying a richly diverse musical culture emplaced in south Louisiana and intertwined with a broader circum-Gulf region and pan-Hispanic world (see chapter one). Such a conception of the space of lower St. Bernard has thus figured centrally, if often implicitly, in this dissertation's historical narrative, from the exotic landscape of lower St. Bernard depicted in the early sources (chapter one), to the sense of loss that my interlocutors express about the meaningful places of Delacroix that they grew up with and that are no longer there (chapter four).

The present chapter builds on this historical narrative towards a rather more explicit critical consideration the décima's spatiality. It begins with my fieldwork in Delacroix, my experiences, in the absence of décima singing, at one of the few large public events still held in the village, the annual Blessing of the Fleet, and with interviews wherein my attempts to engage in conversations about décimas turn to attention to spaces and places that once were key sites of décima singing but are no longer there. These experiences, in conversation with scholarship in human geography and ecology, lead to an understanding of space as a heuristic category, a social construct rather than a quality of the world, and one that affords insights into a spatial ethnography of lower St. Bernard. The understanding of space that emerges here recalls what the geographer Doreen Massey (2005) conceives of as

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[1] See, for example, Fortier (1894) , Howell Storck (1915) , and Perez (2011)

> the challenge of space as multiplicity. If time unfolds as change then space unfolds as interaction. In that sense space is the *social* dimension. Not in the sense of exclusively human sociability, but in the sense of engagement within a multiplicity. It is the sphere of the continuous production and reconfiguration of heterogeneity in all its forms — diversity, subordination, conflicting interests. As the argument develops, what begins to be addressed is what that must call forth: a relational politics for a relational space. (Ibid., 61)

This is not a turn away from history, to what Massey refers to as “the prison-house of synchrony” (2005, 33). Rather, like the phoroptic theoretical lenses of chapter three, the spatial lens is additive, expanding the historical frame heretofore developed with a spatial analysis of the genre. What emerges here is an understanding of the dynamic space of lower St. Bernard as a relational multiplicity, always already temporal and historical, coeval with and inseparable from the subjects who give it meaning and the songs they once composed about it. In keeping with the imbrication of historical, ethnographic and hermeneutic modes of analysis that have defined my methodology in previous chapters, I bring insights gained from my ethnographic experiences to an analysis of space and time in the texts of historical décimas, figuring these two realms of musical meaning as overlapping frames of reference rather than as discrete epistemologies.

Dancing at the Boat Blessing

When I ask my interlocutors about décimas—I usually start by just expressing that I want to learn about them—they nearly always respond first, by explaining that there isn’t anyone left who sings them, and second, by nostalgically describing the spaces in which they were once sung, or the spaces that were meaningful to them during the times in in their lives in which they recall the songs as a part of quotidian life in St. Bernard. Two central themes in this spatiality are discussed here: dance halls, which were key spaces of sociability in St. Bernard as throughout

Louisiana (see chapter one), and the idyllic outdoor ecologies of fruit trees, bayous, and woods, that defined the memories held by many of my interlocutors of Delacroix and Yscloskey as they once were. Together, they form an affective impression of what the old Isleño hamlets, while attesting to the fundamental emplacement of Isleño décimas within not only the places they were sung, but a wider ecology of Isleño life in lower St. Bernard that sustained the tradition.

Spaces and places were thus abiding and salient themes in my conversations with Isleños. As much as I wanted to learn about décimas, it often seemed that my interlocutors wanted me to learn about the spaces and places that they associated with the songs, as well as the wider cultural world they represent. Yet I couldn’t for example, head down to one of the many barrooms that once stood in Delacroix on a Saturday evening and listen in on a décima session, or even sit in the audience at a “décima night” at the San Pedro Pescador Church in Poydras, as Armistead had (see chapter three).[2] The spaces and places that had sustained the décima tradition were not accessible to me: most have been utterly transformed, washed away, abandoned, or destroyed. And the people who gave them meaning no longer experienced them as part of daily life—they’ve moved up the road and now experience the songs as memories of what once was.

Despite these constraints I sought to experience something of the social meaning of space in lower St. Bernard. Frequent drives to Delacroix took me past glassy bayous, dying cypress swamps, and lush citrus orchards. The village typically contained a few fishers hard at work, who had little interest in talking to a curious interloper. Lonely drives through the parish left me contemplative and reflective, but with seemingly little usable data for my dissertation. Occasionally, though, I would find myself with a destination in lower St. Bernard—for an interview or the occasional public event still held in the old villages. In August 2016, accompanied by my friend and colleague, the historian Andreas Hübner, I got in my car to make the hour-long drive to Delacroix, but this time with a specific destination, Dean's Seafood, a seafood and ice loading facility on Bayou Terre aux Boefs in Delacroix, to observe the annual Delacroix Island Boat Blessing.

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[2] San Pedro Pescador, incidentally, has since been closed and the parish merged with a larger one up the road.

Such boat blessings have their origins in coastal villages of the Mediterranean, and today endure in fishing communities around the world. Southern Louisiana's Catholic heritage and robust fishing industry together contribute to the enduring salience and popularity of such popular Catholic traditions. Until recently, it was known as the "Blessing of the Fleet," a more explicit reference to the commercial vessels that were the object of the event. Only in 2015, after ten years without a blessing following Hurricane Katrina, was the blessing reinstated, with a broader purview to include the sport-fishing and pleasure craft that are now featured in the event, part of an effort to sustain its relevance and participation amidst the declining commercial fishing industry in Delacroix.

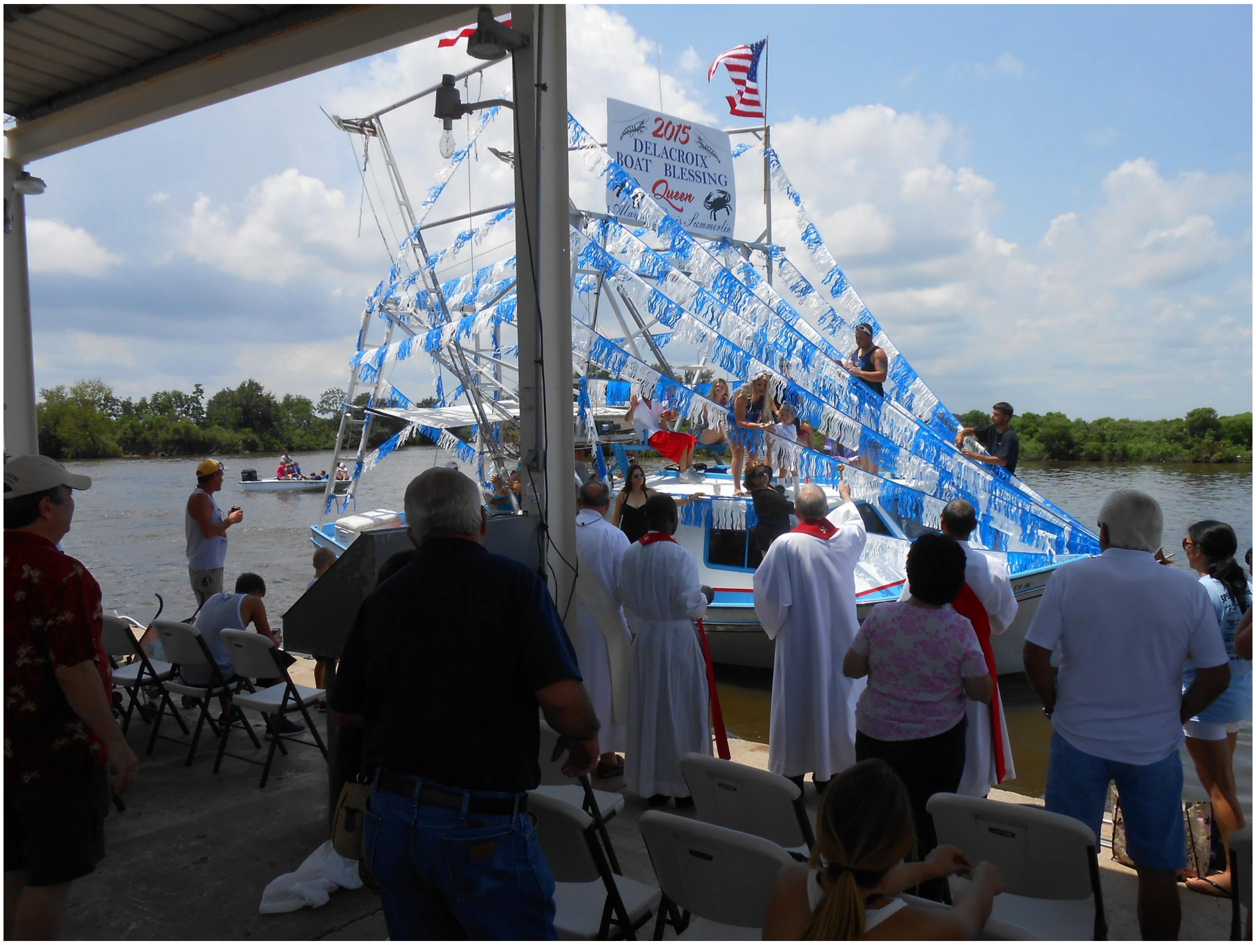

Figure 16: Archbishop Gregory Aymond blessing a vessel at the 2016 Delacroix Island Boat Blessing, taken by author.

We arrived around noon, and were pleasantly surprised to easily find a place topark along the bayou. A short walk down the road we found Dean’s Seafood, the advertised location of the blessing. Dean’s Seafood appears to be little more than a large concrete slab fronting the bayou, with a refrigerated storage container full of ice. This material sparseness and visual accessibility reveals both its regular use as a place where seafood is loaded off of fishing vessels and onto trucks bound for restaurants and markets; it also seems like an ideal location for the blessing. The large slab affords space for picnic tables, a dance band, and a few score of spectators a comfortable space and clear view of the bayou and the dock on which the blessing itself takes place.

Gradually the dignitaries who presided over the affair arrived—the local deacon and priest were first, and they were followed by St. Bernard Parish President Guy McInnis and Archbishop Gregory Aymond, who drives down from New Orleans to officiate. After a brief invocation by Aymond and McInnis, the event got under weigh. The boats were spotless—washed and waxed for the occasion—and decorated with flags and wreaths strung along the rigging. Packed to the gunwales with celebrating sunbathers, the boats paraded up the levee passing within arm's reach of shore, the archbishop's aspergillum, glistening in the sunlight, extended out over the water to bless the passing boats and their passengers. An associate of the parish president collected money in a large basket—donations for the church. Everyone helped fend the boats from the dock and send them on their way up the bayou.

Following the invocation, a dance band, having quietly set up in the background, began an extended set of rhythm and blues and rock and roll classics, with a heavy emphasis on the New Orleans and Louisiana repertory, and a few Cajun and zydeco standards included as well. The minimalist band, made up of only a drummer and the bandleader, Barry Ciaccio, on vocals and electric keyboard with backing tracks supplied by a stack of floppy disks exchanged between songs, managed to sustains a high level of energy throughout a long set on the hot concrete slab. While the crowd's attention was focused on the blessing and the boats, eating hot dogs and drinking beer, or just catching up with friends and family now scattered to different parts of the parish, state, or region, a pair of dancers took to the ad hoc dance floor—the portion of the slab in front of the band—and performed an energetic and virtuosic display of dancing, seeming to embody a lifetime spent in step together on the dance floor as they floated across the slab in close synchrony.

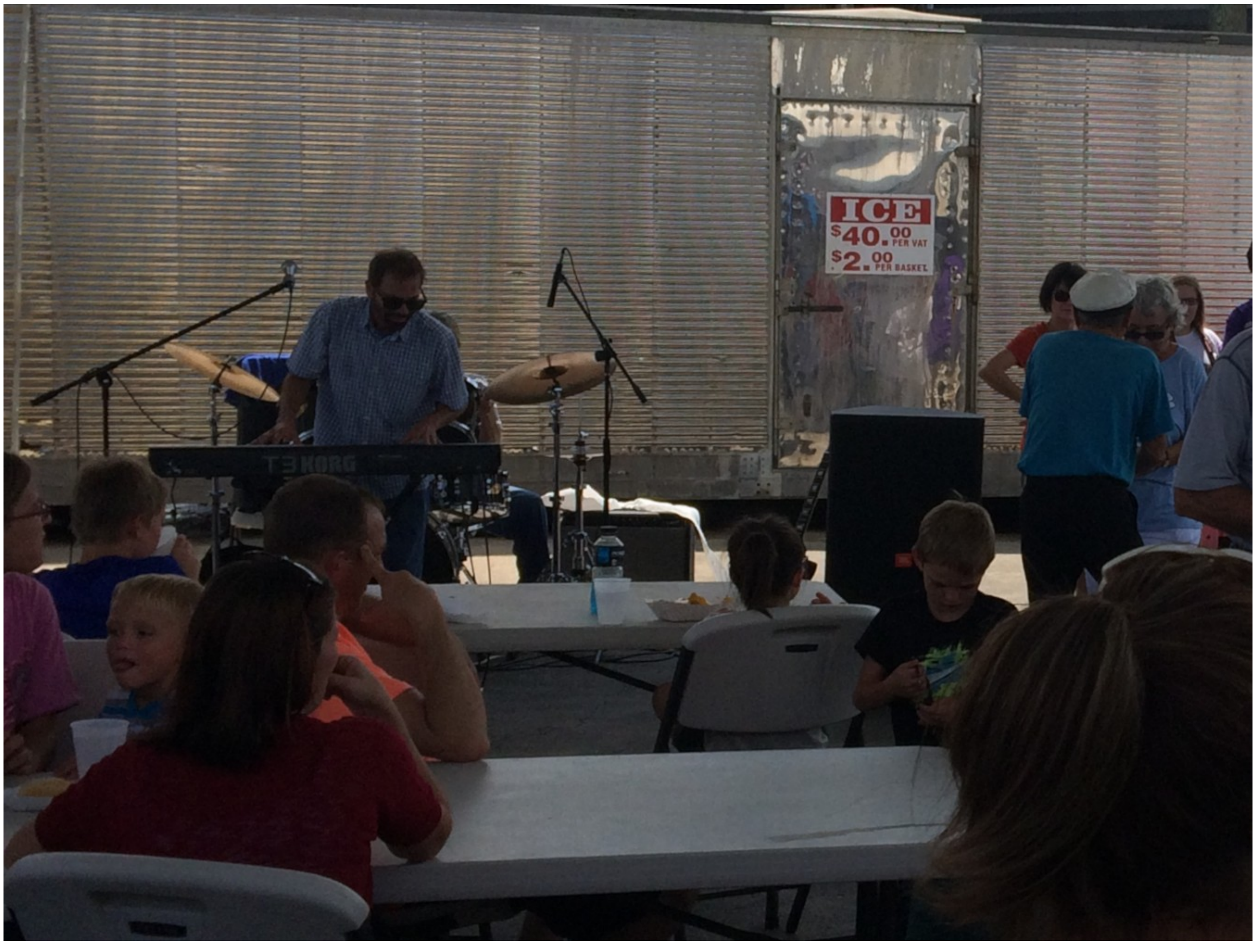

Figure 18: Joan and Thomas Gonzales dancing (far right) at the 2016 Delacroix Island Boat Blessing, taken by author.

Joan and Thomas Gonzales were the only dancers at the blessing, and they also stood out in other ways. Thomas Gonzales was one of the oldest people present, and they're two of the last remaining full-time residents of Delacroix. Thomas Gonzales is also one of the last remaining speakers of Isleño Spanish (Joan Gonzales, a few years younger, grew up up the road in Violet, and doesn't know the language), and grew up in mid-century Delacroix when life in lower St. Bernard was defined by décima-singing, social dancing, and a robust Spanish-speaking enclave (see chapter one). I was struck by the Gonzaleses' virtuosic couple dancing—gliding around the ad hoc dance floor, their feet barely seeming to touch the ground—and the contrast between the Gonzaleses' experience of the blessing, as primarily an opportunity for dancing, and that of everyone else, whose attention was focused on the blessing of the vessels, or other activities related to the event such as selling food or T-shirts to raise funds for the church. I introduced myself to Thomas Gonzales and we soon struck up a fitful conversation in Spanish. Gonzales was born and raised in Delacroix, and still lives just down the road from the site of the blessing. While he claimed not to have much to say about décimas, he agreed to have me over in future for an interview.

I arrived at the Gonzaleses' home in Delacroix on a rainy Sunday morning later that month. As I pulled up, Thomas Gonzales greeted me from his balcony, perched on stilts two stories above grade, directing me to a patch of gravel next to his driveway and warning that I'll get stuck if I park on the grass. I darted up the stairs and Thomas walked with me towards the back of the porch, from which I was surprised to observe a clear view of Lake Borgne. I commented on the view and the rain, which afforded a welcome break from the otherwise relentless August heat. "It's a beautiful day," he responded—if there was a hint of irony implied here it was lost on me.

I came prepared with my usual slew of questions about the décimas—the focus of my research—and some archival recordings of songs to share with him. Gonzales, however, takes his nominal disavowal of knowledge about décimas further than my other interlocutors: he seemed genuinely uninterested in them. Gonzales remembered that people used to sing décimas, "old Spanish men" used to sing the songs in the many barrooms of Delacroix's past. But

Gonzales associates the songs with an older generation—he was just a kid then and he wasn't allowed anywhere near the intimate spaces of mens' sociability in which décimas were sung. He was child encroaching in the adults-only spaces of a barroom and he would have been chased away:

> If you were a kid and the old Spanish men was their talking, don't go sit there! They'd smack you in the head and boot you in the butt to get on home . . . Normally in the evenings they would go in the barroom and make up all kinds of songs but you couldn't stay there and listen; they'd run your ass off.[3]

Children, then, may have been allowed to go to Vincent Fabra's barroom and grocery in order to buy something at the counter, perhaps catching a snippet of the men's singing and talking before being sent away:

> If there was a bunch of Spanish men there singing songs you couldn't . . . if you went in the store to buy something you couldn't stay and listen–old man Fabra would hit you and kick you out.

Gonzales was dismissive of my questions about décimas, but he had his own priorities for our conversation. He wanted me to understand that Delacroix as I experience it today—largely abandoned except for events like the blessing—contrasts with the community that Gonzales was a part of for most of his life. And he wanted me to know about dancing, his own area of musical interest and a central pillar of his sense of his own identity and of Isleño culture.

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[3] Thomas and Joan Gonzales. Interview by author. Delacroix, August 11, 2016.

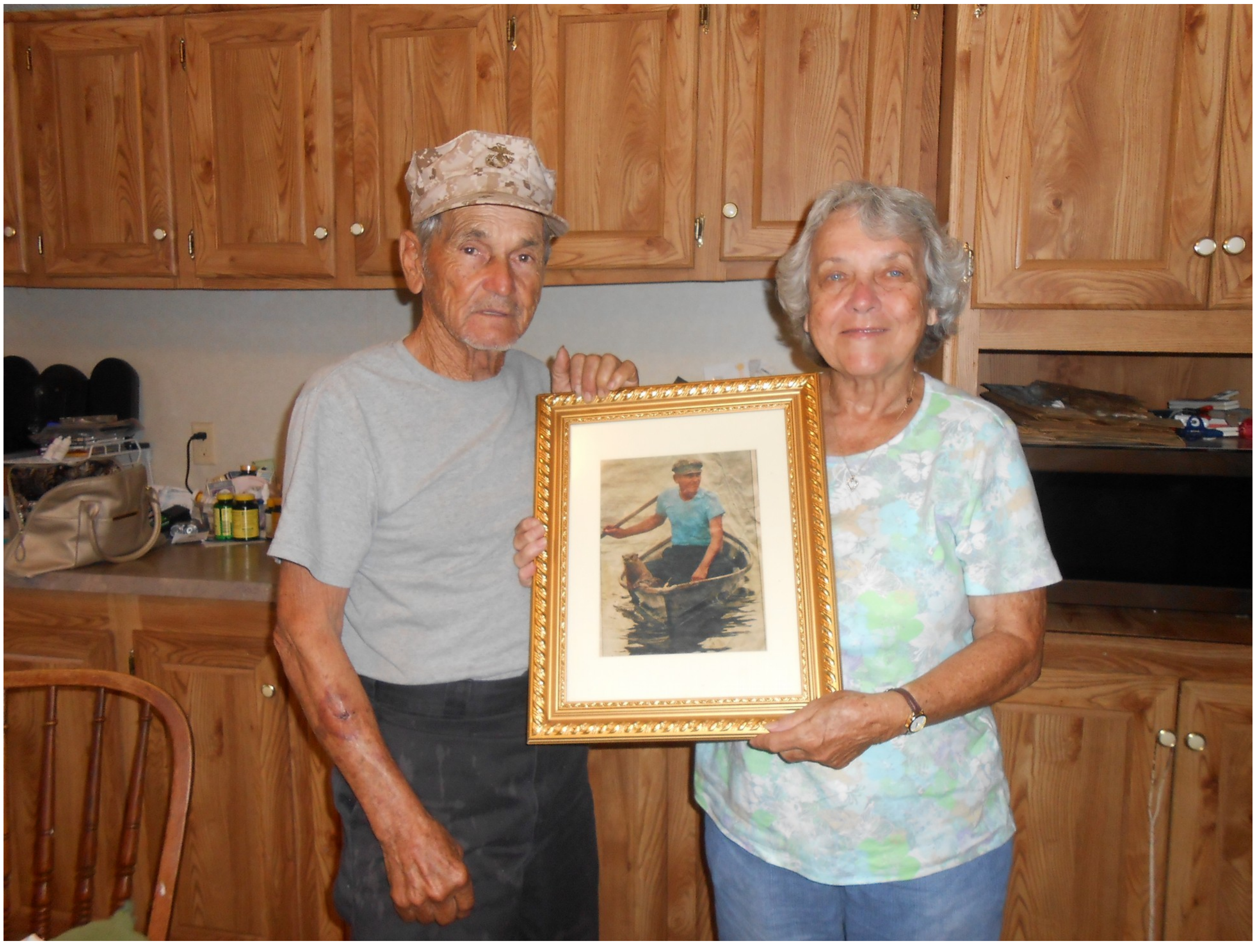

Figure 19: Joan and Thomas Gonzales with photograph of Thomas Gonzales in a pirogue with his late pet otter, Delacroix, August 11, 2016, taken by author.

Gonzales's memories of Delacroix are of a thriving, vital, and independent community. "We had everything down here when I grew up," he remembered, "we had a theater and all!" Gonzales recalled growing up in a robust Isleño enclave in Delacroix, emphasizing the many iconic social spaces that defined the community for him. Delacroix did indeed once have a movie theater, along with a school, community center, fire station, grocery store, barrooms, gambling houses, and dance halls up and down both sides of the bayou. In addition to Vincent Fabra's store and barroom, there was the Spanish Tavern, then Fabra's place, and progressing down the road through Delacroix were six more barrooms, each of which Gonzales associated with a particular owner: Joe Brown, Bill Martinez, “Becker,” an other whom he could only remember as a “Spanish man,” Tony Molero (brother of Manuel), and Ernest Melerine. Gonzales remembers a place called the Spanish Tavern most fondly of all. The Spanish Tavern was located on the “far side” (the right bank) of Bayou Terre aux Boefs, accessible only by boat (or by swimming, as many former residents fondly recalled doing in their youth). Once home to dozens of structures and a vital part of Delacroix, today there is no visible evidence of the structures that were once built there, having been washed away by Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina and the gradual toll of subsidence and erosion. According to Gonzales, Pat O’Brien, namesake of the famous Bourbon Street bar in New Orleans, was the proprietor. The owner’s investment in the place began as a kennel where he kept his hunting dogs, and developed into an expansive barroom and gambling house.

All of these places functioned as dance halls on weekends. Vincent Fabra’s grocery store and barroom, for example, was famous for the dance bands from New Orleans whose members would drive down for a Saturday night performance and spend the night in bunk beds in the back of the building, kept for that purpose. Thomas Gonzales proudly recalled some of the people who once performed there. “Louis Armstrong with his trumpet and his handkerchief in his mouth,” played his favorite song, “My Little Margie.” He mentioned “Papa Celestino” (Oscar Phillip “Papa” Celestine) and other luminaries from the New Orleans tradition. He also fondly remembered the jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll of what he termed the “rockin’ ‘50’s”—music he likely experienced himself as a young man.

Today, the Gonzaleses enjoy dancing to the same live music did in their youths, but performed by bands like the one at the blessing, aimed specifically at their demographic, and at venues in relatively nearby places in the upper part of the parish or across the river, at dance halls as well as at "old folks' homes," casinos, bingo halls, and other venues in the area that hold weekend dances. Even when there were still venues for dancing in Delacroix, the Gonzales's enjoyed driving up to dance venues in upper St. Bernard or New Orleans. But while these places to dance—bingo halls across the river or the slab at he blessing—might serve as workable substitutes for the dance halls of Delacroix's past, they are not a replacement for what's been lost. Indeed, Gonzales dismissed the slab at the blessing as a less than ideal venue for dancing. And while "dancing is not a big thing at the blessing,"—the Gonzales's were, indeed, the *only* dancers at the blessing–the space of the blessing was once home to some of the community dances Gonzales remembers from the heyday of Delacroix's social dance culture. As Gonzales explained,

> that place where the blessing was—that big cement slab was a dance hall and gambling house owned by Joe Brown . . . that was a biiiiig building. They had a gambling room over here and behind it was the dance hall; there was a stage on that side and up front was the barroom. they had a TV . . . that was the first TV they had on the island. I'll tell you what, it was *something*! This was a *big place*.

When I arrived at the blessing I was struck by what seemed like the given nature of the space of Dean's Seafood: a covered slab fronting the bayou, affording an ideal setting for the events that ensued. In other words, the space of Dean's Seafood for me was a kind of blank canvas—As I related above, I was struck by the sparseness of the facility and its seeming suitability for both its normal function as a place for unloading fishing vessels and as a site for the blessing, so perfectly framing the parade of boats, a nice space for spectators onshore and the interactions between the archbishop, his attendants, and the vessels passing by. For Gonzales, however, the space holds essentially different meanings. He sees the its temporal dimension—the space of Joe Brown's dance hall which once sat upon the slab, and his own experiences dancing there in his youth. Gonzales, it seems to me, "sees what was" at Dean's Seafood, not unlike Serigne's explanation of his experience of Delacroix. Gonzales's perspective of the space of the blessing takes material form in his dancing, embodying his own specific orientation towards space.

Rethinking Space

The ethnomusicologist Matt Sakakeeny observes that "one's experience of a soundscape is dependent on an *orientation* towards sound" (Sakakeeny 2010, 4). For residents of the Tremé neighborhood of New Orleans, negotiating a landscape fractured by development projects that reinforce that city's racial inequalities, Sakakeeny found "that orientations are not fixed or culturally assigned but areas dynamic and mutable as the landscape itself and the sounds that animate it" (ibid., 4). This "multiplicity of possible orientations toward sound" (ibid., 23) suggests an emergent understanding of a soundscape, arising from the different perspectives of those who experience it. Thus, for Sakakeeny,

> [h]ow these sounds are interpreted by various listeners is dependent on their orientation towards them, which relates to history, culture, and biography in ways that are not always predictable. Soundscapes encompass multiple, sometimes opposing, subject positions. (Ibid., 25)

Such a view suggests that while my orientation to the sound of the dance band at the blessing meant that I heard the band as a mere addendum to the main event and primary meaning of the space of Dean's Seafood as affording a space for conducting the blessing, Gonzales's orientation to the space involved its temporal dimension, wherein the space afforded dancing first and foremost, and the band was the central focus of attention and locus of meaning at the blessing.

In this turn to the specificity and contingency of a soundscape's meanings, Sakakeeny contributes to a key insight in what he describes as ethnomusicology's attention to the "interrelation between people, places, and sounds . . . [and the] specific sound-making activities [that] ground culture in specific localities" (ibid., 3). Sakakeeny's assertion of a soundscape's relational, contingent meaning, builds on Steven Feld's theory of an "acoustemology of place" (1996), which Feld defines as "local conditions of acoustic sensation, knowledge, and imagination embodied in the culturally particular sense of place" (ibid., 91). Feld's notion of acoustemology emerged from earlier work (1982) which drew out in sharp ethnographic focus the key role of space in analyses of sound and music in addressing epistemological and cosmological questions, and laid the groundwork for a flourishing of scholarship on space, place, and sound in ethnomusicology, establishing space as a central concern in ethnomusicology.

In drawing attention to individuals "creating and representing public space rather than merely [being] subjected to it" (Sakakeeny 2010, 34), Sakakeeny's fine-grained ethnographic account builds on what's come to be referred to as the "spatial turn" in critical theory; and the attention to space and place in ethnomusicology reflects a broader shift in humanities and social sciences in a critical approach to space as an emergent, relational, and perceptual dimension. At issue is the very nature of space, as substantivalist or relationalist, as *a priori* or *a posteriori*, as the very stuff of the universe or a mere quality of perception. The geographer David Harvey, distinguishing between what he calls absolute space and relational space, has been influential in articulating the valence of these concerns for scholars in the humanities:

> If we regard space as an absolute it becomes a "thing in itself" with an existence independent of matter. It then possesses a structure which we can use to pigeon-hole or individuate phenomena. The view of relative space proposes that it be understood as a relationship between objects which exist only because objects exist and relate to each other. There is another sense in which space can be viewed as relative and I choose to call this relational space—space regarded . . . as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects. (Harvey 1973, 13)

Doreen Massey has expanded on Harvey's notion of relational space to argue for "imagining space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity" (Massey 2005, 9), emphasizing the difference and heterogeneity of space as a relational multiplicity rather than a fixed dimension, "imagining space as always in process, as never a closed system" (ibid., 11). According to this view, "[s]pace does not exist prior to identities/entities and their interrelations. . . . [I]dentities/entities, the relations 'between' them, and the spatiality which is a part of them, are all co-constitutive" (ibid., 10).

Reading Sakaeeny, Feld, Harvey, and Massey and reflecting on my experience at the blessing leads me to shift my frame of reference from my own view of the *place* of Dean's Seafood—as one defined by its affordances based on my orientation to it (an orientation that at the time I habitually assumed was shared by everyone)—to the relational *space* of the concrete slab underfoot: first and foremost a dance floor for the Gonzaleses, and an infinite multiplicity of spatialities to anyone who might relate to it. This attention to the space of the slab must, however, account for the temporal dimension embodied in Gonzales's orientation, as well as the way many former residents experience Delacroix today. Gonzales's experience of the space, as one defined by an Isleño musical culture and the community that once lived here, emerges from his experiences of the space over time, a contrast from my experience of the space in terms of its affordances for the blessing. So Gonzales's sense of self and place are defined by dancing, and the vital dance culture that Delacroix once cultivated attests, for Gonzales, to the vitality of Delacroix in past decades. The dance-halls are gone, and Delacroix endures, seeming as just a shell of its former self. The structures on the far side of the bayou, like the famous Spanish Tavern, have reverted to marsh and open water. And yet Gonzales still dances, and dancing still defines who he is and how he constructs his identity. There aren't any dance-halls left in Delacroix, so he dances at the blessing; and he drives across the river or up the road to other venues that hold dances on the weekends. And he still emplaces himself and his dancing in *this* place, Delacroix—what it used to be seems as relevant to Gonzales as what it's like now. Rather than seeing and hearing it for what it is now, he experiences its temporal dimension.

Time occupies a salient but highly variable position in scholarship on space. It's central to Feld's coining of "acoustemology," which emerged from the "flowing paths," connecting fluid Kaluli topologies with emic notions of the body and voice, as Feld observes, "connecting these flowing paths reveals a Kaluli acoustemology of place relations, a fusion of space and time that joins lives and events as embodied memories" (Feld 1996, 91). Space and time are, indeed, inseparable in Feld's experiential account of acoustemology:

> Acoustemology means that as a sensual-space-time, the experience of place potentially can always be grounded in an acoustic dimension. this is so because space indexes the distribution of sounds, and time indexes the motion of sounds. Yet acoustic time is always spatialized; sounds are sensed as connecting points up and down, in and out, echo and reverb, point-source and diffuse. And acoustic space is likewise temporalized; sounds are heard moving, locating, placing points in time. The placing of auditory time is the sonic envelope created from the layered attack, sustain, decay, and resonance of sounds. The placing of auditory space is the dispersion of sonic height, depth, and directionality. Space-time inevitably sounds in and as figure and ground, as comingness and goingness. Its presence is forward, backward, side to side, and is heard in trajectories of ascent, descent, arch, level, or undulation. (Ibid., 98)

Such a view calls for a reckoning with received assumptions about both space and time. Feldian acoustemology is thus connected with discourses, well over a century old, that have undertaken to engage with the implications of Minkowski space-time and Einsteinian relativity for understanding the human experience.

The mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead presciently considered what might be read as a critique of the distinction between quantum mechanics and general relativity in troubling the distinctions between things and processes. R. G. Collingwood glossed one of Whitehead's best-known examples, "that to be an atom of hydrogen takes time—the time necessary for establishing the peculiar rhythm of movements which distinguishes it from other atoms—so that there is no such thing as 'nature at an instant'" (Collingwood 1971, 212). The pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead ([1932] 2002) engaged with special relativity and Minkowski space-time in developing his experiential philosophy of temporality and consciousness in the 1930s. For Mead, the human experience of the universe must be understood

> as an infinite scroll unrolling in snatches before our intermittent vision receives another variant in the picture of reality as a four-dimensional continuum of space-time, of events and intervals, forever determined by its own geometry, and into which we venture with our own subjective frames of reference, receiving momentary impressions whose present character is a function of our minds and not of any section of the ordered events of the universe. (Ibid., 61)

Here space and time collapse as discrete dimensions, appearing rather as qualities of perception—a function of the human mind distinct from any assumptions about the nature of the universe it perceives. Such an experiential approach to understanding space and time was also central to the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's foundational theorization of space, which suggests that time and space are mutually constituted, appearing as separate dimensions only in perceptual experience:

> The experience of space and time is largely subconscious. We have a sense of space because we can move and of time because, as biological beings we undergo recurrent phases of tension and ease. The movement that gives us a sense of space is itself the resolution of tension." (Tuan 1977, 118)

Tuan observes that humans live the overlapping domains of time and space in daily experience, even as they try to distinguish them conceptually:

> Daily living in modern society requires that we be aware of space and time as separate dimensions and as transposable measures of the same experience. We wonder whether there is parking space, whether we shall be late for an appointment, and even as we estimate the distance from parking lot to office in terms of time we wish we had been able to assign a bigger block of time for the appointment. (Ibid., 118–119)

Rather than taking such observations to the kinds of conclusions gestured at by Whitehead and Mead, abolishing space and time as mere qualities of perception, perceptual participles of an impenetrable spacetime, Tuan reinforces the two concepts rather as discrete modalities, parsing time and space as a dialectic of change and stasis, claiming that "space exists in the present" (ibid.,119) and suggesting that *place*, in contrast to space, is somehow set apart from time, that "if time is conceived as flow or movement then place is pause" (ibid., 198).

What emerges from my experiences at the blessing, however, is an experiential view of space as inseparable with time. Building on the relational understanding of space discussed above, its the concept of space-time as developed by Doreen Massey that provides the theoretical thrust for my analysis of space in lower St. Bernard and its pertinence to the analysis of décimas that follows. Massey's project is a probing critique of space across multiple contexts and domains. Central to this critique is the argument that "space must be conceptualized integrally with time . . . space-time as a configuration of social relations within which the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity" (Massey 1994, 2–3). In a later publication, Massey gestures at the fundamental implications of this claim, explaining

> that this is not some mere rhetorical flourish, but that it influences how we think of both terms; that thinking of time and space together does not mean they are identical (for instance in some undifferentiated four-dimensionality), rather it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions (not always followed through) for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other; that it opens up some problems which have heretofore seemed (logically, intractably) insoluble; and that it has reverberations for thinking about politics and the spatial. *Thinking about history and temporality necessarily has implications (whether we recognize them or not) for how we imagine the spatial*. (Massey 2005, 18, emphasis added)

Space, for Massey, is a "dynamic simultaneity" rather than "frozen instant" (ibid., 23). In contrast to Tuan's view of space as outside of time, space here is "the sphere of coexisting multiplicity, . . . a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (ibid., 54).

Such an understanding of spacetime as a relational, processual multiplicity opens new possibilities for how ethnomusicological fieldwork in the interstitial and rapidly changing spaces of lower St. Bernard might contribute novel insights into both this space and the music it once sustained. Above all, I'm interested in the affective experience of spacetime that emerges in the experience of inhabiting lower St. Bernard, and in listening to and reflecting on the sounds of décimas and their texts. The anthropologist Kathleen Stewart gestures at this experiential imbrication of space and time in her ethnography of space in the hills, hollers, and camps of West Virgina,

> where "life in the hills" is always already a re-membered life pieced together in memory and by roaming from place to place, moments of melancholic rumination cull rambling remembering into an image with duration and haunting force that not only slows time but provides a space in which to dwell in time. (Stewart 1996, 94)

Such an approach would seem to afford the possibility of transcending time and space, of experiencing spaces that are no longer there, and of overcoming the oppressive dualities of past and present, subjectivism and positivism, and time and space.

Rethinking Agency

In my fieldwork in lower St. Bernard, spacetime's relational multiplicities take shape through the experiences of those who know the spaces of lower St. Bernard differently than I experience them today. For Gonzales, the meaning of the space of Dean's Seafood was defined by his experiences at the dance hall that was once there. Others were more explicit, for example, Lloyd Serigne's remark that he "sees what was." The "what was" that Serigne described to me is an idyllic paradisaic land of natural bounty, a vision held by other former residents of Delacroix and Yscloskey. Here the relationality of space appears in sharper focus, and recollections of Delacroix's physical landscape become intertwined with the *joie de vivre* of boyhood ignorance. Despite living in materially sparse conditions, Serigne remembered being "very poor, but happy. . . . We didn't have want for anything." A natural bounty of crabs caught in the bayou, wild fruit gathered from the surrounding woods, and an expansive terrain affording entertainment and play meant that back then one simply "didn't need much money." As Serigne remembered,

> it was a place that was wonderful for a child to grow up in because you had so many things to do. We had a lot of woods behind the houses. We'd go play in the woods all day long. They had different kinds of fruit—wild fruit that would grow different parts of the year like you know we had blackberries in the spring. We'd eat—we had what they call "may pops": it's a little green thing that grow on the vine—very sweet. And then later in the Autumn we had wild persimmon trees. We'd go play in the woods and the parents didn't have to worry about us![4]

Though our conversations were nominally about décimas, for Serigne it was this past ecology of Delacroix that sustained Isleño culture that I needed to grasp in order to understand the tradition. It wasn't the intimate spaces of décima composition or singing, the dance halls or barrooms of

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[4] Lloyd Serigne. Interview with author. March 8, 2015, St. Bernard

Delacroix’s past that defined the tradition for Serigne. Rather, it was the expansive ecological landscape that defined his own childhood memories of the place, which intersected only tangentially with the décimas that his parents’ generation sang. More than anything else Serigne emphasized the trees of Delacroix—since washed away by hurricanes and rising tides. These wild fruit trees, woods, and “big oak trees,” the stuff of childhood idyllic fantasy, lay at the heart of Serigne’s recollections of Delacroix.

Trees figure centrally here, as they do for many former residents of Delacroix and Yscloskey who recalled the changes that the old Isleño enclaves have born witness to in recent decades. Charles Robin’s emotional response to a photograph of Delacroix’s oak trees most potently conveyed to me something of the pain of reckoning with such a loss (see chapter four). In Anthony Fabra’s memories of growing up in Delacroix, an oak tree endures as the only remaining landmark of his childhood home in Delacroix, and his memories of Sico Morales’s décima singing were associated with the persimmon tree in Morales’s yard (see chapter four). Persimmon trees are an especially salient point of reference for my interlocutors. In addition to fig and other fruit trees, Thomas Gonzales remembered fondly the distinctive black persimmons of his youth in Delacroix: “those things were nothing but a chunk of sugar!”—sweeter than the more common orange-skinned varieties.

As the descendants of arboreal apes, it seems an understatement to write that humans hold a special relationship to trees. Trees embody perhaps some of the most fundamental and universal of human affordances (Gibson 1979): of climbing, taking a branch in hand as a weapon, tool, or building material, gathering nuts or fruit, or taking shelter under its branches. Trees act as powerful forces in human lives. They provide sustenance and shelter, food and lumber, shade and beauty. They are iconic of American places—from the fall colors of New England's deciduous woods, to the redwoods of California, the mangrove swamps and palm trees of Florida, and the majestic live oaks south Louisiana. A tree's roots can destroy a building's foundation, while a falling tree can render destruction much more violently. In South Louisiana, trees mitigate against erosion and subsidence, and the destruction of the vast acreages of hardwood bottomlands and cypress swamp that once buffered against high tides and hurricanes have left coastal communities like lower St. Bernard ever more susceptible to flooding and stronger storms as the forests have receded.

Trees might serve to trouble received notions of agency and distinctions between humans, animals, and plants. Though botanists have documented a world of plant behavior, in which plants perceive and react to their environments, there remains astonishingly little mechanistic understanding of these behaviors. The mechanism behind the behavior of "crown shyness," for example, whereby trees gracefully avoid their neighbors' canopies in dense plantings of a single species, is little understood, but might be described as nothing less than tree sociability (Esterluss 2017; Schröter, Härdtle, and Oheimb 2012; Uria-Diez and Pommerening 2017). Crown shyness is indicative of the much broader problem of plant behavior. Plants express behaviors nearly indistinguishable in kind from those of animals, though their mechanisms—in an organism without a nervous system or dedicated sensory organs—remain little understood, suggesting the pressing need to reckon with Jack C. Schultz's now famous observation that "plants are just very slow animals" (Schultz 2002).[5] Consider, for example, that plants appear to spend their lives listening to their environment and responding to what they hear (Appel and Cocroft 2014; Gagliano, et al. 2017).[6]

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[5] See alsoVan Loon (2016) for a synthesis of the scholarship and a compelling perspective on the issue.

In lower St. Bernard recollections of trees—as living things whose affordances of fruit for eating and sticks for playing with, and the spreading oak trees whose loss signified the destruction of Delacroix for Serigne and Robin—attest to conceptions of space not as a static landscape, or, in Massey's phrasing, a "discrete multiplicity of inert *things*, even one which is thoroughly interrelated" (2005, 107). Rather space seems here as "a heterogeneity of practices and *processes*, . . . an ongoing product of interconnections[,] . . . always unfinished and open" (ibid., 107). Rigid distinctions between subject and object begin to unravel in this space, giving way to what Helena Simonett refers to, via David Anderson (2000) as a "sentient ecology . . . which suggests relational identities, solidarities, and obligations between human and non-human entities" (Simonett 2016, 105). Assumptions about agency—that human subjects exclusively act on non-human objects—also gives way here to what James Rhys Edwards, following Karen Barad (2007), and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (2012), describes as a "'field of distributed agency' which humans share with a range of non-human actants: animals, forests, watersheds, corporations, infrastucture projects, treaties and international agreements, texts and works of art, etc" (Rhys Edwards 2016, 156). As Rhys Edwards observes, reckoning with such distributed agency entails problematizing the division "between the observing subject and the observed object" (ibid., 155). Relational multiplicity, sentient ecology, and distributed agency offer the possibility of imagining a theoretical framework with which to reckon with the experience of space in lower St. Bernard.

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[6] Even the much of the more quotidian world of animal sounds are little understood; consider that the sources of some of the loudest animal soundings in the ocean, as well the physiology of birdsong production, for example, remain shrouded in mystery (Fischer and Cory 2015, 60 and 73–74 respectively)

Bringing this framework to bear on the décima corpus itself, heretofore depicted as essentially polysemous and relational, reveals a coherent and specific notion of spacetime with its own affordances and limitations on human agency, resonating with conceptions of space explored above. Here in the song texts of historical décimas, trees, animals, larger-than-life individuals, boats, and a diverse world of other actors, act as powerful forces in the world. In turning to song texts, my ethnographic, historical, and hermeneutic interpretations flow into one another. In chapter three, a recognition of the historical forces shaping the genre in the 1970s and ‘80s drew my attention to the parallel changes in the song texts themselves as they became crystallized in the form of collections and recordings. Likewise, here my conversations with Isleños—nominally about décimas but often more about life in Delacroix and Yscloskey and the broader milieu which sustained the genre, leads me back to the song texts of historical décimas. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of *chronotope* provides an approach to these anlayses. Like the phoroptic lenses of chapter three, this is an additive process, revealing a finer ethnographic grain to the Masseyan conception of space discussed above and my own understanding, emergent in my ethnographic experience of space in lower St. Bernard.

The Décima’s Chronotope: “La vida de un jaibero”

“Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (Bakhtin 1981) periodizes the genre of the novel according to a typology of the genre’s chronotopes. Chronotope, the specific configurations of time and space within a genre or literary work, affords a mode of analysis that reveals a historically expansive definition of the genre, categorized into discrete types, each defined by a specific chronotope, while lending coherence to the genre as a whole. Applying such an approach to an analysis of the Isleño décima, informed by the conceptualization of space developed from my ethnographic fieldwork above, re-frames the genre, previously defined in this dissertation by a polysemy arising from qualities ascribed to it by various perspectives, as a literary genre whose coherence emerges from the specific ways space and time function in its song texts.

For Bakhtin the chronotope is central to the function of agency in literature—how and when characters are able to act is defined by the configurations of space and time in a given chronotope. Here the specific configurations of space and time define the possibilities and limits of human agency. For example, in what Bakhtin calls the “adventure-time” of the classical Greek chronotope, “an individual can be nothing other than *passive*, completely *unchanging* . . . to such an individual things can merely *happen*. He himself is deprived of any initiative. He is merely the physical subject of action” (ibid., 105). Regarding Isleño song texts, Bakhtin’s chronotopic mode of analysis and the notion of space as a processual multiple field of distributed agency come together to reveal a specific chronotope and attendant configuration of space, time, and agency. The décima’s chronotope is defined by a field in which agency is distributed in specific ways, among nonhuman forces and entities which serve to restrict the agency of human characters and define their relationship to time and space.

Returning, with this approach to the chronotope and understanding of space and time, to the décima texts discussed in previous chapters reveals a coherent and distinct chronotope of the genre. The configuration of space in décimas serves to limit human characters to tightly prescribed roles; when human beings undertake to transgress space their intentions are always thwarted by a chronotope in which animals, sea-life, and other forces transcend the normal parameters of space to act to undermine the agency of humans. In time, likewise, human characters are typically incapable of effecting substantial actions of any sort, while animals and other manifestations of a distributed agency are responsible for dramatic happenings. In “El trabjo del *welfare*” (see chapters one and four), for example, when the human residents of Delacroix undertake to transgress space and engage in new kinds of work up the road for the WPA, they’re stymied by incredible exterior and non-human forces. A thorn injures Titico’s foot; a mule threatens its driver’s life (whether with digestive gases or a well-placed kick); the sun causes sunstroke; a truck breaks down, immobilizing all. Here plants, animals, celestial bodies, and machines act to define a limited role for the human characters within a restrictive spacetime. The ethic here is embodied most powerfully in Juanita’s violent censuring for protesting the status quo, for transgressing space (walking up and down the road), and threatening action. This is an ethic of conformity, conformity to tightly prescribed and limited quotidian behavior forbidding any action that demonstrates initiative, transgresses the usual confines of daily life, or undertakes to cause a change in time.

“La décima de Wila” (chapter two) and “La barca de Boy Molero” (“La pesca del camarón”) (chapter three) likewise reveal the limits placed on human agency and the larger-than-life scale of the power of animals to act on their human neighbors in the genre’s chronotope. In the former, “Tío” Caco has the original idea of bringing a mule to till a plot of land accessible only by boat. Here, as in “El trabajo del welfare,” a mule acts to undermine the human character’s agency, sinking the boat; the message is driven home in the final lines, which state that Wila, in death, is now the captain of a steamship. In the latter, the titular boat captain seems to have a fantastical superhuman ability to transcend the constraints of time and space—his enormous boat spanning miles with a crew of hundreds. But the tone is ironic, irreverent, the point, it seems to me, is to show the ridiculousness of Molero's pretentious persona and shame him—a member of the powerful family of business people—for defying the ethos of egalitarianism, humility, and emplacement, and the ethic of conformity, prescribed by the décima's chronotope.

Thus from the décima's seeming impenetrability—MacCurdy described the songs as "incomprehensible to outsiders" (1975, 38)[7]— there might actually emerge a coherent understanding of the genre from an analysis of its chronotope. What's been described as the décima's allusive, impenetrable, localist, or incomprehensible qualities, might actually cohere through an analysis of the genre's chronotope: rather than fantastical or impenetrable, the actions of human and non-human agents conform to clear expectations according to a specific ethos and the ethic of conformity. Nothing happens because nothing *can* happen in this chronotope. A human agent may attempt to transgress space and act, but can only act within a field of distributed agency and a multiplicity of emergent spatialities, and the human characters' agency is undermined by powerful plants, animals, and features of the environment that act as subjects on them.

This is not to deny that the Isleño décima is a richly diverse and heterogeneous genre, as this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, defined not by stringent categories drawn from without but emerging from the innumerable individual perspectives of those who've known the genre in various modalities over the decades. And certainly not every décima conforms unproblematically to the chronotope as I envision it here. "Setecientos setentaisiete" (see chapter two), for example, seems to embody an entirely distinct configuration of space-time, though this particular example seems an outlier in other ways as well (see Armistead 1992b, 27). A few such exceptions aside, throughout the corpus, the chronotope described above seems to consistently structure the genre according to these specific configurations of space and time. The décima's chronotope thus reflects an ethic of conformity; those who act out of place, exhibit egoism, or undertake any actions in which the quotidian boundaries of space and time are transgressed, face dire consequences effected by a powerful field of distributed agency. Décimas, then, are not just non-narrative, they're *anti-narrative*; time is stationary for the human characters in décimas because nothing *can* happen according to the genre's chronotope.

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[7] "Incomprensibles a los extranos".

"La vida de un jaibero," the popular décima which Duggie Robin had framed on his wall with a photograph of his father (see chapter four), embodies one of the classic subject matters of Isleño décimas, what Armistead described as "humorous commentary on local activities and the rigors faced by local people in wresting a difficult existence from their natural surroundings" (1992, 24). Armistead description of the song fit neatly into this typology:

> In . . . *La vida de un jaibero* (*The Crab Fisherman's Lament*), we see the poor crabber searching in vain for a place to lay his lines in an over-fished bay or half frozen by February winds along some desolate shore. But characteristically there is no self-pity here, for while the singer knowingly evokes the crabber's sufferings, he also realizes that the ability not to take oneself too seriously can overcome more troubles than any amount of lamentation. so the hardworking, ill-paid crabber is seen to become involved in various humorous mishaps and what might have been tragic ends in laughter. This splendid capacity for humor, in the face of an often hostile and none too generous environment, seems to be a crucial ingredient of traditional poetry as it has developed in St. Bernard. (Ibid., 24)

In the context of the genre's chronotope discussed above, however, an alternate reading might emerge. It suggests that, rather than "the ability not to take oneself too seriously," it's the recognition of the limited human agency afforded by the décima's chronotope, and the powerful forces acting in this field of distributed agency, that are the central lessons here. Indeed, Armistead's suggestion that "the ability to not take oneself too seriously" can *overcome* troubles doesn't ring true here—in the end, the crabber dies. It's an acceptance of the crabbers' lack of agency rather than the ability to overcome hardship that seems to be the lesson here:

"La vida de un jaibero"	"The Life of a Crabber"
Yo me arrimé a la costa	I went close to shore
buscándome el abriguito.	seeking shelter
Sentí una vos que decía	I felt a voice which said,
—y aquí estoy heladito.—	"and here I am frozen."
y era un pobre jaibero	And it was a poor crabber,
pescando en el mes de febrero.	fishing in the month of February.
Y salió calando,	And he was laying out his lines,
derecho pa la otro lado.	straight to the other side.
se encontro otro jaibero	another crabber was found,
otro pobre digrasiado.	another poor wretch.
Tó se dice el jaibero:	The crabber says to himself,
—¡Maldita sea el mes de febrero!—	"Damned be the month of February!"
Di una lata a la otra,	I struck one pot to the other;
di un pobre jaibero.	I struck a poor crabber.
Se fue a tierra a corta paja	He went ashore to cut straw
y le cayó un avispero.	and a bees' nest fell on him.
Tó se dice el jaibero:	The crabber says to himself,
—¡Maldita sea el mes de febrero!—	"Damned be the month of February!"
Parece que tenía rabia	He seemed to have rabies
se volcó de cuatros patas	he turned on all fours
y el compañero que ha visto eso	And his partner who has seen that
le cayo atras con la lata	fell back against the pot.
Tó se dice el jaibero:	The crabber says to himself,
—¡Maldita sea el mes de febrero!—	"Damned be the month of February!"
Tenía pelo largo	He had long hair
y senredado en los mangles	and it got tangled in the mangroves
y no pudia salir	and he couldn't go out
pa recorrer sus palangres.	to go over his lines.
Tó se dice el jaibero:	The crabber says to himself,
—¡Maldita sea el mes de febrero!—	"Damned be the month of February!"
Cuando se muere un jaibero	
que nadie le ponga luto,	
porque se va a descansa	

este pobrecito difunto.
Era un pobre jaibero,
pescando en el mes de febrero.[8]

When the crabber dies
let no one mourn him,
because he’s going to rest
this poor deceased one.
He was a poor trapper,
fishing in the month of February.

Here the human characters conform to the ethic of conformity prescribed by the décima’s chronotope; no one is acting out of bounds, attempting to effect inappropriate agency or stepping outside of their expected roles. Rather, the titular crabber is going through the quotidian but arduous routines of crab fishing, and the agentive forces in his environment make themselves apparent in forceful and painful ways. The effect of Perez’s strident and meandering delivery of the lilting triple-meter tune seems to reinforce the utter inevitability of the wretched crabber’s fate.[9] The agency of other ecological forces remain potent here, restricting the human crabbers from moving through space, and going close to shore. Here the cold, the tide and wind, bees, and mangrove trees act to constrain the miserable trapper; whose only option to escape his suffering lies in dying. Even in death, though, the lesson seems to be the acceptance of the inevitability of suffering and death (in good humor, of course)—not the act of mourning.

In “El mosco y el agua alta,” (Armistead 1992, 27–28; Perez 2004, track 9) a letter is received from a bank in New Orleans, and the narrator learns that a loan has come due. There’s no possibility of new initiative taken to resolve the situation. The appropriate response, rather, according to the genre's chronotope, in the face of agentive forces such as mosquitoes, high water, and the potential for bad fishing and trapping seasons, is to continue working each season, at fishing and trapping, and wait for the next season. Perhaps, though without certainty, a family member will help out. While the impersonal bank has the power to demand repayment of the loan, and the animals and fishes the narrator relies on for his livelihood might withhold their bounty, the narrator can only respond with passive perseverance and the lighthearted lament, "¡Estos sí que son fatigas!" [These sure are toils!] If there's anything that will save them, it will come from the established roles and models of behavior according to the chronotope's ethic of conformity—the luck of a fruitful fishing season or the help of a family member.

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[8] Transcribed from a video recording of Irvan Perez appearing on “Rendez-vous des Cajuns” KRVS radio show, 13 November 1984, accessed at the Center for Louisiana Studies Archive, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, accession number LI2.017; my translation adheres closely to Armistead’s (1992, 30-31). See also two versions recorded by Armistead (1992, 30-31), both entitled “La vida de un jaibero,” as well as Perez’s (2004) recording and MacCurdy’s (1974, 101) (entitled “El pobre jaibero”).

[9] See Israel J. Katz’s transcription of another performance by Perez in (Armistead 2007, 238). Katz described Perez’s rendition of this song, with its meandering modal center, as “enigmatic,” in “Spanish Language and Folkliterature of the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish (Louisiana) (1987) Vols. 1 and 2” (pp. 416–417) (accessed at Annie Laurie Armistead’s house in July, 2015, in process at UC Davis Special Collections), the original report written by Armistead for the Jean Lafitte National Park Service.

"Los pajaritos" (Armistead 1992, 37) sees an owl crossing fantastical distances, flying from Florissant, Louisiana, to Torreón, Mexico. Speaking to the narrator, the owl complains of the harsh retribution received for eating hens—a boy has been killing owls with his slingshot. Rather than praising the boy for his initiative, the song turns to subtly chastise him for his pastime, which, though it would have been useful during the lean war years, is seen as frivolous today. Here an owl demonstrates larger-than-life abilities to speak and transgress great expanses of space, and its behavior—eating hens—doesn't deserve reprimand. The boy's actions, however, seem to warrant censure; he's stepped outside of the acceptable parameters of action, the ethic of conformity prescribed by the genre's chronotope.

The Chronotope's Historicity: "Pachín y la jaiba grande"

Human characters face censure, if not disastrous consequences, when they demonstrate initiative, or attempt to transcend the space of lower St. Bernard outside of the ethic of conformity prescribed by the décima’s chronotope. Animals, on the other hand, are able to transcend space and time in fantastical proportions, and appear as the most powerful agents in the configurations of space and time of the décima. In “Marcelino y la trucha” (Armistead 1992, 31–32), A trout is caught whose length spanned miles across the parish, blocking roads (and thus limiting the ability of human characters to move through space), while a similarly out-sized catfish vomits up “cuatros negros, cuatros blancos, y treinta sacos de arroz” [four blacks, four whites, and thirty sacks of rice] (Armistead ibid., 32). Here human characters are rendered completely impotent, unable to manage fishes of fantastical proportion. Human beings, along with sacks of rice, are rendered as the objects of the similarly fantastical expulsions of the catfish’s violent digestive system.

As Armistead observed, “tall tale[s],” featuring larger-than-life marine animals are a common theme in the genre, a feature “perhaps not uncharacteristic of a community of fishermen” (Armistead 1992, 24). In “Pachín y la jaiba grande” a crabber, Pachín, catches a fantastically large crab, which drags the hapless fisher across the parish, thwarting the titular human character’s efforts to subdue the monstrous crustacean:

“Pachín y la jaiba grande”	“Pachín and the Big Crab”
Pachín cogió y una jaiba, que daba temor de verlas. Esta es la jaiba mas grande que ha venido a la ribera.	Pachín caught a crab that was scary just to look at. That’s the biggest crab that ever came to the riverbank.
Se le enredó del palangre, la ves que se vomitaba quinientos sacos de iñervo, sin contar otras carnadas.	It got hung up on the line and proceeded to vomit up five hundred sacks of gristle, not counting other bait.
Se le enredó del palangre; Pachín le tenía miedo,	It got hung up on the line; Pachín was scared of it;

de ver una jaiba tan grande	to see such a giant crab
en un semejante enredo.	in such an awful tangle.
Pachín, como un atrevisto,	Pachín, who was bold,
trató cogerlo con el salabre.	tried to chatch it in his net.
La jaiba dio un sacudión;	The crab gave a tug
lo tiró a los Canarnwares.	and pulled him to Black Duck Pass.
Pachín se va hacer un cerco	Pachín’s going to make a pen
y para encercá su jaiba.	to pen up his crab:
—Aquél que la quiera vé,	“Whoever wants to see it
no la ve si no me paga.—	won’t see it unless he pays.”
Chongo estaba asorado,	Chongo was awfully scared;
que ya lo hasI perdido.	he’d given him up for dead.
Y lo vino ye alcontrár	And he finally caught up with him
mas hallar Puerto Escondido.	out beyond Hidden Bay
Cobró medio por los chicos;	He charged a nickel for the kids
dice sentavos por los grandes.	and ten cents for grownups:
—Me tengo que desquitar	“I’ve got to make up for
el destroso mis palangres.	the destruction of my lines!”
Y la jaiba esta en la costa;	Now the crab’s on shore;
camos a dejarla quieta;	let’s leave it alone;
vamos a la Isla buscar genter,	let’s get people from the Island
pa llevarla a la marqueta.	to help take it to market.[10]

The décima’s chronotope—of a restrictive spacetime, ethic of conformity, and distributed agency—is revealed here through close analysis of what happens—or doesn’t happen—in this song text. The crab demonstrates fantastical dimensions and power, dragging Pachín twenty miles (see ibid., 33, note 17) across the parish, vomiting up incredible quantities of bait. It’s important to note that the text leaves Pachín with tangled lines and stranded at Black Duck Pass. The idea of making a pen for the crab and charging admission—actions that would seem antithetical to the genre’s chronotope—are speculative. It’s not implied that Pachín was actually paid any money or was able to untangle his lines or return home—the second half of the text reads rather as speculative ideas that Pachín had to try to cope with his situation, not solutions that were actually effected. And indeed, such undertakings of human agency would be unlikely to succeed in this chronotope.

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[10] Adapted from Armistead (1992, 32-33). I’ve altered Armistead’s phonetic spellings in favor of standard othography; the translation is quoted verbatim.

Chronotope, as Bakhtin makes clear, is not a disavowal of history; rather it's a mode of analysis that serves to illuminate the very historicity of genre. As with the décima repertory in general, "Pachín y la jaiba grande" is not a single text fixed in time, as its representation above might suggest. Rather, it has endured in as many conceptions, meanings, and versions as there are individuals who continue to locate meaning in the genre. In the mid-1990s, Dorothy Benge, then the president of the Los Isleños Heritage Society as well as of the Delacroix Corporation (see chapter three), developed an educational presentation, in which she and Bertin Estevez, another leader of the society, performed a dramatized historical skit presenting Isleño culture and history for school children and educational programs across the state and around the country. A DVD recording of the skit is available for sale in the Los Isleños museum's gift shop.[11] Benge and Estevez appear in folkloric costumes from the Canary Islands, and play the roles of two historical colonists who arrived in St. Bernard during the initial eighteenth-century colonization effort.

In their roles as the "ghosts" of Maria Esteves y Rodriguez and Pablo Estevez, two historical persons and members of the original group of colonists from the Canary Islands, Benge and Estevez dramatize a historical narrative beginning with the Guanches of pre-Hispanic Canary Islands, through the Isleños' colonization of St. Bernard, Isleños' contributions to

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[11] DVD entitled "Who Are the Isleños?" recorded at the Iberville Parish Museum. No date or other metadata appears on the DVD, but conversations on the video suggest that it was probably recorded in 2009.

American history—in the roles they played in the Galvez expedition to British Florida during the Revolutionary War and in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815—and finally the Isleños' contributions to the state's cultural heritage, in the form of the Spanish architecture of New Orleans, foodways, and crafts. Benge's and Estevez's project is one of reclamation of Louisiana's marginalized Spanish heritage embodied by the Isleños of St. Bernard. While "everyone's heard of" the Acadians and Louisiana's French heritage, the Isleños, Estevez explains in the skit, "are like lost pages in history."

It was through their décimas, as Benge narrates in the skit, that Isleños were able to preserve their history. Benge offers the following explanation of the genre:

> Our songs were unique and very important to us, because you see we were not an educated people and most of us were illiterate. It was through our storytelling and our décimas that we were able to preserve our history. A décima, for those of you who may not know, is a narrative, ten-stanza song or poem. They were very popular in Spain as far back as the Middle Ages, and they still are today, especially in rural areas. And our Isleño versions, just as theirs, tell tales of joyous occasions, sad laments, and oftentimes hilarious exaggerations much like your American Paul Bunyan.[12]

Benge and Esteves perform a dramatized adaptation of "Pachín y la jaiba grande." Benge urges Estevez's character to "tell them my favorite décima of all, the one about your cousin Paco." To humorous effect, Benge's character exitedly interrupts Estevez to "tell the décima" herself. "Pachín y la jaiba grande" represented the décima most suited for Benge's vision of the genre as part of her work to spread awareness of Isleño culture and history in the context of the heritage revival. In this rendition, "Pachín" becomes Pablo Estevez's cousin, "Paco," and the song text becomes spoken dialogue:

> **Maria:** Pablo, tell them my favorite décima of all, the one about your cousin Paco. [*To the audience*:] Listen, you're going to like this.
> **Pablo:** My cousin Paco was an Isleño fisherman—

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[12] See the introduction of this dissertation for a discussion of such definitions of the genre.

> **Maria:** Oh and what a fisherman he was! [*audience laughter as Maria, in her excitement, interrupts Pablo to tell the story herself*] One day he was out fishing and he catches this crab. And this was absolutely *the* biggest crab that he had ever seen in his entire life. In fact this crab was so big that he couldn't get it in his boat, so what did he do [*turning to Pablo*]?
> **Pablo:** My cousin, he jumps overboard right away, and—
> **Maria:** And [*laughter as Pablo is interrupted again*] he starts wrestling with this crab! And he is *wrestling* with it. And he is out there, *alone*. He could have *drowned* and no one would have known the better of it. But finally, exhausted, he gets it on shore. [*to Pablo*:] And then what?
> **Pablo:** Once he gets it to shore, he's—
> **Maria:** He's got another problem [*laughter*], you see. You see the crab is too big to fit in his oxcart to bring it to market to sell it; and he didn't have a pot big enough to cook it in to feed his family. So, [*to Pablo*] what happens next?
> **Pablo**: My cousin, resourceful Isleños fisherman [*a sideways glance to Maria, who's letting Pablo speak for a change, elicits laughter*] he builds a fence around it and he charges people money to come and see it!
> **Maria:** Pablo, I love to hear you tell that story. [*laughter*]
> **Pablo**: Sí, Maria.
> **Maria:** And, you know people, think about it for a minute. We Isleños may well have had the very first zoo in Louisiana, because of Pablo's cousin Paco and his crab! [*laughter*]

The transformation of "Pachin y la jaiba grande" in Benge's and Estevez's performance is manifold and complex. Sung verse is transformed into dramatized spoken dialogue, the larger-than-life dimensions of the crab become a more realistic, human-sized crab which the titular character is able to wrestle on shore. The localist frame is refocused on Benge's and Estevez's reclamatory historical project, in joking that the Isleños were responsible for the first zoo in Louisiana. The anachronistic setting is jarring: the twentieth-century commercial crab industry is overlaid with nineteenth-century market economics and set in the eighteenth-century colonial period.

More profound than these changes to the song as embodied in Benge's and Estevez's dramatization, however, is the change to the song's chronotope that are apparent here. While the song text, as I argued above, embodied the ethic of conformity of the genre's chronotope, where the crab exhibits fantastical powers to transcend space and time and act on the relatively helpless human character, in Benge's and Esteves's rendering, it's Pablo who acts on the crab, wrestling it to shore, containing it in a fence, and actually effecting (rather than merely suggesting) his novel idea of charging admission to view the crab. Thus, while an analysis of the corpus's chronotope reveals specific configurations of space and time that unify the genre, embodying an ethic of conformity and revealing a field of distributed agency, the chronotope remains essentially relational, mutable, and polysemous. Benge and Estevez turn the genre's chronotope on its head here, where the human agents act in heroic fashion to conquer and contain the natural world around them. The genre, then, like the chronotope it embodies, remains essentially historical, dynamic, polysemous, and relational. Just as the more superficial features of the songs—the intimate, salty lyrics, or the inwardly directed and allusive perspective—were subject to transformation in the context of the Isleño heritage revival (see chapters two and three), so could the essential qualities of the chronotope—the specific configurations of space and time that seemed to reveal a broader coherence to the genre—be inverted to suit new contexts, audiences, and politics.

* * *

Throughout my time in lower St. Bernard, the tragic aspects of this place seemed to demand attention. This is a place that seems both singular in its transformation resulting from the violent effects of Louisiana's ecological crisis, as well as representative of circumstances that many coastal areas will face in the coming years and decades as sea levels rise and tropical cyclones increase in frequency and intensity. But it was my experience at the Boat Blessing and interview with Thomas Gonzales—the striking contrast between the essential meaning of the space of Dean's Seafood for Gonzales and myself—that prompted the reading and reflection that would lead to the understanding of space related above. It was only after reflecting on those experiences and my reading in human geography, ecomusicology, and botany that the implications for my understanding of the décima's chronotope began to take shape. In other words, I arrived at my analysis of these historical song texts first through my ethnographic experiences in St. Bernard (that seemed only to intersect tangentially with my object of study); only later reflecting on the décima repertory and my reading of Bakhtin did a coherent understanding of space and time in lower St. Bernard—in the spaces of past décima singing as well as in the texts of historical décimas themselves—emerge.

Even as the genre seemed to begin to cohere into a discretely defined body of literature defined by its chronotope, the essential relational polysemy of the genre reappeared in the form of Dorothy Benge's dramatization of "Pachín y la jaiba grande," to remind me that the genre's essential features remained very much as the "mire" it seemed when I first encountered it (see the introduction to this dissertation). The décima's chronotope and the ethic of conformity it embodied is indeed nothing more than the meaning that one person (myself) locates in the genre, as contingent and mutable as the other features of the genre discussed in previous chapters. The transformation of "Pachín y la jaiba grande," mirrors the transformational process depicted in chapters two and three, and, indeed, suggests the possibility of a much broader spatial analysis of that transformation with wider implications. In the epilogue that follows, I imagine a future for the Isleño décima, a future that emerges from the broader spatial context of the historical narrative of this dissertation.

Epilogue

“Historical thought is a river into which none can step twice.”

—R. G. Collingwood ([1946] 1971, 248)

In the introduction, I offered an exposition of the first half of the dissertation’s title, *recollecting*, a word meant to summon the diffuse and emergent approaches I’ve taken to my object of study, born of diverse perspectives on Isleño décimas, the object of study of this dissertation. The chapters that followed put this approach into practice, with chapter four offering its most focused application and discussion. The latter part of my title, however, which describes Isleño décimas as “lost,” remains uninterrogated and, indeed, problematic. Has the Isleño décima been lost, and what does that mean? This is a fundamentally political question, central, in my view, not only to the genre’s history, but also to its future.

The question emerged from my conversations with Isleños in St. Bernard for whom décimas remain meaningful points of reference (see chapter four). For many of my interlocutors, recognizing the “loss” of the tradition was their immediate response to my interest in the genre. There’s a powerful tragic dimension to this view. In the last thirteen years the Isleños of lower St. Bernard have experienced the collective tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, losing family members, friends, pets, homes, and possessions in the storm. The following years bore witness to a recovery of sorts, evidenced, for example, by the resurgence of the annual Isleños Fiesta recounted in the introduction, but the villages of lower St. Bernard, Delacroix, Wood Lake, Reggio, Ysckolskey, and Shell Beach, have endured only as fragmentary shells of the vital enclaves that once embodied the heart of Isleño culture. Within a decade of the storm’s destruction, the last décima singers passed away and, with them, their unique performance practices and individual repertories of songs. As the last generation of Isleño Spanish speakers turns eighty and ninety years old, the loss of the unique dialect of Isleño Spanish as a living language seems imminent as well.

This understanding of the tragedy of this recent history and local specificity of the Isleño décima is intertwined my own positionality. As a scholar of Louisiana, it's the singular culture and history of southeast Louisiana and its rich musical heritage that drew me to the subject of this dissertation and conditions my understanding of it. There's a contrast here with Armistead's or MacCurdy's perspectives as scholars of Spanish, contextualizing a local case first and foremost within a world a pan-Hispanic tradition. Likewise, Isleños themselves, seeking to define the parameters of their own identities in the world, have often seen things very differently than I have. The duality of the early heritage revival, where décimas were at once representative of a unique local culture *and* ancient retentions from the Canary Islands, has given way to a nearly totalizing emphasis on the latter aspect, what one might call the *instantialist view*, wherein Isleño culture in Louisiana is imagined as an instantiation of a pure originary Canary Islands culture. Indeed, the instantialist view has offered compelling alternatives to the tragic narrative described above.

Here Isleño décimas are essentially indistinguishable from the ten-line-based eponymous genre as it exists in the Canary Islands today (see the introduction); nothing much has been lost but a local instance of a much broader tradition. Isleño décimas, in the instantialist view, are still sung in St. Bernard—in the form of "true" décimas performed by the folkloric musicians from the Canary Islands who visit the museum complex for the annual fiesta. Accordingly the value of

Isleño décimas lies in their ancient provenance, not their local specificity. Thus it’s the old romances that endured in the Louisiana corpus that are valued over distinctive local and intimate songs composed in twentieth-century Louisiana, with their influences from Anglo-American and Louisiana French traditions (see chapter one).

Its this understanding of Isleño culture *qua* Canary Islands retention, in my view, that undergirded the Isleño heritage revival as its taken shape since the history of the early revival depicted in chapters two and three. As the distinctive language and music of the Isleños are lost, resources are poured into architectural history, the museum, trips to the Canary Islands, and an ideology that erases Isleño distinctiveness in favor of a unitary connection with the Canary Islands. While many of my interlocutors—individuals with direct connections to the tradition—assert that there was something unique and specific to the Isleño décima that’s now been lost, the instantialist view, it seems to me, propogated by powerful figures in the Isleño heritage revival, has held the greatest sway in shaping the current state of Isleño heritage.

Isleño heritage today is embodied in ongoing exchanges with the Canary Islands, material folk culture such as foodways, boat building, and decoy carving, and a museum campus filled with beautifully restored historical buildings, transported at great expense from around the parish. Visits to the Canary Islands beginning in the 1970s brought Spanish folklore to St. Bernard. And today the annual fiesta brings folkloric troupes from various parts of the Canary Islands to perform. And Isleños have adopted contemporary Canary Islands folklore as *their* patrimony. This took such diverse forms as the establishment of a *Tenerife* lace-making club, wearing Canary Islands folkloric costumes at official functions, staging *timple* concerts by professional musician from New Orleans, tours by visiting Canary Islands folkloric troupes, and the formation of an Isleño dance troupe performing Canary Islands folkloric repertory—all couched in the language of "recovery" of once-lost patrimony. Here Isleño Spanish is seen as a pure anachronistic retention of eighteenth-century Canary Islands Spanish. The heritage sustained at the museum is eternal, safe within the protective levee insulating it from the ravages faced by the outlying villages. The instantialist view reclaims a pure and vital Canary Islands heritage.

Here Isleño Spanish was *the* authentic eighteenth-century Canary Islands Spanish; even if most Isleños today might be monolingual English speakers, the mother tongue is carried on uninterrupted in the Canary Islands. And Isleño décimas are nothing more than less authentic versions of the ancient décimas and romances sustained in the Canary Islands since the Middle Ages, still sung there and once a year in St. Bernard at the fiesta. While the old Isleño hamlets gradually wash away, a more authentic version of Isleño patrimony endures at the museum, within the protective barrier of the levee system. And the real home of Isleño culture lies, Eden-like and eternal, across the ocean in the mountainside villages of the Canary Islands.

It should be clear at this point that I disagree with the instantialist view. This is meant, however, as a constructive, not dismissive, critique. The awakening that accompanied the early heritage revival in the 1970s gave meaning and identity to a people who had had little sense of their place in their world. The instantialist view lent coherence to a unique culture that previously had only murky understandings of its origins and history. In the 1970s and '80s, it emerged as a complex multi-vocal duality; today, the rather more totalizing instantialist view offers a sense of hope and ownership in the face of inconceivable tragedy and loss.

There's still room, however, for the more complex understanding of Isleño identity that emerged in the preceding chapters of this dissertastion. Charles Robin, for example, who expressed in chapter four that he and his siblings "knew who we were," because of the décimas and stories that his family sang and told each other, distinctly local and personal traditions passed on from generation to generation. This view is also valid, and one in which the décima, as the embodiment of a unique local tradition, is central. Indeed, it's easy to imagine another future for Isleño heritage, one with décimas at its center. These two visions are not mutually exclusive, as the history told in the previous chapters makes clear—indeed I would suggest that *both* are needed, ongoing exchanges with the Canary Islands *and* a renewed recognition and valuing of the uniqueness of local Isleño culture. And other visions of a future Isleño heritage have historically coincided with the instantialist view. In the early 1990s, Spanish classes were held at the Isleños museum, and efforts were undertaken to pass on the Isleño dialect to younger (aged under fifty years old in 1991) semi-speakers (Coles 1993, 128). Irvan Perez, for his part, tried to teach décimas to younger Isleños and encouraged others to compose new décimas (Lestrade 2004, 448).

What's lost can be found again. Décimas, it seems to me, are unlikely to return as quotidian musical practice in St. Bernard. But music can mean in many different ways, as I've tried to demonstrate in the preceding chapters. The boxes of tapes and papers that I pored over in summer of 2015 in Samuel G. Armistead's study have since been catalogued and stored in the climate-controlled facilities of the Special Collections department of the University of California, Davis library. The finding aid is now available on the open-access Online Archive of California. Copies of Armistead's field tapes remain available at the Louisiana Collection at the Earl K.

Long Library Special Collections department at the University of New Orleans. The other main body of Isleño ethnographic recordings, the Frank Fernandez Collection, recorded mostly by Isleño culture bearers themselves in the 1970s and ‘80s, is housed at Nunez Community College.[1] As of this writing, all of these audio and video recordings remain in analogue form, in varying states of decay. There are also countless personal collections of tapes recorded by the last generation of décima singers, passed on to subsequent generations of Isleños as familial patrimony.

An alternative to the dominant vision of the future offered by the instantialist view discussed above, it seems to me, would begin with these recordings. A digital, online, open-access archive of Isleño ethnographic recordings could afford a point of reference for those interested in engaging with décimas and other forms of Isleño oral tradition. Metadata that include a range of information such as transcriptions and translations—techniques that were central to the collecting paradigm at the heart of this dissertation’s historical narrative—would contribute to the materials’ accessibility and relevance to wider audiences.

Isleño décimas are as relevant and important today as ever. At a time of increasing xenophobia and racism in the United States, these songs serve as a reminder of Louisiana’s long history as a multicultural crossroads, a rich local culture built on a diverse regional milieu and connections around the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean basin. They embody a contestable, multivocal history, and trouble the dominant stories told about the purity of settler colonialism, about the Trappers’ War, or the glorification of war more broadly. Indeed, décimas evince what I see as a consistently anti-war ethic. Where the glorification of the violence of wars has taken over recent representations of Isleño heritage (in the context of an increasingly war-loving popular culture) décimas that address the subject of war focused on the human suffering that resulted from war, shaming the political leaders responsible for the conflicts. The ethic of conformity discussed in the previous chapter offers an alternative to the neoliberal ethic of individual initiative and industry, economic growth at any costs, and the arbitrary power of the state and its representatives. Here, rather, is a radically anti-elitist egalitarian ethos. Décimas also embody an aesthetic of individual expression—revealing the value of individual perspectives embodied in rough-hewn individualistic compositions. Imagining a future for the décima, in which individuals can discover the genre for themselves in all its contestable polysemy, opens possibilities for imagining a different future for lower St. Bernard. The unfolding disaster of Louisiana's coastal crisis could be further mitigated and reversed, through an end to oil and gas exploration and extraction, and large-scale engineering efforts aimed at restoring the coast. The march toward irreversible global climate change—the cause of the rising sea levels and stronger storms that pose the most immediate threat to south Louisiana—and the end of human civilization it entails, could still be reversed, beginning with a radical shift in the political landscape.

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[1] It’s not clear as of this writing if Raymond MacCurdy’s field tapes from the 1940s and ‘50s have been preserved.

The epigraph by R. G. Collingwood, above, is a recognition of history's Heraclitean contingency. The history told in the preceding chapters is the product of my own specific historical imagination, encompassing my individual perspective, experiences, and values. The next person to step into the river of the the décima's history will bring with them their own perspective in time and space; and the flowing waters they find will be different than those that I've waded in. It's my hope that this dissertation will inspire interest in and discussion of Isleño décimas. Many will disagree with the central arguments of this dissertation. I hope, above all, that they will be inspired to take their own step into the waters of this history, listen to décimas, read their texts, sing these tunes, reflect on and talk about those experiences, and find their own meaning in this tradition.

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