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“Thy Kingdom Come”: Catholicism and the Nueva Canción, 1966-1982

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“Thy Kingdom Come”: Catholicism and the *Nueva Canción*, 1966-1982



Honors Thesis

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Department: Music

Advisor: Samuel Dorf, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Within Latin America’s tumultuous political atmosphere during the 1960s through the 1980s, a grassroots musical genre called the *Nueva Canción* emerged. Meaning “new song,” it sought to unify the poor and marginalized through a combination of folk influences, indigenous musical styles, and politically-charged lyrics. Although they achieved similar commercial success to U.S. contemporaries such as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Joan Baez, the *folkloristas* [folksingers] of the *Nueva Canción* often incorporated references to and elements of Catholic liturgical practice. Considering the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the advent of a Latin American Liberation Theology, the time was ripe for cultural revolution by the poor, for the poor. While military dictatorships and civil wars ravaged many Central and South American countries, many of those who were suffering sought refuge in Christian Base Communities. These small groups of lay Catholics would meet regularly to discuss the week’s Scripture, to sing and pray together, and most importantly, to heal. The unorthodox, yet explicitly religious, nature of these groups offered opportunities for non-liturgical and popular music to enter a paraliturgical setting. In this project, I contextualize the *Nueva Canción* within this distinct intersection of the sacred, the secular, and the genre’s specific mission of social justice. Considering the Catholic Church’s significant influence in Latin America, by studying the surrounding social and political context and by examining the lyrics and performance practices of the *Nueva Canción* from a theological perspective, I interpret how Catholic theologies and liturgical practices affected the reception of this unique genre.

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Introduction

An early autumn chill cut through my jacket as we cut down the sidewalk toward the church. Standing about six inches shorter than me, somehow Dr. Tracey Jaffe still managed to keep a brisk pace that left me gasping for breath. A historian and Latin Americanist, she was one of the faculty leading this small study abroad group in Buenos Aires in the summer of 2015. Ecstatic about this late-night trip, she animatedly gave context to the event we were about to witness. Dr. Jaffe was bringing another student and me to a Catholic Mass, however she assured us that this was no ordinary service.

Located in the *barrio* of San Cristóbal, Iglesia Santa Cruz was once the site of an atrocious violation of human rights. In December of 1977, French nuns Alice Domon and Léonie Duquet were kidnapped from the church and then taken to the *Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA)¹, where they were tortured for seven days and eventually executed. The two women had been affiliated with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a protest movement started by mothers of the “disappeared” [*los desaparecidos*] during Argentina’s “Dirty War” [*La Guerra Sucia*] (1976-1983). These mothers, grandmothers, and aunts would gather in the plaza on Thursday afternoons and keep vigil for their missing loved ones. Along with their status as Catholic nuns, Sr. Alice’s and Sr. Léonie’s involvement with the left-wing *Madres* marked them as potential threats to the omniscient military dictatorship.

¹ [“Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics,” or “Navy Petty-Officers School of Mechanics,”] ESMA was originally an educational center for the Argentine Navy. However, it was used a secret, illegal detainment facility during Argentina’s “Dirty War” from 1976-1983. The largest detention center of its kind, tens of thousands of kidnapped young “subversives” were taken there to be tortured and executed. Today, ESMA has been converted into a museum called *Espacio para la Memoria y para la Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* [“Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights”].

However clandestine these government operations were, the two Sisters' deaths would not be forgotten. In front of Iglesia Santa Cruz stood their tombstones, decorated with roses and carnations. As we walked into the church, I immediately noticed that the pews had been uprooted and rotated away from the altar and toward the left side of the church. Situated in a circle with the altar in the center, the parish justifies this change, explaining that "Jesus taught us to surround a table, sharing like brothers and sisters in a stance of equality."² At the front of the church, two large, hand-painted banners hung on either side of the original altar (see Figure 1). Scrawled in broad, black and red lettering, the tapestry on the left read "We, passionate pilgrims, choose life, walking with the crucified of today,"³ while the banner on the right proclaimed Pope Francis's theme for the 48th World Day of Peace in 2014: "No longer slaves, but brothers and sisters."⁴

Surprised and confused by the unorthodox arrangement, the other student and I looked around in bewilderment while Dr. Jaffe excitedly whispered that these alterations indicated "just how left-wing" the parish was. We found seats at the end of a pew toward the back as congregants shuffled around to greet one another before the 6pm Mass began. The service flew by as I clung to my then modest Spanish skills in an attempt to understand the round, rapid-fire *castellano* of the priest. Each congregant held a Mass program listing the psalm and lyrics for the hymnody. When the cantor announced before communion that we would be singing a song called "*Gracias a la vida*," Dr. Jaffe leaned over and breathlessly repeated how "left-wing" this parish was. Eternally confused, I

² "Jesús nos enseñó a estar alrededor de una mesa compartiendo como hermanos, en un pie de igualdad" from laiglesiasantacruz.blogspot.com (accessed 10 February 2018).

³ ["Nosotros, peregrinos pasionistas, elegimos la vida, caminando con los crucificados de hoy."]

⁴ ["¡Ya nunca más esclavos, sino hermanos!"] English text official translation per the Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

wondered how a church could have a political affiliation, let alone how a hymn could signify such a stance. I would later discover that this was not a liturgical piece, but instead one of the most famous songs the *Nueva Canción* [New Song], a genre of socially-conscious folk music popular from the 1960s through the 1980s. Confronted by this contradiction – a non-liturgical piece sung in a liturgical setting – I sought to uncover the conditions that could allow such an impossibility.



Figure 1. Banners at the front of La Iglesia Santa Cruz (Photo by Roberto Fiadone)

That enigmatic Mass in La Iglesia Santa Cruz sparked the idea behind this project. Through musicological analysis and an interdisciplinary literature review in the fields of performance studies, musicology, women's and gender studies, and theology, I situate

Latin American protest and folk music from the 1960s through the 1980s within the political and religious movements of the period. In this introduction, I will first contextualize the political backdrop of the *Nueva Canción*, focusing on Argentina's "Dirty War" (1976-1983), and the 1977 coup d'état of Chilean Socialist President Salvador Allende and the following military dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet. I will then examine changes within the Catholic Church during the same period, concentrating on the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the burgeoning movements of Liberation Theology and Latina Theology. Finally, I will introduce this genre of folk/protest music and place it within a socio-political and religious framework as both a product of and contributor toward the tumultuous atmosphere of late-twentieth century Latin America.

Argentine "Dirty War" and Chilean Dictatorship

From 1976 to 1983, Argentina experienced a government-led holocaust of its youth. Approximately 30,000⁵ young people were kidnapped, or "disappeared" [*desaparecidos*] by right-wing death squads and taken to secret detention centers where they were questioned and tortured. While a few were returned to their families, most were killed. Most commonly, they would be blindfolded, bound, and taken on "death flights" [*vuelos de la muerte*] in military helicopters, where they were pushed out over the Atlantic Ocean. These young people were typically targeted because of a suspected "left-wing" political leaning; involvement in university student government, social activist groups, or

⁵ The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP 1986) reports only 8,960 documented kidnappings. Argentine human rights groups often project 30,000, while Amnesty International estimates 20,000; in Lindsay DuBois, *The Politics of the Past in an Argentine Working-Class Neighborhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 246.

the arts were so dangerous in the military junta's eyes that it would cost thousands their lives.

While many youths were kidnapped on the streets in broad daylight, all government activities were kept highly classified. Families mourned the loss of their loved ones while desperately clinging to the small hope that they could have survived. During this period of outrage, fear, and grief, a group of women began organizing in protest to these government violations of human rights. Calling themselves *los madres* [the mothers], a few female relatives of *los desaparecidos* would sit on benches in la Plaza de Mayo, using their children's nappies as headscarves to signal the other *madres* and to pay homage to their missing family. When other members would arrive, they would sit in groups of two or three so as not to attract attention, often knitting or crocheting to make themselves appear less suspicious. If police or military officers approached as they surreptitiously discussed plans to find their children, the women would carefully get up and begin walking in a circle around the main pillar of the plaza. This performance of maternity helped them remain unthreatening to officials, while allowing them to privately and stealthily organize.

Their numbers multiplied, and today the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are one of the most well-known protest groups in the world. Swarms of activists still meet each Thursday afternoon in the plaza to march around the main circle, holding banners and signs while chanting or singing (see Figure 2). Although their group has expanded, many of the mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared have been replaced by cousins and siblings as the next generation has accepted the responsibility of carrying on their loved ones' stories.



Figure 2: *Madres* marching in la Plaza de Mayo. [Banner: ““Where are the hundreds of babies born in captivity?” – Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo”]

Directly to the west, Chile was experiencing its own political upheaval. In 1970, the Chilean people elected their first socialist president, physician Salvador Allende of the Popular Unity Party [*Unidad Popular*]. A fierce proponent of the working-class, he began restructuring Chilean economics to align with socialist ideals. Redistributing wages among lower-income laborers and turning certain privately-owned manufacturing sectors into peasant cooperatives.⁶ This focus on the working-class quickly earned the reproach of both the Chilean middle classes and the U.S. government, while mass food shortages, labor strikes, and rising inflation signaled that dramatic change was imminent.

⁶ Salvador Allende Gossens and Jane Canning, *Salvador Allende Reader* (Victoria, Australia: Ocean Press, 2000), 282.

On September 11, 1973, as a military junta led by Augusto Pinochet (and supported by the U.S.)⁷ staged a coup on the presidential palace, Allende shot himself.

With Chile now under the direction of Pinochet and his military government, an era of extreme conservatism and mass murder began. During his tenure as president from June of 1974 until March of 1990, he committed countless human rights violations. In an attempt to decimate leftism, his regime arrested and tortured approximately 130,000 people in his first three years in office alone.⁸ Immediately following the coup, thousands of poets, artists, activists, and intellectuals were uprooted and detained in the National Stadium [*Estadio Nacional*] in Santiago, where many were tortured and brutally murdered. The beginning of a nearly thirty-year reign of Pinochet and his military junta, such widespread fear and right-wing pandemonium would make the Chilean coup the most violent political takeover in Latin American history.⁹

Redefining the Church: The Second Vatican Council and a Theology of Liberation

While the political landscape of Chile and Argentina¹⁰ was in a state of mass chaos, the Catholic Church experienced a profound transition. The meeting of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) had produced unprecedented changes within liturgical methodology and practice. Reforms concerning priests' relationship to congregations (i.e. they would now face the assembly during the Fraction Rite and transubstantiation) symbolized a

⁷ John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 299.

⁸ Jorgelina Corbatta, "The Pinochet Affair in London and Spain: Echoes and Reflections," in *Remapping the Humanities: Identity, Community, Memory, (post)modernity*, ed. Mary Garrett, Heidi Gottfried, and Sandra F. VanBurkleo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 125.

⁹ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 300.

¹⁰ For more on the Nicaraguan and Guatemalan Civil Wars, see, respectively Roger Miranda and William E. Ratliff, *The Civil War in Nicaragua: Inside the Sandinistas* (1992); and Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal and Forgetting in Guatemala* (2002).

more profound shift in the Church's ideology. The Mass would now be celebrated in the vernacular rather than Latin, making the liturgy more intimate and approachable for lay congregants, and parishioners could receive the Eucharist in their hands rather than having the priest place it directly on their tongues. These changes represented a more anthropocentric shift in the Church, as congregations were better encouraged to live their faith in direct relationship with Jesus, rather than through the mediation of a priest or bishop.

The Second Vatican Council also opened new avenues for musical and personal expression in the Mass. As vernacular languages replaced Latin text, ancient Gregorian chant and lofty cantors were passed over in favor of guitars and catchy songs about Christian love. While musicians were exploring a new realm of liturgical practice, Catholic bishops gathered in Medellín, Colombia, to discuss the meaning of Vatican II for Latin America. Drawing on the Council's promotion of structural change and human dignity, the bishops agreed to focus on the marginalized of the region. This push to aid and work with under-resourced populations would become the basis of Latin American Liberation Theology. By helping to provide childcare, housing, soup kitchens, and better wages to the working-class, these ideals of liberation reached beyond high theology and became a real and tangible "irruption of how God is active, life is lived, and Christianity is practiced among the poor."¹¹ The documents that these bishops would adopt at the Medellín Conference would become the basis of this theology of liberation, a theology that would extend beyond church walls and seep into the culture, politics, and everyday experience of Latin American society.

¹¹ Rebecca S. Chopp, "Latin American Liberation Theology," in *The Modern Theologians*, Vol. II, ed. David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 409.

The Nueva Canción: Songs of Hope and Social Change

Mirroring these humanistic shifts within the Catholic Church, a resurgence of folk music began to emerge out of Chile and spread throughout the parts the Latin-Caribbean region. Rooted in folk rhythms and indigenous instrumentation, the *Nueva Canción* sought to reinforce regional and Pan-American identity while empowering those living on the margins of society. Crying out for political justice and social equality, this genre would typically be deemed “protest music” from a Northern hemispheric perspective; however, there is an important distinction between North and South American folksong. Whereas most North American singers like Joan Baez (b. 1941), Woody Guthrie (1912-1967), and Bob Dylan (b. 1941) celebrate the staunch political implications of the term, many *Nueva Canción* folkloristas have adamantly objected to its application regarding their works. Most feel that the word “protest” holds an antagonistic connotation that uncharacteristically represents their motivations. Argentine singer Mercedes Sosa (1935-2009) has described the music as “honest songs about the way things really are” and has stated that she feels the label “protest song” implies a restrictive, hostile approach.¹² Similarly, Uruguayan folksinger Daniel Viglietti prefers “propose” rather than “protest,” as it better represents the genre’s unifying nature.¹³ In fact, the only destructive quality of the *Nueva Canción* can be found in one of its rallying cries, “¡a desalambrar!” meaning “to tear down fences.”¹⁴ Indeed, the mission of the genre is not to diminish the oppressors, but rather to motivate and empower the oppressed.

¹² Jane A. Bernstein, “Thanks for My Weapons in Battle – My Voice and the Desire to Use It: Women and Protest Music in the Americas,” in *Women’s Voices Across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 169.

¹³ Bernstein, “Women and Protest Music in the Americas,” 169.

¹⁴ Robert Pring-Mill, *Gracias a La Vida: The Power and Poetry of Song* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, Department of Hispanic Studies, 1990), 9.

With a spirit of optimism and solidarity, these *folkloristas* wrote and performed their music – songs by the people, for the people. Initially intended to foster a sense of unity and ethno-cultural pride throughout Latin America, the movement took on a more militant and political tone by the 1970s, as many nations experienced waves of tremendous upheaval and widespread terror. While their markedly left-wing messages and commercial success were reminiscent of U.S. protest songs, *Nueva Canción* repertoire often incorporated religious elements within their lyrics and performance style. Combining Catholic theologies, social consciousness, and indigenous influences, the *Nueva Canción* seems to have encapsulated the political, cultural, and social context of its time – making it fall into a category entirely of its own.

Although many scholars have examined these folksingers and the political impact of their work, the topic lacks an interdisciplinary study of their legacies. For example, performance studies often demonstrate a bias against the Catholic Church and its institutions, while religious studies take on a supportive, and at times defensive, view of Catholicism, yet neglects crucial aspects of performance. Throughout her work, Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor misses an opportunity to explore the role of the Catholic Church in the cultural and political atmosphere of Argentina's "Dirty War" (1976-1983). Instead of delving into the connections between Catholicism and its role in the establishment of Latin Theology in Argentina, she quickly dismisses the Catholic Church, focusing solely on its connection to the country's purist, antirevolutionary movement of *nacionalismo*.¹⁵ The question that begs to be answered, then, is whether these biases and intentional omissions within each academic discipline affect the

¹⁵ Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 34.

outcomes of their respective studies. By using an interdisciplinary approach and analyzing the music of *Nueva Canción* through musical and lyrical analysis, women/gender, performance, and religious studies, I seek to connect the impact of their works with Catholic liturgical imagery and practice.

The following chapter descriptions outline the project. In Chapter 1: “Performance for the People: The Legacy of Violeta Parra,” I detail the life and work of Violeta Parra, the Chilean *folklorista* deemed “the Mother of the *Nueva Canción*.” Connecting her audience-centered performance style and humanistic lyrics with post-Vatican II liturgical music reforms, I then demonstrate the afterlife of and hopeful symbolism in her most famous song, “*Gracias a la vida*” [Thanks to life]. Chapter 2: “V́ctor Jara: A Voice of Resiliency and Martyrdom,” connects the Chilean artist’s political activism and dynamic lyrics with tenets of Latin American Liberation Theology, explaining how his career and infamous death have made him a political martyr and national hero. In Chapter 3: “Embodying *La Pachamama*: The Life, Work, and Marian Spirituality of Mercedes Sosa,” I delve into the musical career of this Argentine singer, arguably one of the most famous artists of the *Nueva Canción*. Considering her *mestizo* identity, I will connect her performance style and public image with Latina Theology and indigenous symbolism. Finally, in my concluding chapter, I will offer how the *Nueva Canción* can act as an example for current genres that seek to cross the divide between sacred and popular music while promoting social conscious for the greater good.

Chapter 1: Performance for the People: The Legacy of Violeta Parra

I cannot see the difference between the artist and the audience: that is the miracle of contact. I feel that I am closer to my audience and the audience to me, because I sing for them, not for myself. To have an audience is a normal result of my work. We must justify our existence and I am sure that anyone would be able to do what I do. For me it is a matter of duty.¹⁶

Called the “mother and soul” of the Chilean “New Song” movement, for the past fifty years, Violeta Parra has lived on in the memory of her people. After taking her own life in 1967, she became an icon to her audiences both in her native Chile and worldwide. Up to the point of her death, she had been struggling to earn a living, yet posthumously her works have become an integral part of the *Nueva Canción*. Though she only experienced moderate success in her life, her creativity and inclusive performance style have given her music a lasting place in Latin American folksong.

Born in 1917 in rural Chile, Parra’s works were deeply influenced by her childhood of poverty and a forced migration from the country to the rapidly industrializing cities. Parra herself the victim of mass urbanization, her compositions would come to be associated with a sense of displacement and dispersal – a feeling shared among many rural Chileans in newly modern and industrial society. She would later idealize this romanticized world of the past as “the idea of paradise and of a memory

¹⁶ Violeta Parra, cited in Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor*, 46, in “Singing the Difference: Violeta Parra and Chilean Song,” Rodrigo Torres Alvarado, in *I Sing the Difference: Identity and Commitment in Latin American Song*, ed. Jan Fairley and David Horn (Liverpool: Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, 2002), 39-79.

to be recovered, a utopian model of a future society rooted in harmonious unity between the human and the divine, between society and nature.”¹⁷ Herein lies one of Parra’s greatest attributes as an artist and performer – her innate ability to connect the tradition and nostalgia of the past with novel poetry and musical technique. In this chapter, I will discuss Parra’s inclusive performance style from a Catholic theological perspective and highlight the legacy and reinvention of her work which performers keep alive through a variety of covers and arrangements.

After moving to Santiago in 1932, Violeta and her sister Hilda began a folk duo called *Las Hermanas Parra* [The Parra Sisters] and performed primarily Latin American and Spanish songs popularized on the radio, such as “*Se fue el año viejo*” and “*El buen consejo*.”¹⁸ In 1953, however, Violeta’s career took a dramatic turn. She decided to abandon the quaint image of rural sisters transplanted in the fast-paced city, and instead to travel around Chile and learn firsthand the artistry of popular poetry. Taking on the roles of performer, researcher, and ethnomusicologist, she acquired a vast wealth of musical material through oral transmission and study. As she returned to the urban stage, her experience from years of playing in folk clubs – known as *peñas* – was fused with her newly-acquired knowledge of Andean and Chilean folk music.

With her unique musical background, Parra bridged the gap between the stage and the *pueblo*, eschewing any sense of egotism or celebrity pride. These were her people. It was for them and with them and because of them that she sang. Without a sense of separation between the two parties, this joint performer-audience could partake in a new

¹⁷ Fairley and Horn, *I Sing the Difference*, 42.

¹⁸ “Las Hermanas Parra,” *Musica Popular.cl: la enciclopedia de la música chilena*, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.musicapopular.cl/grupo/las-hermanas-parra/>.

communion devoid of hierarchy or partition.¹⁹ This sense of obligation defines Violeta Parra as more than a folksinger, but as a natural artist who had answered the call of her vocation. Her focus was always about her public, perceiving them as more than an audience, but as her compatriots and friends. Both on and off the stage and through various mediums, she created art that invoked the cries and longings of her people. In a 1965 interview, she explains her holistic performance philosophy:

I believe that every artist must aspire to aim at fusing, fusing himself, fusing his work through direct contact with the audience. I am very glad to have reached a point in my work where I don't even want to do tapestry, or painting, or poetry, like that, on its own. I am content...with working with live elements this time, with the audience nice and close to me, so I can feel them, touch them, speak to them and incorporate them into my soul.²⁰

Parra connects her audience and includes them in the creative process as well as the product, involving them in the performance and including them as more than viewers, but as inspiration. She treats them as integral components of her music, as well as the intended receivers, her intention mirrors the goals of the Second Vatican Council to create an engaged musical and liturgical experience for the congregation.²¹ Her

¹⁹ Fairley and Horn, *I Sing the Difference*, 46.

²⁰ Fairley and Horn, *I Sing the Difference*, 46.

²¹ "Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it. [4] Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem. Pastors of souls will therefore do all they can to achieve this form of celebration. They will try

performance venues were often transformed into spaces of vindication and redemption, much like the “definitive inclusion of each person” emphasized in the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia.²² Many of her lyrics are written in second-person, as though she is singing directly to, as well as with, the audience instead of at them. For example, in her most famous work, “*Gracias a la vida*” (1966), the first five stanzas are written to a distant lover, yet the final stanza directly addresses her people:

¹ Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.

² Me ha dado la risa y me ha dado el llanto

³ así yo distingo dicha de quebranto,

⁴ los dos materiales que forman mi canto,

⁵ y el canto de ustedes que es el mismo canto

⁶ y el canto de todos que es mi propio canto.

¹ Thanks be to life for the much it has given.

² It has given me laughter and given me tears

³ with which to distinguish good fortune from heartbreak,

⁴ and those are the themes which give shape to my song.

⁵ my song that’s the same as the song that you sing –

⁶ as the song of all people; my very own song.²³

Although this breaking down of the fourth wall is a common literary and cinematic technique, Parra utilized it not to merit a reaction, but to remind her downtrodden *pueblo* that they are still seen and still remembered. While urbanization contributed to a concept of national progress and modernization, many people were excluded from such upward mobility – particularly the poor and indigenous. Literary scholar and Latin Americanist Robert Pring-Mill describes the socio-political and humanistic aspects of this inclusive creative process. In it, the artist first observes the world around her and “rationalizes” it in political terms, and then she contextualizes each detail on the “map of human experience” so that she can relate to the rest of the world

to work out how that assignment of different parts to be performed and duties to be fulfilled, which characterizes sung celebrations, may be transferred even to celebrations which are not sung, but at which the people are present. Above all one must take particular care that the necessary ministers are obtained and that these are suitable, and that the active participation of the people is encouraged.” “*Musicam Sacram: Instruction on Music in The Liturgy.*” *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.* 5 March 1967.

²² Gerald W. Schlabach, “Excerpts on justice, peace and poverty from final document,” GeraldSchlabach.net, last modified April 5, 2014.

²³ Translated by Robert Pring-Mill, ‘*Gracias a la vida*’ *The Power and Poetry of Song*, 1990.

and the people in it. “As [she] becomes more deeply involved, the ideology becomes a source of almost spiritual strength – as well as of ‘poetic’ inspiration – until the process of commitment is complete.”²⁴ This sense of devotion to her audience and her artistry is evident throughout Parra’s work. However, Pring-Mill downplays the depth of Parra’s emotional and spiritual connection to her audience. Having experienced her share of struggle and hardship – economic instability, a broken marriage, the loss of her father and daughter – her songs were testimony to the tenacity and duality of the human condition, often juxtaposing sorrow and joy, darkness and light, and laughter and tears.²⁵

Lyrical and poetically as well, she established new styles of expression. With a heavier focus on storytelling, her songs took on more earnest subject matter such as grief, abandonment and loss. From her fieldwork in rural Chile, her words reflected the poetry of ancient folksingers – known as *payadores* – in their ability to reflect the memories and experiences of the collective audience and people. Her innovative style changed the genre, so that folk music became more than atmospheric background music. Though not explicitly somber, the poetic and often dramatic lyrics lent themselves to more reflective atmospheres and audiences.

In the following section, I will examine Parra’s most famous work, “*Gracias a la vida*” [“Thanks to life”], and discuss how her original recording and its many renditions by other artists have reinforced and reinvented its connection to post-Vatican II forms of worship. Particularly in its later covers, performances of “*Gracias a la vida*” embody

²⁴ Robert Pring-Mill, “Both in sorrow and in anger: Spanish American protest poetry,” *Cambridge Review*, 91, no. 2195 (February 1970): 112-117.

²⁵ See Pring-Mill, *Gracias a La Vida: The Power and Poetry of Song*, 45.

elements of liturgical practice with an unwavering emphasis on social justice and community interaction.

The Life and Legacy of “*Gracias a la vida*”

Parra’s best-known composition, “*Gracias a la vida*” would later become an anthem for the *Nueva Canción* throughout Latin America. Released just a year before her death, the singer celebrates life and its many gifts. In the first stanza, she thanks it for giving her sight; in the second, for hearing; the third, for language, the fourth for strength, and the fifth for her heart. Frequently described as a love song, the complexity and poetic symbolism behind the words highlight the holistic nature of the *Nueva Canción* genre.

While the lines portray a tormented woman attempting to focus on the beauty in life, the simple musical accompaniment is reminiscent of a lullaby, gently soothing the listener with its rocking 3/8 meter. In Parra’s original recording, the thin, metallic sound of the solo guitar accompaniment lends a waltz-like quality, while the emphasis on the second and third beats propels the floating melody forward throughout the song (see Figure 3).

Gra-cias a la vi-da que me ha da-do tan-to
 Me dio dos lu-ce-ros. Que cuan-do los ab-ro Per-fec-to dis-tin-
 go Lo ne-gro del blan-co Y en el al-to cie-lo su fon-do es tre-
 lla-do Y en las mul-ti-tu-des el hom-bre que yo a-mo

Figure 3. Opening stanza of Parra’s “*Gracias a la vida*,” 1966.

Creating a Communal Experience: The *Nueva Canción* and Liturgical Practice

Though Parra’s composition has remained popular throughout much of the Spanish-speaking world, in its countless covers we see how “*Gracias a la vida*” has continued to evolve through repeated performance. As a song is taken out of its original setting and performed by a different artist, the audience, purpose, and overall meaning change with each reproduction. Singers like Joan Baez and Mercedes Sosa have performed Parra’s famous piece both solo and as a duet in various settings ranging from massive outdoor concerts in Europe, to intimate, indoor venues.²⁶ In one performance in Bretagne, France

²⁶ See Baez and Sosa 1988 performance in Germany <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMuTXcf3-6A>; and Baez 2000 performance in France <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFZxBvUMIG0>

(see Figure 4), as Baez sings a song with Spanish lyrics to a French-speaking audience, how does the message of the performance change? Does the audience understand the words, and if so, how are they interpreted by a European audience in the twenty-first



century versus the audience Parra had intended – one set in South America in the late 1960s?

Figure 4. Joan Baez performs “*Gracias a la vida*” in Bretagne, France, 2000.

In both live performances, Baez incorporates an original vocal line (see Figure 5) which acts as both a transition between stanzas and a means of increasing audience participation. The repetitive melody, sung on the syllable “la,” is quickly echoed by the entire crowd as they clap along in unison.



Figure 5. Baez original melody in “*Gracias a la vida*.”

Sung on a simple, five-note scale at a range accessible to most voices, the song is transformed into an upbeat “sing-a-long.” In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor suggests that rather than revealing a culture’s truest essence, performances can

allow further insight into our own “desire for access” and act as a reflection of “the politics of our interpretations.”²⁷ By including a simple chorus and encouraging participation, Baez accommodates this innate “desire for access” so present in the *Nueva Canción*.

Furthermore, her efforts to create an inclusive experience for her audience mirrors the shift seen in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). With the Mass now being celebrated in the vernacular and the priest finally addressing the people directly, a new sense of familiarity and unity grew amongst the congregation. As the liturgical focus became full and active participation, fostering a communal worship experience became vital to the celebration. In a self-conscious society, simple and repetitive melodies gave the congregation a sense of familiarity and encouraged the people to join together in song. Within Catholic practice, this idea of repetition is present not only in the hymns used during the liturgy, but in the recitation of the Rosary. When said by numbers of people, the effect of the recurrent verses has been likened to that of a sea shanty, as the rhythmic pattern of call and response “induces a sense of being caught up in the flow of something greater,” and “thus [liberating] the mediator to throw him- or herself completely into the task.”²⁸ By including a repetitive melody purely to garner audience involvement, Baez creates an environment conducive to the full and active participation laid out in Vatican II, while effortlessly touching upon something so innately human: the desire to belong.

²⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

²⁸ Sarah Jane Boss, “Telling the Beads: The Practice and Symbolism of the Rosary” in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 386.

As each “Hail Mary” and “Our Father” are begun by one specific individual and finished by the rest of the group, Baez acts as the leader of the prayer. Each verse could



be compared to a decade of ten recitations of the “Hail Mary,” with Baez’s original melody acting as the “Glory Be to the Father”²⁹ and the Fatima Prayer³⁰ which everyone prays in unison. Her monosyllabic vocal line offers a chance for the audience – or “congregation” – to rejoin one another as a full, united body.

Figure 6: Organization of the rosary³¹

Mercedes Sosa: Liturgical Practice through Indigenous Performance

Argentine folksinger Mercedes Sosa’s cover of “*Gracias a la vida*” has risen to international recognition well beyond its composer’s initial recording. Considered by some as the most poignant and moving of its many interpretations, Sosa initially recorded the song in 1971 for her album entitled *Homenaje a Violeta Parra* [Homage to Violeta Parra]. In the video of this live performance, Sosa is seated on a low stage, level with her select audience. The small, intimate venue is dark save for two spotlights on Sosa and the single guitarist accompanying her (see Figure 7). Whereas Parra’s original version was

²⁹ “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

³⁰ “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Your Mercy.”

³¹ “How to Pray the Rosary.” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*.

relatively consistent in tone, vocal timbre, and tempo, Sosa sings in short bursts, as if overcome by emotion halfway between each line.

Figure 7: Mercedes Sosa's live performance of "Gracias a la vida," 1971.

Her swaying rubato and quasi-improvised style captivate the listener, while her frequent and meaningful pauses hold as much power over the audience as her rich alto



voice. The guitar accompaniment varies in style and pattern from each stanza to the next, whereas Parra's version had a constant, light-hearted quality throughout. Ranging from verses of pensive reservation to fervent intensity, Sosa thoroughly employs the full range of her powerful voice (see Figure 8). Before beginning the song, she addresses the audience with a simple statement "*Violeta Parra era chilena*" [Violeta Parra was Chilean]. A recurring theme throughout Sosa's career, she uses her commanding stage presence and striking indigeneity to create a bridge between the Chilean anthem and her Argentine audience, acting as ambassador to both nations.³²

³² In Matthew B. Karush's book, *Musicians in Transit: Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music*, he discusses Argentine intellectuals' emphasis on the country's "whiteness" and European influence rather than on its diverse indigenous ancestry. Not only did this leave indigenous and Afro-Argentines invisible and unrepresented, it distinguished Argentina from its Latin American neighbors (10).

Gra- ci- as a la vi- da que me ha da- do tan- to me di- o dos
 lu- ce- ros que cuan- do los ab- ro Per- fec- to dis- tin- go lo
 neg- ro del blan- co Y en el al- to cie- lo su fon- do es- tre- lla- do
 Y en las mul- ti- tu- des el hom- bre que yo a- mo

Figure 8: Opening stanza of Sosa's 1971 performance

Voces Unidas por Chile: A Unifying Call to Action

After the massive earthquake that devastated Chile in 2010, a group of famous Latin American artists came together to produce a charity song for the victims and survivors of the disaster. The group, entitled “Voces Unidas por Chile” [Voices United for Chile], produced a cover of “*Gracias a la vida*” to raise awareness and funds for those affected (see Figure 9).³³ The high production value and professional lighting and camera angles result in a work utterly removed from Parra’s original and even from Sosa’s interpretation or Baez’s concert version. The digital instrumentation, four-part harmonies, and overlapping images of weeping Chilean families and Grammy-winning popstars create a message distinct from that of its predecessors. No longer simply thanking life for

³³ See cover of “*Gracias a la vida*” by “Voces Unidas por Chile” here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-vTDV_aSA

its gifts, nor comforting a nation torn apart by violence, this modern cover is a call to the middle-class audiences at home to empower the victims of the earthquake through financial support.

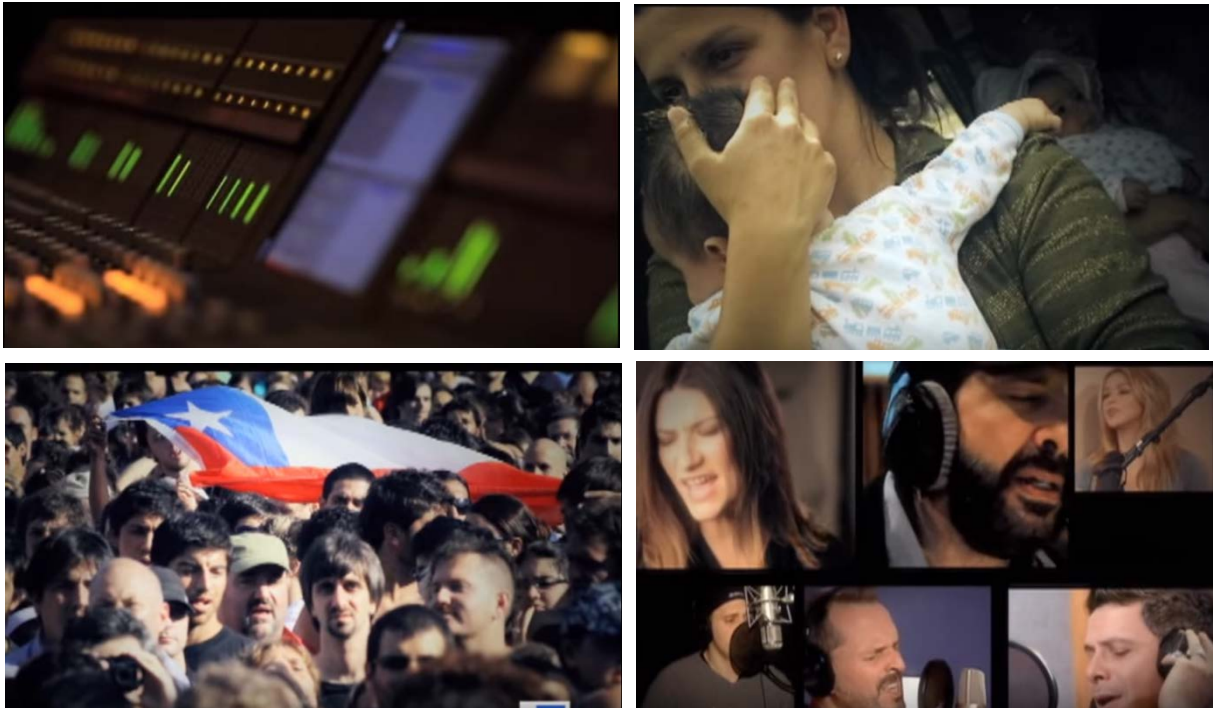


Figure 9: Music video of “*Gracias a la vida*” performed by “Voces Unidas por Chile,” 2010.

Considering the devastating cost of the earthquake, this cover demonstrates a call to action, imploring the people to reach out and help one another in their time of need. The Catholic ministries within South America typically received orders and edicts from the European sectors of the Catholic Church, but during Vatican Council II, and specifically the Medellín Council held in Colombia, the Latin American clergy began to speak up for their constituencies and take action. Rather than simply receiving dictates and input from other continents, the Latin American church elders called for a “new era”

for their nations – one of growth and change through peaceful, nonviolent means.³⁴

Taking long-awaited initiative, this historically overlooked region of the Church came together to cry out for justice, change, and liberation. The documents were said to have been written for the people, with their real concerns and views taken into account.

Although “Voces Unidas por Chile” is an explicitly secular group, their performance of “*Gracias a la vida*” retains a similar focus on the person as an individual as well as on the collective identity of the *pueblo*.

The singers’ countries of origin range from Spain, Chile, and Panama; to Mexico, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic; and even to Canada (Michael Bubl ) and Italy (Laura Pausini). The efforts to bring together musicians from across Latin America – as well as those from Europe and North America – demonstrates the objective of unification prioritized throughout the recording. In the years of the Second Vatican Council (years), during the Latin American Episcopal Conference [CELAM – *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*] in Mar del Plata, Argentina, Pope Paul VI spoke on “The Church in the Development and Integration of Latin America,” saying that the Catholic Church, “which was present at the birth and throughout the history of these nations, had to be present in these crucial moments of their history.”³⁵ Indeed, “Voces Unidas por Chile” emphasizes this idea of a supportive presence with a subtle adjustment to the final lyrics, from “thanks to life, which has given me so much,” to “thanks to life, which has given *us* so much.” Echoing Parra’s technique of addressing the audience directly, this intentional

³⁴ Marcos McGrath, C.S.C., “The Impact of *Gaudium et Spes*: Medell n, Puebla, and Pastoral Creativity” in *Sacred Music and Liturgy Reform After Vatican I*, ed. Johannes Overath (Saint Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1969), 68.

³⁵ Joseph Gremillion, *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience of North and Latin America* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 65-66.

change combined with an international artistic collaboration implies that these nations are standing by the victims and survivors of the earthquake, and that together, they are ready to face whatever lies behind and ahead, as one, united Latin America.

Conclusion: A Continued Gratitude

Through her innovative style – her ability to fuse traditional rhythms and melodies with socially conscious lyrics – Violeta Parra became a heroic figure to her people.

Incorporating her audience into the message and performance, the atmosphere became a place for vindication and acceptance of the complex web of Chilean and Latin American society. In making space for her listeners, they are redeemed and accepted for who they are, sharing an equal part in the performance. Having recognized and celebrated the diversity and humanity of her audience, she posthumously becomes a pseudo-martyr, a romanticized emblem of a romanticized past. Although her music is not explicitly religious, with her inclusive performance style and emotional, personal lyrics, she laid the groundwork for future artists to connect with their audiences and to fuse the gap between folk music and religious music. In showing gratitude for the gifts of life, especially for the gift of her people, Violeta Parra has earned her place in history as a martyr, poet, musician, muse, and revolutionary.

Chapter 2: Víctor Jara: A Voice of Resiliency and Martyrdom

¡Canto que mal me sales /cuando tengo que cantar espanto! / Espanto como el que vivo, / como el que / muero, espanto. / De verme entre tantos y tantos / momentos del infinito / en que el silencio y el grito / son las metas de este canto. / Lo que veo nunca vi, / lo que he sentido y lo que siento / harán brotar el momento...

[How hard is it to sing / when I must sing of horror! / Horror in which I am living, / horror in which I am dying. / To see myself among so much / and so many moments of infinity / in which silence and screams / are the end of my song. / What I see, I have never seen. / What I have felt and what I feel will give birth to the moment...³⁶]

Written while captive in the *Estadio Chile* [Chile Stadium], singer and activist Víctor Jara finished these grim lyrics just hours before his execution. An avid supporter of the leftist Popular Unity party and a proud communist, Jara was kidnapped and imprisoned the day after the bloody military coup of socialist President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973. Though Jara held national fame throughout his native Chile, the breadth and depth of his popularity is incomparable to other Chilean folksingers of the same period. While other popular *Nueva Canción* acts like Inti-Illimani³⁷ and Quilapayún³⁸ remain

³⁶ Translated by Joan Jara from Víctor Jara, *His Hands Were Gentle: Selected Lyrics of Víctor Jara*, ed. Martin Espada (Grewelthorpe, England: Smokestack Books, 2012), 79.

³⁷ For more on Inti-Illimani, see Juan Pablo González, "'Inti-Illimani' and the Artistic Treatment of Folklore," *Latin American Music Review / Revista De Música Latinoamericana* 10, no. 2 (1989): 267-86.

³⁸ For more on Quilapayún, see Jan Fairley, "La Nueva Canción Latinoamericana," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 3, no. 2 (1984): 107-115.

moderately popular in Latin America, few names have gained the international recognition of Víctor Jara. What is it about Jara that has attracted celebrities like Bono, Emma Thompson, and Arlo Guthrie to rally behind his image decades after his death?³⁹ Robert Pring-Mill proposes that were it not for his murder, “there would have been no reason for his enduring international reputation to have so greatly overshadowed those of equally powerful *cantautores* who survived the coup.”⁴⁰ However, I propose that not only did his early death create an international appeal, but that it is the image of quasi-martyrdom that has made him an unrivaled symbol of political freedom and human rights. In this chapter, I will outline how Jara’s radical political ideology and uplifting lyrics elevated his image as an activist and artist to one of spiritual revolutionary and Christ-like liberator.

To engage in Jara’s life and work, we must first consider the political and social context of mid-twentieth century Chile. In the early 1960s, various Catholic theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru) and Leonardo Boff (Brazil) began developing a new theology of liberation centered on a “preferential option for the poor.”⁴¹ Described as “not merely a form of ethics or social witness, but as a systemic theology, a radically new interpretation and transformation of Christian faith itself,”⁴² liberation theologians developed their teachings through both an anthropological and theological approach, using social structures as their primary means of analysis. Recognizing the sharp contrast between the region’s poor and elite, scholars sought a re-reading of fundamental

³⁹ “New Documentary Sheds Light on the Life and Brutal Murder of Chilean Singer-Songwriter and Political Activist Víctor Jara,” *Newswise*. University of Vermont. Published Nov 4, 2015.

⁴⁰ Pring-Mill, “*Gracias a la vida*,” 65.

⁴¹ For more on the beginnings of Latin American Liberation Theology, see James B. Nickoloff, ed., *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

⁴² Chopp, “Latin American Liberation Theology,” 409.

Christian concepts, namely sin and redemption. Though often regarded as a sign of moral failure, liberation theologians refused to view poverty as an isolated issue, but rather as the byproduct of systemic racism and a cycle of poverty. The Christian symbol of redemption, as well, is re-read within Liberation Theology as more than a singular occurrence, but as a continuous and lifelong effort to overcome the sinfulness of human nature, contextualized within one's historical and social setting. By viewing Jesus Christ as a political rebel and liberator who stood in solidarity with the oppressed, liberation theologians placed him in their own current political and historical context, exemplifying Him as a revolutionary and champion of the poor.

Set against a background of rampant poverty, Jara's songs of resiliency became symbols of redemption for the struggling Chilean working class. Born in 1932 in Lonquén, near Santiago, Jara's illiterate and alcoholic father left his family while Víctor was still a young child. His mother, Amanda, was a mestiza of Araucanian Mapuche heritage, and it was through her that Jara learned to play the guitar and gather an understanding of Chilean folk music. After his mother's death when Jara was just fifteen, he left his hometown to become a priest.

However, after two years in the seminary he became disillusioned with the Catholic Church, a sentiment which is reflected in the lyrics of many of his songs. For example, in "*Manifiesto*" [Manifesto], Jara sings of the heart of his guitar, that "like the dove it goes flying / tenderly as holy water, / blessing the brave and the dying."⁴³ His whimsical tone is coated with an edge of cynicism as he uses religious vocabulary to draw attention to the dire state of thousands of impoverished Chileans. After leaving the

⁴³ Translated by Adrian Mitchell from Jara, *His Hands were Gentle*, 71.

seminary, Jara cut off all connection to Acción Católica – a group aimed to involve young people in the Church – and never went to Mass again.⁴⁴ He then joined the military, and after receiving high marks, was honorably discharged. Returning to his first love of performance, he studied theatre at the University of Chile and rekindled his passion for folk music. After meeting fellow Chilean *cantante* Violeta Parra in 1957, his music began taking on a notably leftist tone.

One of his most popular songs, “*Plegaria a un labrador*” [Prayer to a Laborer] invokes religious imagery while borrowing from a decidedly socialist vocabulary. Released in 1971, it was part of his third album, *El derecho vivir en paz* [*The Right to Live in Peace*]. The song begins with a soft guitar melody as Jara’s lyrics address the working-class, calling on them to “Rise up...to look at your hands...to hold them out to your brother.”⁴⁵ This emphasis on the sweat and toil of hard labor mirrors that of a socialist ideal of purpose and redemption through work. As the tempo increases and the guitar shifts into a dotted rhythm, Jara’s lyrics continue with: “Bring us your kingdom of justice.../ Clean, like fire, / The cannon of my rifle. / Your will be done, finally, / Here on earth.” Reminiscent of the Lord’s Prayer,⁴⁶ Jara subtly alters the words so that it is unclear whom he is addressing. The Lord’s Prayer, or “Our Father,” is directed toward God, yet by using the pronouns “we” and “us,” the rest of the song is aimed at working-class farmers and laborers.

While Jara increases the volume and picks up the tempo yet again, he further complicates the metaphor by changing the phrase “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,

⁴⁴ Joan Jara, *Víctor: An Unfinished Song* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1983), 37.

⁴⁵ Translated by Robert Pring-Mill, “*Gracias a la vida*,” 73.

⁴⁶ Traditionally written as “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

on earth as it is in heaven”⁴⁷ into “Bring us your kingdom of justice / and equality.../ Your will be done, finally, / Here on earth.”⁴⁸ In omitting any direct reference to a heavenly afterlife, Jara pointedly emphasizes the urgency of the working class’s state “here on earth” alone. It is not necessarily to God’s kingdom of salvation which he is referring, but to an earthly kingdom of equality. Later, Jara uses a direct quote from the “Hail Mary” prayer, drawing on his Catholic past to satirize the passivity of the Catholic Church in Chile and to rally Chilean laborers to obtain their own salvation here on earth. He strums a frantic pattern on the guitar – even slightly out of sync with the lyrics – as he belts the final lines of the song: “Together we will go united in blood, / Now and at the hour of our death.” The performance reaches a peak dynamic intensity as he ends with a resounding “Amen.” At once a parody of blind religion and a battle cry for the poor, “*Plegaria a un labrador*” emphasizes the agency and everyday divinity of the Chilean working class.

Jara as Political Revolutionary and Martyr

Of the three *Nueva Canción* artists studied in this thesis, Jara is arguably the most overtly political. While Violeta Parra and Mercedes Sosa shared leftist political backgrounds, Jara’s radical political beliefs were inextricably connected to his performance and public image. A fervent supporter of Chilean President Salvador Allende and his Popular Unity [*Unidad Popular*] party,⁴⁹ Jara rewrote the lyrics to the song “*Venceremos*” [“We Shall

⁴⁷ “*Venga tu reino. Hágase tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo.*”

⁴⁸ “*Tráenos tu reino de justicia / e igualdad...Hágase por fin tu voluntad / Aquí en la tierra.*”

⁴⁹ “Popular” in this sense refers to *los sectores populares* [popular sectors], a historically constructed cultural-political group encompassing all members of the lower classes, including people of indigenous, mestizo, or black identities. From Charles R. Hale, “Between Che Guevara and the Pachamama: Mestizos, Indians and identity politics in the anti-quincentenary campaign,” *Critique of Anthropology* 38, no.1 (1994): 11, SAGE.

Triumph”] for Allende’s 1970 political campaign. A simultaneously nationalistic and socialist text, Jara’s revision of the strident march includes such verses as: “The victorious Popular Unity Party / will be the tomb of the Yankee oppressor” and “Farmer, student, and laborer: / Comrades of our song.” When Allende addressed his adoring crowd during his inaugural speech, the banner above the stage read, “You Can’t Have a Revolution without Songs” (See Figure 10), thus solidifying the importance of folk music in the growing Marxist movement and Víctor Jara’s role in the burgeoning insurrection. While his commitment to Allende helped achieve the first democratically-elected socialist presidency in the Western Hemisphere, Jara’s visibility also made him a target in Allende’s 1973 coup – a vulnerability that would cost him his life.



Figure 10: Salvador Allende greets crowd during his inauguration speech, 1970; sign reads, “You Can’t Have a Revolution without Songs: We Sing to Women, Workers, Farmers, and Students.”

Returning to Jara’s final composition, the lyrics of “Estadio Chile” (1973) reveal the dark thoughts of a man facing his own mortality. He looks around at the thousands of people trapped in the stadium with him, noting: “One dead, another beaten as I could

never have believed / a human being can be beaten. / The other four wanted / to end their terror / one jumping into nothingness, / another beating his head against a wall, / but all with the fixed look of death. / What horror the face of fascism creates!”⁵⁰ Even at the point of his death, his socialist ideologies seep through his terror, writing: “Here alone are ten thousand hands which plant seeds / and make the factories run.” He laments the loss of so many comrades, so many fellow Chilean workers. Questioning God’s will, he asks, “Oh, God, is this the world that you created, / For this your seven days of wonder and work?” His impassioned plea is reminiscent of Jesus’s appeal on the cross: “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”⁵¹ Scribbled on a piece of paper (see Figure 11) and miraculously smuggled out of Estadio Chile, these lyrics act as a farewell letter to his family, fans, and beloved homeland. Along with countless fans, musicians like Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie, as well as poet Adrian Mitchell, have performed spoken recitations of the work. After a noble career as musician, poet, and activist, his story of a young life suddenly and brutally cut short has made Víctor Jara a political and national martyr in his native Chile and beyond. As American singer, songwriter, and activist Holly Near writes in her song “It Could Have Been Me”: “The junta broke the fingers on / Víctor Jara’s hands. / They said to the gentle poet, / “Play your guitar now if you can.” / Víctor started singing but they brought his body down. / You can kill that man but not his song / When it’s sung the whole world round.”

Although not a religious man, his story has been equated with spiritual activism and used as an exemplar of perseverance and personal sacrifice. For example, Jara’s life, career, murder, and legacy are recounted in detail on the website of “Read the Spirit”

⁵⁰ Translation by Joan Jara from Víctor Jara, *His Hands were Gentle*, 77.

⁵¹ Matthew 27:46, *New American Standard Bible*.

publishing company under the section of “Interfaith Peacemakers: Stories of heroes across time, nation, and spirituality.”⁵² Conversely, leftist websites, journals, and publishing companies also lay claim to his story, evidenced in comprehensive articles such as “Victor Jara, 1973-2013 – A Tribute,”⁵³ published on the site, “In Defence of Marxism.” Jara’s martyrdom symbolizes a struggle and hope that can traverse the divide between sacred and secular realms and that can be accepted and celebrated in multiple imaginaries, whether musical, political, or spiritual.

⁵² “Victor Jara (1932-1973),” *Read the Spirit: Interfaith Peacemakers*, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.readthespirit.com/interfaith-peacemakers/victor-jara/>

⁵³ Marzia De Luca, “Victor Jara, 1973-2013 – A Tribute,” *In Defence of Marxism*, last modified October 8, 2013, www.marxist.com

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 quitan este quorisma.
 Somos diez mil manos nuevas que no
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 ¿cuantos sanos en toda la patria?
 La sangre del compañero Presidente
 golpea más fuerte que bombas y metralla,
 con golpea nuestro pecho más
 fuerte que un sol sobre cuando tengo
 que sentir espanto
 Espanto como el que vivo, como el que
 muero, espanto es
 espanto de verme entre tantas y tantas
 mandatos del infierno,
 en el que el silencio y el grito son
 las mitas de este castigo
 lo que veo nunca sé,
 lo que he sentido y lo que siento
 Haré brotar el momento... U1

Figure 11: Original copy of "Estadio Chile," by Víctor Jara (1973). Image from *Retazos de la Memoria Chilena*.

Chapter 3: Embodying *La Pachamama*: The Life, Work, and Marian Spirituality of Mercedes Sosa

The vast stage is completely dark, save for a lone spotlight on the soloist. Dressed in black with only a shocking red silk scarf, she unfolds a small handkerchief and lays it on the stool beside her. The acoustic guitarist seated in the background begins picking a simple accompaniment as the vocalist makes her familiar introduction of the song: “*Todo cambia.*” Julio Numhauser. *Chileno*.⁵⁴ She sings the first verse but is tacit for a repetition of the chord progression. Rather than remaining silent with her, the massive crowd cannot help but sing the missing lyrics on their own. As she finally arrives at the refrain, she throws up her right hand, motioning to the crowd like a cantor, inviting them to join her. By the end of the performance, Sosa is dancing around the stage, waving that same small handkerchief around in the air while belting the lyrics. The musical dynamics have intensified as the entire crowd stands, singing in unison with her.

With her commanding alto voice and inviting affect, Argentine folksinger Mercedes Sosa embodied more than a social movement toward political change, but a symbol of Latin American pride. Although her life and rise to fame have been recorded in countless articles and biographies, her unique career and stage persona lack critical examination from a religious studies perspective.⁵⁵ As an advocate for the poor and a

⁵⁴ In many of her performances, Sosa begins pieces by giving credit to the composer – in this case Julio Numhauser – and stating his or her nationality.

⁵⁵See Jane A. Bernstein, “Thanks for My Weapons in Battle – My Voice and the Desire to Use It” in *Women and Protest Music in the Americas*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern, 2003), 171; Matthew B. Karush, *Musicians in Transit: Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 142-178; Murray Luft, “Latin American Protest Music: What Happened to The New Songs?” *Canadian Folk Music bulletin/Bulletin de Musique Folklorique Canadienne* 30, no. 3 (1996): 10–18; Larry Rohter, “Mercedes Sosa: A Voice of Hope,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1988, sec. Arts.

passionate ambassador for justice, how did her social consciousness affect her image as a performer? In the first section of this chapter, I will examine through critical reception and performance style how Sosa came to be associated with the Marian images of mother, intercessor, and hope for the world. In the second section, I will study two of her works, “*Las manos de mi madre*” (1985) and “*Canción con todos*” (1969), through the lens of Latina Theology, focusing on her ability to act as a bridge within and beyond her Argentinean, Latin American, and musical communities.

La Pachamama

Born in 1935 in province of Tucumán, Sosa was the daughter of working-class parents. In 1950, at the age of fifteen she entered and won a radio singing contest, earning her a record label and launching her lifelong career as a celebrated folk musician and emblem of Latin American revolutionism. However, it was not until the mid-1960s, after a poorly-received album, and a complete re-branding that she began to garner success. Although initially marketed by her record company as a popular musician with a modest beehive hairstyle, Sosa had always seen herself as a folksinger.⁵⁶ In 1965, after a bold decision to reinvent her image, she gave a standout debut performance at the Cosquín Folk Festival in the province of Córdoba, Argentina. Amid the sexual revolution, Sosa’s intentionally indigenous persona doubled as an excuse to nix the fake eyelashes and form-fitting dresses of the day. Wearing her dark, raven hair around her shoulders, she was draped in a black and red poncho, her lack of make-up highlighting her angular

⁵⁶ Matthew B. Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 144.

cheekbones (see Figure 12). Seated on the stage playing the *bombo legüero*⁵⁷ she held in her lap and singing a song lamenting the fall of the Inca empire, she evoked an essence of earthy authenticity. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor discusses the fluidity and transferability of a dual-indigenous and European heritage (*mestizaje*). She states that it “both reveals the marks of its initiating conditions *and* transcends them. It has a history, tells a history, enacts a history through racialized embodiment, and gets retheorized at different historical moments as part of social projects.”⁵⁸ Sosa’s decision to emphasize her indigeneity would last throughout her career, quickly becoming her signature appearance.



Figure 12: Sosa singing and playing the *bombo legüero*.

Though her Amerindian attire did challenge traditional notions of femininity, Sosa was simultaneously desexualized and gendered through critics’ and media’s

⁵⁷ An Argentine drum usually held on the performer’s side, as seen in Figure 12.

⁵⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 100.

repeated emphasis on her maternity. In a 1969 article about the Cosquín festival, Sosa was featured in a photo with her son, captioned “The Mother of the Festival.” Beneath the photo read, “All the dramatic ferocity, the savage blood that Mercedes Sosa puts into her singing, disappears when she is accompanied by her son.”⁵⁹ Her wideset frame and fiery, robust voice were softened when contextualized with her babe at her side. In the words of historian Matthew Karush, “Maternity humanized her, reducing the danger implicit in her exotic indigeneity.” Aside from the racist implications of her “savage blood,” motherhood set her apart from other female artists and removed her from the male gaze. Particularly as a folksinger, she evoked an earthy, holistic quality, leading a television host to refer to her as a “telluric phenomenon”⁶⁰ and earning her the nickname “Pachamama.” An indigenous Andean term meaning “earth mother,” the name refers to the Incan goddess, and in some cases, to the Virgin Mary.⁶¹ Characterizing Sosa as such not only highlighted her image as a maternal, if not matronly, figure, but simultaneously elevated her above typical feminine sexuality to a quasi-sacred status.

Much like the Virgin Mary’s image as an intercessor, Sosa soon became a symbol for those in need. By 1975, she had earned yet another nickname, this time of “*La Negra*” [the Black One]. A deceptively politicized term, it placed her within the ranks of the marginalized, predominantly dark-skinned poor. However, rather than being directly associated as a member of the lower-classes, her indigeneity was interpreted as “sincerity, passion, and authenticity.”⁶² With this elevated and somewhat privileged status, she was

⁵⁹ *Gente*, January 30, 1969, 9, in Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 159.

⁶⁰ Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 159.

⁶¹ Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, *Object and Apparition: Envisioning the Christian Divine in the Colonial Andes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 137-176.

⁶² Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 159.

seen as a champion of the people, straddling a unique divide between being one of them and being semi-divine. Simultaneously a comforting mother and fervent warrior, she, like the Blessed Virgin, became “not just the prophetic woman or the liberating woman, or the mother par excellence” but a source of compassion and safety.

Her poetic lyrics, often calling upon the audience to join in a spirit of community, were “like a cry that springs from the heart and produces some relief from affliction.”⁶³ An intercessor for the oppressed and a representative for the impoverished Argentines, Sosa embodied the Marian image of “hope, mother, protector, she who does not abandon her children.”⁶⁴ Just as Mary stayed with her Son until his final breaths, Mercedes Sosa never left her people – or as her maternalized image would imply – her children. Even after being forced into exile via censorship by the dictatorship,⁶⁵ she returned to her homeland and held a series of eleven sold-out concerts in 1982, at which the adoring crowd chanted in unison, “*La Negra no se va*” [*La Negra* will not leave].⁶⁶ Increasingly more closely associated with “Argentineness” and political revolution, Sosa had become a loyal companion of the people, a champion of the poor, and a symbol of national pride.

Furthermore, within her professional image Mercedes Sosa reflected the Virgin’s ability to take on various identities. Their multi-faceted nature has contributed to the deep devotion that their fans and followers, respectively, have shown them throughout the years. That is not to say that Sosa’s audiences felt a religious adoration for her, yet in her subtle evolution throughout her career, she constantly adjusted to what her people needed

⁶³ Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 24.

⁶⁴ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary*, 26.

⁶⁵ Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 143.

⁶⁶ Karush, *Musicians in Transit*, 175.

and wanted from her. From her youth as a folksinger and crooner, she shifted her aesthetic to match her indigenous phenotypical identity, while by the mid-1970s when she had garnered massive international success, she slightly re-branded again, this time taking on the plight of the poor through her more racially- and socially-connoted nickname of “*La Negra*.” Although some were intentional decisions, many of these subtle changes stemmed not from cunning career moves, but from images that her audiences and critics projected on to her. She was received as an earthy, authentic mother rather than a struggling folksinger exploiting her one-quarter Quechua heritage. When she moved to Spain after government censorship on her albums and concerts, rather than viewed as an artist placing her finances and career ahead of her country, she was depicted as a beloved Argentine martyr forced unwilling out of her homeland. This is not to say that history has granted her unwarranted favor, but rather that her audience saw in her what they needed to see at the time. She was an emblem of hope when theirs was lacking, a reminder of the romantic past of their beloved Argentina while theirs was racked by dictatorship and genocide.

The image of the Virgin Mary, too, has this extraordinary ability to shift identity and become what her people need in the moment. In times of strife versus moments of gratefulness, one might turn to Our Lady of Guadalupe, of Lourdes, of Good Hope, Mary the Intercessor, the Virgin, the Mother of God. As a compounded emblem of countless possibilities, Mary becomes a canvas on which we project our own desires, a blank yet replete screen on which to envision ourselves and our futures as we wish. Her very name holds a certain power, “a word filled with the human desire for fulfillment...a word of

hope, poetic word, word combining many longings.”⁶⁷ Like a multi-faceted diamond, she contains infinite opportunities and identities: that of mother, companion, of intercessor, a flower of love, the shining star of the sea. In this kaleidoscopic quality we see a reflection of Sosa’s audience perception and reception. Fluid and ever-changing, yet imbued with the comforting stability of a mother’s warmth, Sosa personified the Latin America of their past as well as of their future. Just as Mary is “more than ‘just Mary’ ...more than the people symbolized in a woman,”⁶⁸ Mercedes Sosa was more than the voice of the people; she was their protector, their visionary, their mother, and their muse.

Building Bridges: A Holistic Musicianship

Bridges are thresholds to other realities...passageways, conduits, and connectors, that connote transitioning, crossing borders and changing perspectives. Bridges span limitable spaces between worlds...Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, an unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries.⁶⁹

- Gloria Anzaldúa

Inhabiting the socio-cultural divide between European and indigenous, Sosa fought for the rights of her people in both in her musical career and her personal life. A *mestiza* of white and Quechuan descent, she occupied space amongst the working-class people of the *pueblo* as well as in the modern, Europeanized urban centers. With this dual identity, she had the ability to reach audiences across Latin America by tapping in to a common, shared experience of humanity. A key aspect of that humanity lies in an innate desire to

⁶⁷ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary*, 18.

⁶⁸ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary*, 18.

⁶⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

connect with one's imagined past, ancestry, and heritage. By examining two of her performances from a feminist theological perspective, we will understand how Sosa formed a bridge between the ancestry of her past and her hopes for a more just future, a future of a united Latin America.

Throughout Sosa's career and the *Nueva Canción* movement, she consistently shifts between focusing on the past and looking ahead to the future. Given the harsh political realities of the period, looking back and ahead rather than focusing on the present could be seen as a form of escapism, yet when reflecting on this tendency from a feminist theological viewpoint, the concept of memory and remembrance becomes a necessary part of progress and of healing. Brazilian feminist theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva writes,

The liturgy that rebuilds and fortifies life possesses a historical dimension, one of memory. Celebrating struggles for conditions worthy of life and dreams of liberation means celebrating the memory of those, men and women, who have believed and celebrated their faith in the God of justice who walks with people, heals, and liberates. In this way, the communion women experience from liturgy starts from the most immediate situation but extends to embrace their ancestors, who are remembered with affection.⁷⁰

The past and its lessons become a vital part of a holistic liturgy. Remembering those who came before reignites the passion needed to fight for liberation and reminds one of a

⁷⁰ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, "In the Movement of Wisdom: Wisdom Rituals and Liturgies as Spiritual Resources in the Struggle for Justice," in *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and Elisabeth Schlüsser Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 2000), 122-23.

more profound reason for undertaking the struggle. It provides strength on the journey and inspiration to face the trials ahead. After participating in an all-female liturgy held in the chapel where Sor Juana Inés worshipped, feminist theologian Nancy Elizabeth Bedford describes this idea of making space, as the women “made time and found a place for remembering the past, enjoying the moment, and dreaming of the future.”⁷¹ Sosa captures this sense of cherishing time, as throughout her works she balances the nostalgia of the past while using song to be a hopeful and resilient voice for the future.

In her 1990 live performance of “*Las manos de mi madre*” [My Mother’s Hands] she sings of the simple pleasures of childhood, heralding back to a happier time. Her mother’s hands, “like birds in the air” would knead bread and create life through food so that “Everyday life / becomes magical.” Throughout the song, with only a single guitar accompaniment in the background, Sosa lightly plays the *bombo legüero* to the rhythm of a heartbeat, as if to represent the steady pulse of life. As she holds the final note, resting on the word “*mágico*,” she continues the beating thud of the drum, symbolizing that even after the music has died away, after the “magic” of youthful innocence is gone, life continues. Complementing her whimsical, nostalgic lyrics, the simple musical structure is a tribute to the common *pueblo*, as well as to the memory of a wonder-filled childhood spent in the safety of a loving mother’s arms.

The familiar imagery of a mother’s hands and the soothing smells of baking bread are experiences common to the general *pueblo*, regardless of class or ethnicity. Such universally relevant lyrics of “stories of the kitchen...clay ovens / bread of hope” break

⁷¹ Nancy Elizabeth Bedford, “Making Spaces: Latin American and Latina Feminist Theologies on the Cusp of Interculturality,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado-Nunes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

down social barriers and invite audiences to unite through the normalcy of daily life.

From a feminist theological perspective, Latina spirituality and leadership often center on concrete, even commonplace, experiences, on “work done with the body, the heart, the hands, and the head.”⁷² It is an active, socially conscious method of working, one which promotes community and inclusivity, of being “a part of” instead of “separate from.”⁷³ Indeed, we are reminded that this type of spirituality “draws from its roots, is ingrained in its roots, and continually connects Latinas to the cultural memory of their narrative experience.”⁷⁴ Through this poetic vision of living out history through one’s mother and the use of indigenous, ancestral elements in her performance, we see that it is more than music, but an act of leadership, of storytelling, and of remembrance in her community.

With a passion for social justice and a mission to unite a divided Latin America, her songs resonate with this sense of togetherness and of imagining a world of potential. In her 1971 live performance of “*Canción con todos*” [Song with Everyone], before the song begins, she explains the importance of the piece in Latin America, stating that it is “almost like a hymn to us, a hymn of unity.”⁷⁵ She then calls on the audience to envision a gigantic, unified choir of Latin America, and then invites them to join her in the refrain. As the song builds toward the end in growing volume and dynamic intensity, she sings of a gathering shout, “destined to grow and burst,” as “all the voices, all of them / all the hands, all of them / all the blood can / be a song in the wind.” The audience sings⁷⁶ and claps along as she glides around the stage in her signature black and red poncho, crying

⁷² María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 122.

⁷³ Aquino, et al. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 122.

⁷⁴ Aquino, et al. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 115.

⁷⁵ [“*Es casi como un himno de nosotros, un himno de la unidad.*”]

⁷⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPnqCxIItw>

“Sing with me, sing! / American brother / release your hopes / at the top of your lungs!” Perceived as the “guiding voice of the people,”⁷⁷ she uses her powerful alto voice to join the audience together in song, while her charisma and welcoming affect create an atmosphere of inclusivity and of belonging.

With her warm demeanor and inviting stage presence, audiences viewed her as a comforting, maternal figure. Described in a 1988 interview in the *New York Times* as “short and portly, but with the commanding stage presence of an Andean earth mother,” she seemed to remind audiences of the imagined strength and feminine resilience of legends from childhood. Sosa often embodied one of the many faces of the Virgin Mary, as a proponent of human dignity, or in Marian terms, as a “divine intercessor, who pleads for the cause of humanity.”⁷⁸ By fighting for the rights of her people both on and off stage, she became an advocate for change, an emblem of liberation, and a symbol of survival. In her dedication to unite her beloved yet polarized Latin America, she “metonymically became a mother of her nation, emanating from both native Indian cultures and Roman Catholic traditions transplanted in the New World.”⁷⁹ Acting as a bridge between these religious and cultural divides, or as feminist theologian Jeanette Rodríguez writes, “breaking barriers between people,”⁸⁰ Mercedes Sosa truly lived out the tenets of community, respect, and inclusivity upon which Latina Theology and leadership are founded.

⁷⁷ Bernstein, “Women and Protest Music in the Americas,” 171.

⁷⁸ Bernstein, “Women and Protest Music in the Americas,” 171.

⁷⁹ Bernstein, “Women and Protest Music in the Americas,” 176.

⁸⁰ Aquino, et al. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 123.

In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, Sosa became the very bridge her nation and her *pueblo* needed, a connector that could “span limitable spaces between worlds,” and a catalyst for transitions and transformations. As a secular musician embodying traits of the Virgin Mary, a *mestizo* artist co-existing in rural and urban spaces, and as a storyteller shifting between the folklore of the past and her vision for the future, Mercedes Sosa refused to be compartmentalized. Remaining steadfast in her indigenous roots while promoting social justice and human rights for the poor and disenfranchised, she carried on the work of the Latina women who came before her, a work of faith and leadership, of ritual and of the ordinary, of the heart and of the hands.

Epilogue

Misa Criolla: The Continuing Legacy of the Nueva Canción

Connecting faith with social justice, the *Nueva Canción* traverses the political and the sacred while standing in a category entirely of its own. Its ability to embody the message of Latin American Liberation Theology with approachable music and anthropocentric lyrics has allowed it to bring social activism into the Church as well as the mainstream. Although the *Nueva Canción* reached peak popularity in the 1970s and early 1980s, its unique influence has endured into the 21st century and continues to promote solidarity in popular, liturgical, and paraliturgical spaces alike. One such example can be found in the 2014 performance of Argentine composer Ariel Ramírez's mass setting, "*Misa Criolla*" [Creole Mass] (1964) (See Figure 13).

One of the foremost composers of Argentine folk music, Ramírez (1921-2010) worked closely with *folkloristas* like Mercedes Sosa and Violeta Parra and started his own music and dance company [*Compañía de Folklore Ariel Ramírez*].⁸¹ After a post-Holocaust visit to Germany, he decided to compose a work that would "revere life and involve people beyond their creeds, race, color or origin."⁸² With an impassioned message of courage, freedom, and "Christian love"⁸³ each part of the Mass setting is based upon Latin American folk rhythms. "Creole" in this sense refers to people of European descent who were born in Latin America – a term that encompasses much of Argentina's highly European population. As one of the first Mass settings written in the

⁸¹ "Murió Ariel Ramírez," *La Nación*, February 19, 2010, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/1234859-murio-ariel-ramirez>.

⁸² Adam Bernstein, "Ariel Ramirez dies; Argentine composer wrote 'Misa Criolla,'" *Washington Post*, February 12, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/02/20/AR2010022003418>.

⁸³ Bernstein, "Ariel Ramirez dies."

vernacular after the Second Vatican Council, the “Creole Mass” is intended to tap into the everyday experiences of Argentines. Fusing lived spirituality and culture with the formal setting of the Catholic Mass, it has been referred to as a “reverent carnival.”⁸⁴



Figure 13: Original cover artwork of *Misa Criolla*

Subsequently recorded by famed Spanish tenors Plácido Domingo and José Carreras as well as *folkorista* Mercedes Sosa, the *Misa Criolla* would become Ramírez’s most well-known work. In 2014, the setting was performed at the Vatican to celebrate the

⁸⁴ Bernstein, “Ariel Ramirez dies.”

Solemnity of the Virgin of Guadalupe, further blurring the line between sacred and secular (See Figure 14). As the Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico, the use of the *Misa Criolla* mass setting symbolizes a Pan-American identity, while the Virgin's appearance to Juan Diego – a peasant and the first indigenous saint from the Americas – celebrates indigenous culture and spirituality. Considering Ramírez's connections with *Nueva Canción folkloristas* and Pope Francis's roots in Liberation Theology and *Teología del pueblo* [Theology of the People], the performance functions as a statement of Christian solidarity with all Latin America. The swaying rhythms and bright harmonies of the Gloria evoke a celebratory faithfulness while the lyrics offer a hopeful plea for a more peaceful future: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill. We praise You, we adore You, we bless You, we glorify You, we give You thanks for Your great glory."⁸⁵ Connecting *lo cotidiano* of Latina Theology, the social consciousness of Liberation Theology, and the indigenous folk elements of the *Nueva Canción*, Ramírez's *Misa Criolla* perfectly embodies the genre's ability to transcend the divide between sacred and secular. Its 2014 performance at the Vatican demonstrates the immense impact of the genre and its enduring legacy in the 21st century.

⁸⁵ [Gloria a dios en el cielo y en la tierra paz a los hombres que ama el señor. Por tu inmensa gloria te alabamos te bendecimos, te adoramos, te glorificamos te damos gracias.]



Figure 14: Patricia Sosa singing the Gloria from *Misa Criolla*, 2014. (Photo from Clarín⁸⁶)

Tearing Down Fences and Building Bridges: The *Nueva Canción* Today

I would like to end this thesis with a final analysis of a recording by Mercedes Sosa. Written by Pietro (Luis Ramón Igarzábal) in 1982, “*Soy pan, soy paz, soy más*” [I am bread, I am peace, I am more] is a lilting ballad to the beautiful monotony of everyday things and to the potential for new life. Sosa performed the song live in Luna Park in Buenos Aires in 1984, just two years after returning from her exile in Spain. Draped in her signature black and red poncho, this is a different Mercedes from the glowing, vivacious young woman of her days recording *Homenaje a Violeta Parra*. Her face shows more lines than before, her movements aren’t as lively as they once were, yet she still holds the captive with her inviting smile and expansive stage presence. The

⁸⁶ “Misa Criolla en el Vaticano: Patricia Sosa emocionó con su voz,” *Clarín*, December 12, 2014, https://www.clarin.com/musica/misa-criolla-patricia-sosa-papa-francisco_0_HkJrgdw5PXx.html.

fluctuating syncopation of the guitar and claves makes it almost impossible to determine the meter or the downbeat, creating an ethereal soundscape that floats outward, directionless, from the stage. Shifting between a delicate *piano* dynamic and the distinct timbre of her rich chest voice, the lyrics seem to appear sporadically as if improvised: “I am bread, I am peace, I am more, I am that which is here and now. / I don’t want more than that which you can give me. / Today is given to you, today is taken away, / The same as the daisy, the same as the sea, / The same as life, life, life, life.”

Although a popular “love song” to life, Sosa’s perception as *La Pachamama*, as artist-mother, cannot be separated from her performance. When leaving her lips, the words take on a new meaning: To be bread is to be the Eucharist, to be sustenance, to be peace, to bring things together, to build bridges. Recorded on her album *En Vivo en Argentina* [Live in Argentina] (1982) and again on one of her last compilations, *Voz y Sentimiento* [Voice and Feeling] (1996), the poetic work appears toward the end of the *Nueva Canción* and after some of the most turbulent events of her career and personal life. Quiet and reflective, “*Soy pan, soy paz, soy más*” does not call for a revolution, but for interpersonal understanding, for empathy and open-mindedness, so that “*inside new things can be born / New things, new, new, new...*”

* * *

Just one month after I heard “*Gracias a la vida*” in the Iglesia Santa Cruz, the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the prosecution in *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, guaranteeing same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry. While the nation was torn

between claims of “judicial tyranny”⁸⁷ and cries of “Love Wins,” I was forced to reconcile my political opinions with my religious beliefs for the first time. Although I couldn’t help but smile while reading about the court decision, I knew that this was far from the end of the debate, far from the end of feeling divided between religious dictates and human instincts.

This is not to say that the *Nueva Canción* is a direct “solution” to these issues, but it can offer a novel perspective. Determining that the political can be in relationship with the spiritual, it proves that holistic performance can bridge the divide and spark a conversation that leads to dialogue rather than debate. Violeta Parra’s legacy demonstrates that that which addresses the whole human experience – that reflects both joy and pain, that unites people across generations, classes, and nations – can outlive even death. Víctor Jara symbolizes not only the fight and perseverance necessary to create change, but that a deep conviction to justice will eventually lead to fruition, no matter the cost. The life and work of Mercedes Sosa embody the multifaceted nature of the human condition, the need for unity across borders, and the most fundamental desire to connect.

While a battle continues both within and outside of the Catholic Church, it is music like that of the *Nueva Canción* – music that seeks to unite, music that promotes peace and empathy, music that seeks to tear down walls and to instead build bridges – that may play a similar and significant role in fostering dialogue in a world that yearns for justice and understanding.

⁸⁷ Allegra Kirkland, “Huckabee Outlines Plan to Resist ‘Judicial Tyranny’ After SCOTUS Gay Marriage Ruling,” *Talking Points Memo*, July 3, 2015.

Songs like these request that we be present and aware,

I am bread, I am peace, I am more,

That we adapt to the signs of the times,

I am that which is here and now...

That we recognize the immense suffering around us,

Take what we can outside,

That we constantly seek to put faith in action,

So that inside new things can be born

And that we be the change needed in our world.

New things, new, new, new...

Gracias a la vida

Music and text by Violeta Parra; Translation by Robert Pring-Mill

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me dio dos luceros que cuando los abro,
perfecto distingo lo negro del blanco,
y en el alto cielo su fondo estrellado
y en las multitudes el hombre que yo amo.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It gave me two lights with which to perceive
clearly how starkly black differs from white,
and the star-studded depth from the dark of night,
and the man that I love in the midst of the crowds.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me ha dado el oído que, en todo su ancho,
graba noche y día grillos y canarios,
martillos, turbinas, ladridos, chubascos,
y la voz tan tierna de mi bien amado.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It gave me the breadth of my hearing, recording
the crickets by night and canaries by day,
and hammers and turbines and barking and storms,
and the gentle voice of my own well beloved.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me ha dado el sonido y el abecedario,
con él las palabras que pienso y declaro:
madre, amigo, hermano, y luz alumbrando
la ruta del alma del que estoy amando.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It gave me the alphabet's letters and sounds
and through them the words that I think and I speak:
mother, friend, brother, and light to make clear
the course of the soul of the man that I love

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me ha dado la marcha de mis pies
cansados;
con ellos anduve ciudades y charcos,
playas y desiertos, montañas y llanos,
y la casa tuya, tu calle y tu patio.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It gave weary feet the strength to go on;
with them I have plodded through cities and rivers,
and beaches and deserts and mountains and plains,
and the way to the street of the house where you
live.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me dio el corazón que agita su marco
cuando miro el fruto del cerebro humano:
cuando miro al bueno tan lejos del malo,
cuando miro al fondo de tus ojos claros.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It gave me the heart that beats in its cage
when I look at the fruits of the human mind,
when I look at the gulf that divides good from evil,
when I look into the depth of your clear steady eyes.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.
Me ha dado la risa y me ha dado el llanto.
Así yo distingo dicha de quebranto,
los dos materiales que forman mi canto,
y el canto de ustedes que es el mismo
canto
y el canto de todos que es mi propio canto.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.
It has given me laughter and given me tears
with which to distinguish good fortune from
heartbreak, and those are the themes which give
shape to my song:
my song that's the same as the song that you sing –
as the song of all people; my very own song.

Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.

Thanks be to life for the much it has given.

Plegaria a un labrador

Music and text by Víctor Jara; Translation by Robert Pring-Mill

Levántate y mira la montaña
De donde viene el viento, el sol y el agua.
Tú que manejas el curso de los ríos,
Tú que sembraste el vuelo de tu alma.

Rise up and look at the mountain
From whence come wind, sun, and water.
You who drives the course of the river,
You who planted the flight of your soul.

Levántate y mírate las manos
Para crecer estréchala a tu hermano.
Juntos iremos unidos en la sangre
Hoy es el tiempo que puede ser mañana.

Rise up and look at your hands,
To grow, hold it out to your brother.
Together we will go united in blood,
Today is the time that can be tomorrow.

Líbranos de aquel que nos domina
En la miseria.
Tráenos tu reino de justicia
E igualdad.
Sopla como el viento la flor
De la quebrada.
Limpia como el fuego
El cañón de mi fusil.
Hágase por fin tu voluntad
Aquí en la tierra.
Danos tu fuerza y tu valor
Al combatir.
Sopla como el viento la flor
de la quebrada.
Limpia como el fuego
El cañón de mi fusil.

Free us from the one who rules us
In poverty.
Bring us your kingdom of justice
And equality.
Blow, like wind,
The flower of the ravine.
Clean, like fire,
The cannon of my rifle.
Your will be done, finally,
Here on earth.
Give us your strength and your courage
To fight.
Blow, like wind,
The flower of the ravine.
Clean, like fire,
The cannon of my rifle.

Levántate y mírate las manos
Para crecer estréchala a tu hermano.
Juntos iremos unidos en la sangre
Ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte.
Amén.

Rise up and look at your hands,
To grow, hold it out to your brother.
Together we will go united in blood,
Now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Estadio Chile (Somos Cinco Mil)

Text by Víctor Jara; Translation by Joan Jara

Somos cinco mil
En esta pequeña parte de la ciudad.
Somos cinco mil.
¿Cuántos seremos en total
en las ciudades y en todo el país?
Sólo aquí, diez mil manos siembran
y hacen andar las fábricas.

¡Cuánta humanidad
con hambre, frío, pánico, dolor,
presión moral, terror y locura!

Seis de los nuestros se perdieron
en el espacio de las estrellas.

Un muerto, un golpeado como jamás creí
se podría golpear a un ser humano.
Los otros cuatro quisieron
quitarse todos los temores,
uno saltando al vacío,
otro golpeándose la cabeza contra el muro,
pero todos con la mirada fija de la muerte.
¡Qué espanto causa el rostro del fascismo!
Llevan a cabo sus planes con precisión artera
Sin importarles nada.
La sangre para ellos son medallas.
La matanza es acto de heroísmo
¿Es este el mundo que creaste, Dios mío?
¿Para esto tus siete días de asombro y de
trabajo?

En estas cuatro murallas solo existe
un número que no progresa,
que lentamente querrá más muerte.

Pero de pronto me golpea la conciencia
y veo esta marea sin latido,
pero con el pulso de las máquinas
y los militares mostrando su rostro
de matrona llena de dulzura.

There are five thousand of us here
In this small part of the city
We are five thousand
I wonder how many we are in all
In the cities and in the whole country?
Here alone are ten thousand hands which plant seeds
And make the factories run.

How much humanity
Exposed to hunger, cold, pain,
Moral pressure, terror and insanity?

Six of us were lost
As if into starry space.

One dead, another beaten as I could never have
believed a human being can be beaten.
The other four wanted
To end their terror
One jumping into nothingness,
Another beating his head against a wall,
But all with the fixed look of death.
What horror the face of fascism creates!
They carry out their plans with knife-like precision.
Nothing matters to them.
To them, blood equals medals,
Slaughter is an act of heroism.
Oh, God, is this the world that you created,
For this your seven days of wonder and work?

Within these four walls only a number exists
Which does not progress,
Which slowly will wish more and more for death.

But suddenly my conscience awakes
And I see that this tide has no heartbeat,
Only the pulse of machines
And the military, showing their midwives faces
Full of sweetness.

¿Y México, Cuba y el mundo?
¡Que griten esta ignominia!

Let Mexico, Cuba and the world
Cry out against this atrocity!

Somos diez mil manos menos
que no producen.
¿Cuántos somos en toda la patria?

We are ten thousand hands
Which can produce nothing.
How many of us in the whole country?

La sangre del compañero Presidente
golpea más fuerte que bombas y metralas
Así golpeará nuestro puño nuevamente.

The blood of our President, our compañero,
Will strike with more strength
Than bombs and machine guns!
So will our fist strike again.

¡Canto que mal me sales
Cuando tengo que cantar espanto!
Espanto como el que vivo,
como el que muero, espanto.
De verme entre tanto y tantos
momentos del infinito
en que el silencio y el grito
son las metas de este canto.
Lo que veo nunca vi,
lo que he sentido y que siento
hará brotar el momento...

How hard is it to sing
when I must sing of horror!
Horror in which I am living
Horror in which I am dying.
To see myself among so much
And so many moments of infinity
In which silence and screams
Are the end of my song.
What I see, I have never seen.
What I have felt and what I feel
Will give birth to the moment...

Venceremos

Music by Sergio Ortega; Text by Claudio Iturra

Translation by Nancy Morris⁸⁸

Desde el hondo crisol de la patria,
se levanta el clamor popular.
Ya se anuncia la nueva alborada.
Todo Chile comienza a cantar.

.
Venceremos, venceremos.
Mil cadenas habrá que romper.
Venceremos, venceremos,
La miseria sabremos vencer.

Campeños, soldados, mineros,
la mujer de la patria también,
estudiantes, empleados y obreros,
cumpliremos con nuestro deber.

Sembraremos las tierras de gloria,
socialista será el porvenir,
todos juntos haremos la historia,
a cumplir, a cumplir, a cumplir.

From the depths of our country,
the cry of the people rises.
Now the new dawn is announced.
All of Chile begins to sing.

.
We will triumph, we will triumph.
A thousand chains will have to be broken.
We will triumph, we will triumph.
We will learn how to conquer misery.

Farmers, soldiers, miners,
The woman of the nation as well,
Students, employees and workers,
We will come together with our duty.

We will sow the lands with glory,
Socialist will be the future,
All of us together will be history.
To achieve, achieve, achieve.

⁸⁸ Nancy Morris, "Canto Porque es Necesario Cantar: The New Song Movement in Chile, 1973-1983," *Latin American Research Review* 21, no. 2 (1986): 121.

Venceremos

Music by Sergio Ortega; Text by Víctor Jara

Translation by Elizabeth Turnwald

Aquí va todo el pueblo de Chile,
aquí va la Unidad Popular.
Campesino, estudiante y obrero:
compañeros de nuestro cantar.

Here come all the people of Chile
Here comes Popular Unity.
Farmer, student, and worker,
Comrades of our song.

Concerniente de nuestra bandera
la mujer ya se ha unido al clamor.
La Unidad Popular vencedora
será tumba del yanqui opresor.

Concerning our flag
She is now united with the shout.
The Popular Unity victor
Will be the tomb of the Yankee oppressor.

Venceremos, venceremos
con Allende en septiembre a vencer.
Venceremos, venceremos
la Unidad Popular al poder.

We shall triumph, we shall triumph
With Allende in September to win.
We shall triumph, we shall triumph
Popular Unity to overcome.

Con la fuerza que surge del pueblo
una patria mejor hay que hacer,
a golpear todos juntos y unidos
al poder, al poder, al poder.

With the strength that emerges from the people
A better nation it will be,
To hit all together and united,
To overcome, overcome, overcome.

Si la justa victoria de Allende
la derecha quisiera ignorar
todo el pueblo resuelto y valiente
como un hombre se levantará.

If the just victory of Allende
The right will choose to ignore
All the people resolved and valiant
Like a man he will raise himself up.

Canción con todos

Music by César Isella; Text by Armando Tejada Gómez

Salgo a caminar
 Por la cintura cósmica del sur.
 Piso en la región
 Más vegetal del tiempo y de la luz.
 Siento al caminar,
 Toda la piel de América en mi piel.
 Y anda en mi sangre un río
 Que libera en mi voz su caudal.

Sol de alto Perú, rostro Bolivia,
 Estaño y soledad un verde Brasil
 Besa a mi Chile cobre y mineral
 Subo desde el sur
 Hacia la entraña américa
 Y total pura raíz de un grito
 Destinado a crecer y a estallar.

Todas las voces, todas,
 Todas las manos, todas.
 Toda la sangre puede
 Ser canción en el viento.
 ¡Canta conmigo, canta!
 Hermano americano,
 Libera tu esperanza
 Con un grito en la voz!

I go out to walk
 About the cosmic southern belt.
 I walk in the earliest area
 Of time and light.
 I feel like walking,
 All the flesh of America in my skin.
 And in my blood a river flows
 That releases its waters in my voice

Sun of high Peru, face of Bolivia
 Tin and alone a green Brazil
 It kisses my copper and ore Chile
 I rise from the south
 Toward the inner depths of America
 And total pure root of a shout
 Destined to grow and burst.

All the voices, all of them,
 All the hands, all of them.
 All the blood can
 Be a song in the wind.
 Sing with me, sing!
 American brother,
 Release your hopes
 At the top of your lungs!

Cómo pájaros en el aire

Music and text by Peteco Carabajal

Las manos de mi madre Parecen pájaros en el aire Historias de cocina Entre sus alas heridas de hambre	My mother's hands Look like birds in the air Stories of the kitchen Between her wings wounded from hunger
Las manos de mi madre Sabén que ocurre por las mañanas Cuando amasa la vida Horno de barro, pan de esperanza	My mother's hands Know what happens in the mornings When kneading life Clay ovens, bread of hope
Las manos de mi madre Llegan al patio desde temprano Todo se vuelve fiesta Cuando ellas vuelan junto a otros pájaros Junto a los pájaros Que aman la vida Y la construyen con los trabajos Arde la leña, harina y barro Lo cotidiano se vuelve mágico	My mother's hands Arrive early to the courtyard Everything becomes a party When they fly next to other birds Next to the birds That love life And build it with their jobs The firewood burns, flour and clay Everyday life becomes magical
Las manos de mi madre Me representan un cielo abierto Y un recuerdo añorado Trapos calientes en los inviernos	My mother's hands Represent to me an open sky And a longed-for memory Warm rags in the winter
Ellas se brindan cálidas Nobles, sinceras, limpias de todo ¿Cómo serán las manos Del que las mueve Gracias al odio?	They give themselves warmly, Noble, sincere, purifying for all What will the hands of He who is moved by Hatred be like?

Soy pan, soy paz, soy más

Music and text by Piero

Yo so-o-oy, yo so-o-oy, yo so-o-oy
Soy agua, playa, cielo, casa, planta
Soy mar, Atlántico, viento y América
Soy un montón de cosas santas
Mezcladas con cosas humanas
Como te explico cosas mundanas

Fui niño, cuna, teta, techo, manta
Más miedo, cuco, grito, llanto, raza
Después mezclaron las palabras
O se escapaban las miradas
Algo pasó no entendí nada

Vamos, decime, contame
Todo lo que a vos te está pasando ahora
Porque sino cuando está el alma sólo llora
Hay que sacarlo todo afuera, como la
primavera
Nadie quiere que adentro algo se muera
Hablar mirándose a los ojos
Sacar lo que se puede afuera
Para que adentro nazcan cosas nuevas

Soy, pan, soy paz, soy más, soy el que está
por acá
No quiero más de lo que me puedas dar.
Hoy se te da, hoy se te quita
Igual que con la margarita igual al mar
Igual la vida, la vida, la vida, la vida

Vamos, decime, contame
Todo lo que a vos te está pasando ahora
Porque sino cuando está el alma sólo llora
Hay que sacarlo todo afuera, como la
primavera
Nadie quiere que adentro algo se muera
Hablar mirándose a los ojos
Sacar lo que se puede afuera
Para que adentro nazcan cosas nuevas
Cosas nuevas, nuevas, nuevas, nuevas

I am, I am, I am
I am water, beach, sky, plant
I am ocean, Atlantic, wind and America
I am a mountain of holy things
Mixed with human things
As I explain mundane things to you

I was a child, cradle, breast, blanket
Plus fear, the bogeyman, shouting, crying, race
After they mixed the words
Or they avoided the glances
Something happened I didn't understand anything

Come, tell me, tell me
All that is happening to you now
Because only when alone does the soul cry
We must get everything out in the open, like the
spring
No one wants something inside of them to die
Speaking while looking into his eyes
Take what we can outside
So that inside new things can be born

I am bread, I am peace, I am more, I am that_which
is here and now
I don't want more than that which you can give me
Today is given to you, today is taken away
The same as the daisy, the same as the sea
The same as life, life, life, life

Let's go, tell me, tell me
All that is happening to you now
Because only when alone does the soul cry
We must get everything out in the open, like the
spring
No one wants something inside of them to die
Speaking while looking into his eyes
Take what we can outside
So that inside new things can be born
New things, new, new, new

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