

Songwriting: a Means to Prevent Gender Violence

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INTRODUCTION

Previous studies conducted in different Mexican¹ federal entities (Castro, Riquer 2016, 2017, 2018) agreed in saying that preventative measures from public institutions regarding gender violence are limited. Even though violence against women has been added to the public agenda, the kind of intervention that has been carried on by state and municipal authorities focuses on victims. Most public resources like legal and financial aid, human resources and material aid have been invested in this manner. Regarding prevention, the data from the case studies mentioned above shows that discussions on the fundamental basic and general content about violence are organized in schools and with the general public. Information campaigns are also organized in order to give more visibility to the problem of gender violence and to denounce these acts. Nevertheless, we lack a serious strategy to prevent violence against women where different sectors take part.

This is directly linked to the way the gender violence issue is addressed and to the actions that are taken to face it. Furthermore, it has been noted that even if we

1 In 2016 and 2017 the following areas were inquired: Chihuahua, Chiapas, Colima, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Michoacán, Morelos, Nuevo León y Veracruz. In 2018, ciudad de Mexico was inquired as well as Colima and Guanajuato plus Puebla and Zacatecas.

ignore the impact of the few prevention acts, we know that these focus on domestic violence and intimate partner violence. In most cases of gender violence, the most serious and lethal cases are caused by domestic or intimate partner violence. No prevention strategies have been established to stop extreme manifestations of violence like: rape, child abuse, disappearance of women, human trafficking for sexual exploitation or femicide.

The implications for the focus of attention on assistance are related to the fact that the subject of prevention and sanction, established in legislation based on the right to a life free from violence, is not the principal concern of the institutional responses. On the other hand, the excuse of macho values rooted in violence, in power and in the objectification of women has created, consolidated and reproduced a situation of gender violence against women that has reached concerning levels in a society like the one in Mexico (INEGI 2017). One form of media used to promote violent values has been the lyrics of songs from different musical genres. In light of this, and in order to introduce an alternative and entertaining form of prevention against violence towards women we decided to write and reinvent the Mexican *corrido* with a gender perspective. This method is employed to put a spotlight on the issue of the different types of violence endured by women. In February 2017, the first song writing workshop took place while promoting a gender perspective to prevent violence in the communities of Zacatecas².

Based on the idea of the Mexican *corrido* as an epic popular genre, we analyzed the narrative structures and the various archetypes of the *corrido*'s subjects, such as the representation of women, but with a feminist perspective (Herrera-Sobeck 1990). The Mexican *corrido* poses the idea that a character can either be the archetype of a hero or a victim³. It carries out an idea of a social construct or moral, just like a story would within the song. The general public's acceptance and the reach give these songs an unusual strength of propaganda.

WORKSHOP LAYOUT AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology used during the workshops was based on round tables of open dialogue. Each participant shares their own personal experience and their social, professional and family makeup. These intimate stories are the starting point of the writing process where violence is defined as a disgrace, unjust and overall a threat to the social foundations.

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- 2 In the beginning, we wanted to work with only one music genre but as the workshops went on the possibility of working with other genres presented itself according to the choices of the participants.
 - 3 For example, in the case of Francisco Villa who was brutally murdered.

The objective of the workshops is to promote nonviolence with a gender perspective towards women in a participatory, non-hierarchical environment that focuses on revisiting different forms of popular music. Additionally, the workshops encourage creation, reflection, and promote better values and an alternative way of life that liberates and empowers participants coming from difficult backgrounds who seldom have access to this type of approach to music and the creative process.

The writing process is inclusive to all participants, starting with their perception of violence against women, in a safe space where they are not oppressed by the normative patriarchal model, by violence or consumerism, but rather viewed as principal subjects who in different settings have had their rights violated. Thus, we build a narrative where violence is the front and the center, but also denounce situations like these and claim back women and girls' rights.

The workshops are built around five different stages. First, the discussion is launched by a series of opening questions about violence against women where everyone answers according to their own perception. From this first collective dialogue we can start commenting on stereotypes and gender roles that are directly linked to the violence endured by women. Second, we go over the conversations about power and how it is related to gender, social class, age, and race. We then organize all of the participants' ideas and try to find a topic for the future song, it can vary from recent local events related to gender violence to more generic topics about its prevention like: sexual, professional, economic, physical, psychological violence, harassment, femicide, gender stereotypes, etc... Third, an analysis of the songwriting process and how gender violence stereotypes are born and passed on is done. Then, based on the musical genre chosen on the previous session, we find a way to articulate the text and theme of the song. This is an educational stage; a serious subject does not necessarily call for heavy music. The structure of the song, the feelings it awakens, and the interest of every participant are the factors that we wish to maintain. We want to include all of the participants, so they feel part of the writing process like in the music industry and not feel as though in simply a conference. Finally, depending on where the workshop is held, on the instruments available, and with the support of professional musicians the musical arrangements come to fruition. During this final stage we work with the guitars, basses, traditional instruments, and various percussion instruments to encourage the revival of the participants' voices, teamwork and in support of their talents. It is not mandatory, so every participant inserts themselves as they wish by playing, singing or just as moral support to the group. Finally, in the fourth stage, a recording of the original songs (text and arrangements) is made. All this can be achieved thanks to the professional equipment like cameras, microphones and recording and editing equipment, which we bring as support. We then share the recording with the group

during a listening party in order to receive live and constructive feedback, and also to discuss the emotions of each participant during the recording⁴.

As you can see, this project has the objective of preventing violence against women through arts with a gender perspective. It is not only a theoretical demonstration but a simple, minimalist, and concrete response.

INTERVENTION SPACES

Gender violence against women is not exclusive to lower class communities or to any education level in particular (INEGI 2017). Some studies show the power of the hetero-normative identity as a circumstance for organized crime recruitment or for aggressive behavior in impoverished neighborhoods and communities. This is one of the reasons the workshops target community centers and neighborhoods in identified conflict areas in the city of Zacatecas. This plan was put in place to open the creative dialogue with a creative public that is witness to these activities.

This proposal, with this particular subject and form has the potential to prevent violence against women. The younger populations who are more vulnerable to the influence of the so called *narco corridos*, that are present in the musical panorama and loaded with gender-based violence stereotypes, can be introduced to questioning traditional values and creating awareness on equality and tolerance with an educational, artistic and fun twist. For the past two years these workshops have been open to everyone, there are no limitations, people of all backgrounds are welcome. This means that six-year-old boys and girls, teenagers, men and women have been able to participate. Their professional activities have also been highly varied, some were primary school students, college students, music students, housewives and community center employees.

RESULTS

These workshops of reinvention of the *corrido* and other music genres have a direct impact on the song writers and composers, opening a safe space to reflect on the values we assume culturally that are linked to gender violence. Most participants, in general, do not necessarily have prior musical experience and in all of the workshops no one has had an educational background whatsoever on subjects like gender or how to prevent violence against women. There are many feminist artists and groups

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 4 Playlist of workshops' videos is available from: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcyGHNRNcH4K8Whvc9N-rV3yF1UzDi-jR>; playlist of audio tracks with special guests and remixes is available from: <https://soundcloud.com/gilles-aniorte/sets/corridos-with-a-gender>.

that promote through their lyrics and texts ideas and political views about gender equality. This fact brings us to note that there are a lot of similar characteristics between those texts / lyrics and the ones we write during the workshops. It is also important to say that for most of the participants this experience might be the first time they face subjects like feminism, gender, and violence against women.

To this day we have done, in the space of two years (2017–2018), ten workshops. Most of them (7) have been funded by the Secretary for Women's Affairs in Zacatecas and imparted in underprivileged suburbs. We also organized a workshop in Chicago, and two other ones with the Cuervo Foundation⁵ which were conducted in their music school. In the end, we have compiled twelve recordings of original songs that were written during these sessions.

We were able to discover that every song's theme was very much influenced by the type of attendees. For example, in a group of girls and boys we discussed the discrimination they face while playing games or participating in educational activities as well as the gender stereotypes that prevail through these activities. Whilst among teenagers, the main subject was the right to access information about their bodies, sex education. Amongst women the discussion was more about sexual harassment on the street, calling out rape culture, double burden and sexual violence at home; with men the most important topic was hegemonic masculinity. To illustrate the results, this article is supplemented with an annex which includes the extracts of songs on different topics written during the workshops.

These workshops have helped to give more visibility to the issue of violence against women that manifests under different forms, through reflection and writing sessions where artists, investigators and neophytes interact and debate narratives, verses and their underlying impacts.

There is one unexpected result to this experience, which is that it created a safe space for all participants and this has been very much appreciated by the women, young and adult. The participants – the actively involved, the passive ones, and the general public – start questioning their own values.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this experience where the participants write a new song, they also end up not only with a different vision of the many forms of violence and its origins but also with practical and tangible tools to help them debate and deconstruct the myths causing gender violence. Nevertheless, there were some difficulties in putting this strategy in place. One of them was getting the word out and advertising on

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5 Fomento Cultural Cuervo (Mexico).

the part of the public institutions (state and municipal governments), sometimes it got a positive response and participants would attend regularly and other times the sessions would have to be canceled for the lack of attendees. The reason of this is the lack of communication on the true purpose of the workshop and also because the institutions did not announce the event on time or at all. We then go back to the fact that the resources and the efforts from these institutions are focusing on attending the problem rather than preventing it.

We also had to face censorship from the funding institutions that qualified some of the lyrics as “not appropriate” to be presented as part of a government-funded project. This happened because some of the texts that got censored addressed matters like impunity and the omissions that are committed in the institutions of law enforcement when women report situations of violence they endure. One of the last obstacles was the continuity of the project, as for financial reasons it could not be carried out for the third year.

Finally, given the type of work and topics addressed during the workshops we thought it would present an opportunity for different institutions to come together, primarily the ones whose duty is to promote culture and human rights as well as to prevent violence against women. The point of the project was not limited to reaching only women organizations, this connection was not possible. However, this experience is still very much alive thanks to the re-recording of the songs by people from the music industry⁶ as well as the reach of them facilitated by youtube⁷ or academic spaces.

Annex

TOPICS AND SONG SAMPLES FROM THE WORKSHOPS

Gender stereotypes in games	
<p><i>El Bicho Raro</i></p> <p><i>Este bicho raro que está haciendo aquí, Sé que lo estás pensando y me incomoda. Tus miradas destruyen mi felicidad. Quiero dar la vuelta y salir.</i></p>	<p>Weirdo</p> <p>What is that weirdo doing in here, I know what's on your mind and I don't like it. The way you look at me ruins my happiness. I want to turn around and run away.</p>

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6 E.g. radio show on WGN (Chicago, Illinois) with Mexican American (Chicano) musicians' interpretations, available from: <https://wgnradio.com/nocturnal-journal-with-dave-hoekstra/community-arts-exchange-band-live-in-our-studios/>.

7 Distribution via social media: <https://www.facebook.com/La-Historia-de-Lupe-Fernandez-1214305158638776/>; <https://www.facebook.com/communityartsexchange/>.

<p><i>No soy un bicho raro no me veas así, En esta vida no hay bichos raros,</i></p> <p><i>No soy diferente debes de saber. Por qué tiene que juzgar así la gente: Etiquetas me quieres poner Solamente por ser una mujer?</i></p> <p><i>No soy un bicho raro no me veas así, En esta vida no hay bichos raros.</i></p> <p><i>Dices las canicas no son para mí, El que juegue futbol te incomoda, No me conoces para hablar de mí, Algo yo te quiero decir.</i></p>	<p>I'm not a weirdo, don't look at me like that, In this life there are no weirdos.</p> <p>You must know I am no different. Why do you have to judge people? You want to label me Just because I'm a woman.</p> <p>I'm not a weirdo, don't look at me like that, In this life there are no weirdos.</p> <p>You say marble games are not for me, My football makes you uncomfortable, You talk about me, yet you don't know me, I have something to tell you.</p>
<p>Child sexual abuse prevention</p>	
<p>Nuestro Cuerpo, Nuestro Derecho</p> <p><i>Mamá, papá, tenemos que hablar, Porque es nuestro derecho me debes de informar. Tenemos derecho a tener informacion, Mi cuerpo no se toca y no hay negociación. Es nuestro cuerpo es de nosotros y de nadie más. Mis preguntas deben ser respondidas sin censura y sin ignorar.</i></p> <p><i>Quiero ser adolescente y tener información. Contéstenme mis dudas, Contéstenme sin miedo y sin censura. Es mi derecho a tener información, Mi cuerpo no se toca sin que lo quiera yo. Es nuestro cuerpo...</i></p> <p><i>Si hago una pregunta me debes contestar, No me dejes en visto, Esto me va a afectar. Tenemos derecho a tener informacion, Mi cuerpo no se toca y no hay negociación. Es nuestro cuerpo...</i></p> <p><i>Nuestro cuerpo no se toca sin permiso, Ni siquiera por dinero, El dinero no importa, aunque nos haga falta. Es mi derecho a tener información Mi cuerpo no se toca, sin que lo quiera yo. Es nuestro cuerpo...</i></p>	<p>Our Body, Our Right</p> <p>Mom, Dad, we need to talk, Because it's our right, you must inform me. It's our right to be informed, My body mustn't be touched and there's no negotiation. It's our body and nobody else's. My questions must be responded to without any censorship and not be ignored.</p> <p>I want to be a teenager and get information. Answer my questions and doubts, Answer without fear or censorship. It's our right to be informed, My body mustn't be touched unless I say so. It's our body...</p> <p>If I have a question, you must answer it, Don't leave me hanging, This is affecting me. It's our right to be informed, My body mustn't be touched and there's no negotiation. It's our body...</p> <p>Our body mustn't be touched unless I say so, Not for money, Money doesn't matter even when we need it. It's our right to be informed, My body mustn't be touched unless I say so It's our body...</p>

*No me presionen, no me obliguen, no me forcen,
Que yo me cuido y respeto a los demás,
No debo ser forzada a hacer cosas
Que no quiera.*

No, no tengas miedo

*“No, no tengas miedo
Aunque no te hagan caso.
No dejes de hablar
Hasta encontrar
A esa persona
Que te pueda ayudar.”*

*“Pero si tengo miedo,
Mucho miedo
A esa persona
Que me intimida, me toca
Y me amenaza.*

*Pero aunque tengo miedo
Quiero ser libre,
Y con tu ayuda
Lo voy a lograr.”*

*“No, no tengas miedo
Aunque te hagan callar.
No dejes de buscar
Hasta encontrar
A esa persona
Que te pueda escuchar.”*

*“Pero si tengo miedo,
Mucho miedo
A lo que me rodea,
Al que diran y al rechazo.*

*Pero aunque tengo miedo
Quiero ser libre,
Y con tu ayuda
Lo voy lograr.*

Sabes que, ya no tengo miedo.”

Don't put pressure on me, don't force me,
I can take care of myself and I respect other
people,

I mustn't be forced to do things
That I don't want to do.

I'm not Afraid Anymore

*“Don't, don't be afraid,
Even if they don't believe you.
Don't stop saying it,
Until you find
That person
Who can help.”*

*“But I am afraid,
Very afraid
Of the one who scares me,
Touches me
And threatens me.*

*But even though I'm afraid,
I want to be free
And with your help
I can be.”*

*“Don't, don't be afraid,
Even if they silence you.
Never stop searching,
Till you find
That person
Who will listen.”*

*“But I am afraid,
So afraid
Of what's around me,
Of what they say, and the rejection.*

*But although I'm afraid,
I want to be free
And with your help
I will be.*

And you know, I no longer fear.”

Masculinity	
<p><i>El Morro (Por Querer Ser Muy Hombre)</i></p> <p><i>Desde morro yo soñaba con ser gente poderosa, Tener carros y mujeres y mucha gente a mi mando.</i></p> <p><i>Al final de cuentas no era lo que yo pensaba, Sino lo que me decían no era más que un engaño y una farsa.</i></p> <p><i>A mis vivencias y experiencias me forjé otro camino, Entre los versos y coros encontré ese destino, Entre fiestas y contratos voy y canto mis corridos Con guitarra y acordeón estoy bien respaldado.</i></p> <p><i>Rodeados de dulces y juguetes Y montones de pacas de billetes Uno a uno vi caer a mis amigos Deslumbrados y apagados por traiciones.</i></p> <p><i>Al final de nada sirvió tanta lana, El precio que pagaron fue muy alto. Es la vida a cambio de la nada – Bajo tierra ya no sirven las blindadas.</i></p> <p><i>Desde entonces me di cuenta que a los hombres nos imponen Todos estos roles de violencia y competencia. Reafirmamos nuestra hombría arriesgando hasta la vida Sin saber que todo esto, de nada nos serviría.</i></p>	<p>For Wanting to Be Much of a Man</p> <p>Since I was a kid, I dreamt to be powerful, To own cars and women and be the boss. In the end I realized that life was not as I thought, But what I had heard was nothing but lies and a joke.</p> <p>With my life and experiences I made another path for myself, Between verses and choirs I found another fate, Along parties and contracts I sing my songs, With a guitar and an accordion I got all the backup I need.</p> <p>Surrounded by candy and toys And lots of bundles of bills, I saw my friends fall one by one, Dazzled and shot down by betrayals.</p> <p>In the end the money did no good, The price they paid was very high. It's life in exchange for nothing – When buried, the armor serves no good.</p> <p>Since then, I realized that men impose on us All these roles of violence and competition. We reaffirm our manhood risking our life, Without knowing that all this would be useless.</p>

Translated from the original in Spanish by *Lea Anierte Mendez*

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Dainų kūryba kaip būdas stabdyti lytinę prievartą

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje pristatomas socialinis projektas „Dainų kūrimo seminarai lyčių aspektu“, kurį 2017–2018 m. vykdė grupė mokslininkų, socialinių aktyvistų, profesionalių muzikantų ir prodiuserių iš Meksikos ir Jungtinių Amerikos Valstijų. Dvejus metus trukusio projekto, kurį finansavo abiejų šalių vyriausybės ir nevyriausybinių institucijų, metu buvo suorganizuota dešimt seminarų: septyni surengti Sakateko mieste Meksikoje, trys – Čikagoje. Projekto organizatorių pagrindinis tikslas – šviesti visuomenę ir, kvestionuojant su lytiškumu, amžiumi, socialine klase ir rase susijusius stereotipus, mažinti smurtą prieš moteris. Kaip savitą ir patrauklią smurto prevencijos formą projekto organizatoriai pasirinko dainų kūrimo seminarus, kuriuose kvietė dalyvauti įvairaus amžiaus ir išsilavinimo žmones – suaugusius vyrus, moteris, paauglius ir vaikus. Seminarų metodika buvo paremta atviru dialogu ir apskritojo stalo diskusijomis. Straipsnyje plačiau aprašoma seminarų struktūra, kurią sudarė penki etapai. Darbas grupėse prasidėdavo pokalbiu apie smurtą prieš moteris, socialinius stereotipus, dalijimusi asmenine patirtimi. Apibendrinus grupės dalyvių idėjas pasirenkama būsimo dainos tema, analizuojamas dainų kūrimo procesas, kaip pavyzdį pasitelkiant populiarias meksikiečių pasakojamąsias dainas – vadinamąsias *corridos*. Parašius dainos tekstą, profesionalūs muzikantai padėdavo sukurti dainų aranžuotę. Profesionalia įranga įrašyta daina būdavo pristatoma seminaro dalyviams, siekiant išklausti ir aptarti jų įspūdžius bei konstruktyvius vertinimus.

Straipsnyje pateiktos interneto nuorodos į svetaines, kuriose viešinami dainų, propaguojančių nesmurtinius žmonių santykius, įrašai. Pridedami dainų tekstai iliustruoja vykdyto projekto rezultatus.

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