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Migrating Towards Growth and Oblivion? A Contextual Account of the Lives and Work of Spanish-Mexican Composers

María Teresa Prieto and Emiliana de Zubeldía

¿Migrar hacia el crecimiento y el olvido? Un recuento contextual
de la vida y obra de las compositoras hispano-mexicanas
María Teresa Prieto y Emiliana de Zubeldía

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Abstract

Drawing from an interdisciplinary methodology which brings together feminist musicology, gender, and migration, as well as cultural studies, this article focuses on the lives and works of 20th-century Spanish-Mexican composers María Teresa Prieto and Emiliana de Zubeldía. It aims to analyze their biographies within the context of the frequent under-representation of women in discussions about migration and music. It will show how geographical displacement enhanced their creative development and careers by allowing them to develop broad networks, giving them enriched processes

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of cultural transfer, involving them in rival national/regional identity claims, and liberating them from restrictive (musical) gender norms. Nevertheless, their contextual advantages proved insufficient in the face of more powerful gender-discriminatory structures within the musical sphere, which have typically truncated musical women's journeys by oblivion.

Keywords: Women composers, gender and migration, María Teresa Prieto, Emiliana de Zubeldía.

Resumen:

Este artículo se centra en la vida y obra de las compositoras hispano-mexicanas del siglo XX María Teresa Prieto y Emiliana de Zubeldía, a partir de una metodología interdisciplinaria que reúne aspectos de musicología feminista, género y migración, así como de estudios culturales. El objetivo es analizar sus biografías en el contexto de la escasa visibilidad de las mujeres en la representación de la diáspora y el discurso musical. El texto muestra cómo el desplazamiento geográfico contribuyó a su desarrollo creativo y a su carrera, mediante el acceso a redes significantes, procesos enriquecedores de transferencia cultural, su involucramiento en afirmaciones rivales de identidad nacional/regional y su liberación de normas de género (musical) restrictivas. Sin embargo, las ventajas contextuales que tuvieron demostraron ser insuficientes frente a las grandes estructuras discriminatorias de género en la esfera musical que generalmente han truncado las trayectorias femeninas mediante el olvido.

Palabras clave: compositoras; género y migración; María Teresa Prieto; Emiliana de Zubeldía.

Introduction

This article focuses on the life and work of two composers originally from Spain, María Teresa Prieto and Emiliana de Zubeldía, who settled in Mexico during a time of mass emigration due to the Spanish Civil War. It will be argued that, unlike many other (women) migrants in that period, the composers faced specific sociocultural circumstances which turned their geographical displacement into an opportunity to develop their musical development and careers. However, despite enjoying considerable success during their lifetimes, both composers eventually suffered the common fate of female creators of music (Beer, 2016; Weissweiler, 1999). Their life stories and works are now barely known outside, and sometimes even within, specialist circles.

One of the main aims of this article is to subvert this trend and shed more light onto these significant 20th-century composers. More broadly, it is also a reaction against the frequent under-representation of women in two separate, yet here interconnected, fields—musicology and migration studies—where male creators of music (Chibici-Revneanu, 2013) and male migrants (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, Sales, 2000) are typically treated as the norm. In fact, migration studies also often display a disproportionate interest in migrants from the so-called South to the North (Croucher, 2009), an (often understandable) key focus on migrant suffering (see, for instance, Akhtar, 2014; Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989), and a lack of individual migrant stories (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2013), all of which this study seeks to redress. Finally, this article wishes to add to existing studies on Prieto and Zubeldía, not only by discussing them together and presenting some hitherto barely analyzed autobiographical material, but also by viewing their biographies through a tentative theoretical framework which allows insight into contextual and sociocultural aspects that affected their reputation and work.

This interdisciplinary study thus brings together relevant notions from gender and migration studies, feminist musicology and cultural studies, with a specific focus on pertinent aspects of cultural transfer, network theory, and group identity formation. Moreover, it relies on a

biographical approach based on a thorough review of secondary biographical sources and some accessible primary accounts of the composers' lives.

There are two key assumptions underlying this article. Firstly, it presumes that contextual aspects such as personal networks or group identity formation processes powerfully influence the level of recognition achieved by male and female composers. The promotion of Robert Schumann's work by his wife Clara Schumann to the arguable detriment of the visibility of her own compositions (Chibici-Revneanu, 2013, 2016), or the cult of male composers such as Mozart to promote national identities (Szabó-Knotik, 2006, p. 154) may act as only two male-oriented cases in point.

Secondly, the aesthetic merit of Emiliana de Zubeldía and María Teresa Prieto's compositions, while allowing for the relativity of judgement (Carey, 2005; Csikszentimihalyi, 1998), is taken as a given, a view backed up not merely by personal opinion but also the evaluation their music achieved during their lifetime and beyond. Casares Rodicio, for instance, considers Prieto the only Asturian composer of universal reach (Casares Rodicio, 1978, p. 715) and Salazar published comments on her "excellent writing" of music (in id., p. 732). As to Zubeldía, Gastesi (2003) refers to how the composer's work was often very well received; winning the prestigious Mexican Premio Nacional de Composición in 1956 (Varela Ruiz, 2012, pp. 108-109) could be cited as one illustrative example.

There are several limits to this research. It is primarily focused on sociocultural aspects of Zubeldía's and Prieto's life and work, and therefore omits detailed musicological analysis. Also, unlike woman composers such as Clara Schumann or her compatriot and contemporary Fanny Mendelssohn, who left detailed personal accounts such as diaries and letters, there are only limited autobiographical sources available. However, Prieto did write a short autobiographical text called *Pirulín* (1962) which has been carefully reviewed for the present discussion. In the case of Zubeldía, I have had access to some recorded interviews with the composer (Fuentes Fierro, 2007; Lameiro and Barber, 2019) and the "Fondo de Emiliana de Zubeldía" in the University of Sonora's historical archive. Among many other items of

interest, the latter contains newspaper articles, interviews, and letters, although mostly, albeit with significant exceptions, correspondence received by the composer.¹

Apart from this introduction, this article is divided into four parts. It will begin with a brief summary of underlying theoretical notions. Subsequently, it examines basic aspects about the lives and works of Prieto and Zubeldía. These two parts will then serve as a basis for discussing the multiple contextual advantages enabled by the composers' geographical mobility, which enhanced their careers. Finally, the conclusion will briefly explore the relative powerlessness of those advantages to keep the memory of these women composers alive within a context of a predominantly patriarchal system, in classical music and elsewhere.

Approaching the Theoretical Context

It has been observed that migration studies have often displayed an over-emphasis on male migrants. Hence, there has been a growing and arguably flourishing interest in gender and female migration (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015; Palmary, Burman, Chantler, Kighuwa, 2010). Among many aspects, it has been shown that geographical displacement often has a powerful impact on gender roles (Espin, 1999), potentially having a liberating or constraining effect on many women. Its emancipating influence is frequently discussed with reference to female “South-North” movers (Guarnizo, Chaudhary and Nyberg Sørensen, 2017), but has also been revealed in some female North-South migrants, such as elderly US and Canadian women who feel more respected in Mexico (Chibici-Revneanu, 2018; Croucher, 2009). As to gender constraints and migration, it has, for instance, been shown how displacement, for many female migrants from Spain to Mexico due to the Civil War, often meant a return to traditional female roles associated with “the home,” with only a few able to maintain their professional careers (Domínguez Prats, 2009).

¹ The book *Cartas a Emiliana* (Quiñones Leyva and García Alegría, 2004) provides insight into the many letters received by Zubeldía. Also, at the time of writing, a new biography about Zubeldía was published (Moya Camarena, 2019) which draws on many of the archive's primary sources.

Regarding gender-based musicological studies, the past decades have also given rise to significant research activities into female creators of music.² There has been an interest in exploring the many gender obstacles women in music have had to face, including restricted access to education, lack of time due to work associated with traditional female roles, and the male-centered cultural imagery of god-like genius creative spirits which can undermine the confidence of (potential) female creators (Chibici-Revneanu, 2013). Perhaps most significantly, however, there has been a rediscovery of countless yet hitherto largely-ignored life stories and works by musical women from many different nations, over a period of more than a thousand years (Álvarez Cañibano, González Ribot, Gutiérrez Dorado, Marcos Patiño, 2008; McVicker, 2010; Meierovich, 2001; Peacock Jezic and Wood, 1993; Pendle, 2001; Weissweiler, 1999). This branch of research has thus manifested a massive, gendered “disappearance act” of women from the musical canon (Citron, [1993], 2000), often related to a deeply biased reception of female creators (Neumayr, 2006; Weissweiler, 1999) possibly also influenced by the normativity of male creative heroes (Chibici-Revneanu, 2013; Drechsler, 2001). Unfortunately, the growing body of research on musical women in general, and female composers in particular, has not had the desired impact (Macarthur, 2010), with historical and contemporary women in music still facing exclusions such as few performances of their work, a notable under-representation in “music history curriculums, music textbooks, and traditional classical music repertoire” (Lam, 2018), and an overall lack of recognition for the significant musical heritage they have left behind.

As to the specific theoretical notions from cultural studies addressed in this analysis — cultural transfer, social networks and group identity formation— their inclusion was motivated by a perceived need for greater insight into some sociocultural phenomena that may have contributed to the career development of women composers despite many obstacles, as well as in addition to their structural disadvantages.

“Cultural transfer” is a term coined by Espagne, and can be broadly defined as “the global mobility of words, concepts, images, persons, animals, commodities, money, weapons, and

² In the case of Mexico this already began in the late 1950s, as evident from Pulido’s work on Mexican women in music (1958).

other things” (Rossini and Toggweiler, 2014, p. 5). It generally refers to complex mutual influences between cultures and the “varying forms of interconnection, transition, and adaptation of cultures among one another” (Jin-Ah, 2015, p. 43). Cultural transfer, with its evident connection to migration issues, has also increasingly become relevant to musicological studies, providing a theoretical framework useful for “diverting the musicological discourse away from formalist, transcendentalist ... methodologies and toward cultural and institutional contextualizations” (Fauser and Everist, 2009, p. 3).

As to “networks,” the latter refer to “a set of relations between objects which could be people, organizations, nations, items found in a Google search, brain cells, or electrical transformers” (Kadushin, 2012, p. 162). This research is interested specifically in “social networks” in the form of friendships and other relationships, as conduits of information, ideas, power (id.), music, its diffusion, and the development of musical skills. Cultural transfer and social networks are closely related, as people belonging to social networks often act as key agents of the existence and expression of cultural transfer.

Other fields of study have also focused on how music has helped develop group identities, an issue of such relevance to migration-related phenomena and cultural studies. Given that music typically stands at the crossroads between the personal and the collective (Frith, 1996), it has been shown that it can become a decisive tool for creating, expressing, and affirming national, regional, gender, and other group identities (Martí, 2009), hence acting as a means for “satisfy[ing] our need for difference” (ibid, p. 14).

After this outline of key theoretical notions underlying this discussion, it is time to briefly explore the life stories of Emiliana de Zubeldía and María Teresa Prieto.

The Composers’ Life and Work

The “pioneering” composer Emiliana de Zubeldía (Pliego de Andrés, 2012, p. 374) was born in Salinas de Oro in Navarre, Spain, on December 6, 1888, and died on May 26, 1987 in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico (Álvarez Cañibano *et al.*, 2008, p. 527). She was the daughter

of the fabric merchant José Antonio Zubeldía Elizondo and Asunción Inda León, both devout Catholics (Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 17). They had eight children, but four did not survive past childhood (Pérez Ollo, 1993, p. 111).

In 1890, when Zubeldía was still an infant, the family moved to Pamplona (Camalich Landavazo, 2012, p. 33). Even though some scholars claim that the composer began her musical training at the age of eight (Pérez Ollo, 1993, 114), her biographer (as well as former student and collaborator) Varela Ruiz tells a different story. Apparently, Zubeldía was so powerfully drawn to the piano when her elder sister Eladía first learned to play that she started having piano lessons at the age of four (2012, pp. 20-21) and gave her first recital aged five. (id., p. 21). By the time she was eight, she began formal musical training and joined the Academia de Música Municipal, taking piano lessons with Joaquín Maya. In 1903, she composed her first works, *Serenata Española* and *Habanera* (Camalich Landavazo, 2013, p. 33). One year later, she entered the Conservatory of Madrid and in 1906 she enrolled at the Schola Cantorum in Paris.

After her father's death in 1909, Emiliana de Zubeldía returned to Spain and married the chemist Joaquín Fuentes Pascual in 1919. It was an unhappy marriage and for years to come she claimed that: "marriage is the grave of the piano"³ (in Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 108). Already in 1920, it became evident that Zubeldía had rejected a more traditional role of "wifedom" by successfully applying to a post as assistant piano professor in the Academia Municipal de Música of Pamplona. In 1922, she asked for a leave of absence for one year (to be renewed for two more years in 1923 [Pérez Ollo, 1993, p. 116]), and went to Paris to study piano with Blanche Selva and composition with Désiré Pâque. The composer never returned to Pamplona, and left her husband after a few years of marriage. According to Gastesi, this was prompted mainly by Zubeldía's discovery of her husband's infidelity (2003, p. 49).

An intense period followed. In 1926, she published her work *Seis melodías populares españolas*. A year later, she lost her mother and in 1928 she made her debut in Brazil, which marked the beginning of her love for the Americas and her many travels throughout the

³ All translations from Spanish are mine.

region, where she eventually decided to settle. After Brazil, the composer went to Uruguay and also Argentina, a country where she remained for several months.

In 1930, Emiliana de Zubeldía moved to New York, where she met the Mexican scientist Augusto Novaro, the writer of a new and revolutionary musical theory, the “Sistema natural de la música,” considered “the most important synthesis for understanding [Novaro’s] research on acoustic and musical theory” (Conti, 2004, p. 69). Novaro was there on a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation to conduct research. Emiliana de Zubeldía continued to compose, teach, and publish music. She also performed widely, in the United States and elsewhere, including concerts given in Havana, Cuba, at the Centro Vasco in 1932 (Camalich Landavazo, 2013, p. 35).

Fascinated with Novaro’s theory, she followed his work closely. Through him, she also met and became close friends with Esperanza Pulido, among other things a pioneer of Mexican research into women composers.

In 1933, the composer first visited Mexico (Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 63) deciding to move there permanently a few years later (Varela Ruiz gives the date as 1937 [2012, pp. 69-70]; Camalich Landavazo mentions 1936 [2013, p. 36]). By that time Novaro had returned to his home country and this seems to have played a substantial part in Zubeldía’s motivation to move there. Once in Mexico City, she started to work for him, creating many compositions based on his musical theory.

She sustained injuries to her right arm in a traffic accident in 1937, and this probably explains why she stopped her career as a performing pianist (Camalich Landavazo, 2013, p. 36). Two years later, her sister Eladia died. This inspired her composition, *Sinfonía Elegiaca* (1939-40), for which she won the previously mentioned National Composition Prize in 1956 (Varela Ruiz, 2012, pp. 108-109).

Another important event took place towards the end of the 1940s (Varela Ruiz gives the date as 1947 [1993, p. 130], Camalich Landavazo, 1948 [2013, p. 36]). Emiliana de Zubeldía was

invited to move to Hermosillo and start teaching at the University of Sonora. She accepted, and ended up living there for the rest of her long life. Although Zubeldía continued to maintain her musical contacts with Mexico City and frequently returned there, she led an active life in Hermosillo, working as a music teacher, choir director,⁴ presenter of musical radio programs, composer, and so on.⁵

Also, she started to study music by the Seri,⁶ which corresponded to a desire, already expressed in her childhood, to work with the indigenous population of northern Mexico (Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 93 and p. 21). Zubeldía composed many works during the almost four decades she mainly spent in Sonora. Many of them, such as *Misa de Asunción*, created and first presented in 1968, were written for the university's official choir, the "Coro de la Universidad de Sonora" which she conducted. Indeed, as will be shown in more detail, living "on Mexican soil" helped her "develop her pedagogical and compositional work" (Piñero Gil, 2015, p. 348).

Zubeldía received several honors from the University of Sonora, such as a concert dedicated to her in 1986 and an official recognition of her work on May 15, 1987. She died shortly afterwards, on May 26, 1987 (Camalich Lavavazo, 2013, pp. 41-42).

Emiliana de Zubeldía left behind an important musical legacy. Camalich Landavazo lists a total of 262 works, including pieces for piano, two pianos, choir, voice, and piano, orchestra, chamber music, as well as some compositions for other solo instruments (harp and guitar) and several works whose existence could only be reconstructed from program notes. Some compositions are re-workings and adaptations by other composers, but the majority are original creations. Some of her most important compositions are the previously mentioned *Sinfonía Elegíaca*, the *Capricho Basko* (1929), and *Soles y brumas de España* (1947), to name only a few.

⁴ Zubeldía stated that "for me it is far easier to write a symphony ... than to form a choir" (in Lameiro and Barber, 2019).

⁵ As she commented in a letter to "Josefita Larvea" (this name may be incorrect as the handwriting was not entirely legible) on December 23, 1950: "I'm leading a very intense life: my lessons, choirs, concerts ... and my compositions leave me no time for anything else." (Hermosillo, FEZI/SP/S01/C21/ LÉg 1-4/1950-12-23)

⁶ In a newspaper article, Zubeldía declared that she is "in love with the Seri" (Zubeldía in Vega Granillo, 1982).

María Teresa Prieto Fernández de la Llana, a “protagonist of the Republican generation” (González Lapuente, 2012, p. 284), was born in Oviedo, Asturias, Spain in 1896, and died in Mexico City on January 24, 1982 (Álvarez Cañibano *et al.*, 2008, p. 429). Her family had a long-standing musical tradition and her mother—a pianist—insisted on giving her children a musical education (Casares Rodicio, 1978, p. 720). As a child, Prieto studied piano at the Conservatorio Provincial de Oviedo with the composer and pianist Saturnino del Fresno. The latter introduced her to Bach, who proved an important influence on her work (Perón Perez, 2012b, p. 3). Prieto published her first composition, a piano piece called *Escena de niños*, in the journal “Música” in 1917 (id.).

After María Teresa lost her father, she continued her musical education with Benito García de la Parra in Madrid (Álvarez Cañibano *et al.* 2008, p. 429). In 1936, having now also lost her mother (Casares Rodicio, 1978, p.721), she joined her brother Carlos Prieto in Mexico City, who already had a comfortable financial position in the Mexican capital.

Upon arrival, Prieto received lessons from important musical figures such as Manuel M. Ponce and Carlos Chávez, who introduced her to the “world of orchestration” (Perón Perez, 2012b, p. 4). Unlike Zubeldía, who was an active composer long before reaching Mexico, María Teresa Prieto’s musical creativity took off in her new home. Although Perón Perez (2012 b) mentions *Escena de niños* (1917) as her first composition, Casares Rodicio (1978) only lists works created in Mexico. Among her first compositions in her adoptive country, one finds several pieces for piano, such as *Añada* (1937), *Preludio y Fuga en Do M* (1938) and *Tema y tres variaciones* (1938) (ibid, p. 725).

In 1940, she presented her *Seis melodías para voz y piano* in the Sala Manuel M. Ponce, which included poems by poets such as Juan Ramón Jiménez and Federico García Lorca, as well as texts written by the composer herself (id.). In 1958, Prieto won the prestigious Spanish composition prize “Samuel Ros” which she had entered anonymously, using the pseudonym “México” (Tejada Tauste, 2019, p. 68).

As mentioned above, Prieto also wrote the autobiographical narrative *Pirulín* (1962), which tells the story of a bird who visited her window and accompanied her piano playing with its song. Although the latter gives little information about her personal life, it gives us insight into María Teresa Prieto as a deeply creative woman. She states at the beginning that “if only I never had to leave this spiritual environment full of poetry and softness” (ibid, p. 8) and is recognized by others for her deep “musical sensibility” (ibid. p. 18). Also, there seems to be a personal identification between herself and the music-loving “migrant bird” described (ibid, p. 9).

Returning to her compositions, Prieto soon started to work on extensive symphonic creations, such as her *Impresión sinfónica* (1942) for piano and orchestra, the *Sinfonía asturiana* (first presented in 1943) and her symphonic poem *Chichen Itzá* (1944). She became a significant musical figure during that time, her music was often performed in Mexico City, frequently in the prestigious venue of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, and played by the Mexican Symphonic Orchestra (Perón Perez, 2012b, p. 4) with such acclaimed conductors as Kleiber and her teacher, Carlos Chávez, who had founded the orchestra in 1928 (Saavedra, 2015, p. xii).

In Mexico City, María Teresa Prieto met the composer Darius Milhaud, who was impressed with her work. Like Zubeldía, Prieto was eager to continue her studies and became a student at Mills College in Oakland, California, between 1946-7.

Her creative interests began to shift and in the 1950s, she mainly composed quartets (Álvarez Cañibano *et al.*, 2008, p. 429) and later, under the guidance of Rodolfo Halffter, who became yet another of Prieto’s famous teachers, she developed an interest in the twelve-tone technique.

Prieto died in Mexico City in 1982. She also left behind a significant musical heritage (Rodríguez de la Torre [2020]) mentions close to 50 works) including —as stated— pieces for piano, piano and orchestra, voice and piano, violoncello, and orchestra, among others.

Migration and Two Thriving Careers

After this overview, we must explore how migration apparently interacted with contextual sociocultural elements to enhance the composers' musical development and career.

Migration and the Composers' Paradoxical Gender Liberation

Prieto and Zubeldía's geographical displacement can be regarded as atypical given the time and sociocultural context of their migration. Firstly, unlike many exiles from Spain who came to Mexico at around the same time, both moved to Mexico of their own free will, without facing imminent personal danger.⁷ Hence —and this is crucial when highlighting their unusually positive displacement process⁸— neither shared some of the traumatic experiences of other Spanish migrants to Mexico (Díaz Silva, 2016). Secondly, it appears that largely due to their pre-existing networks in Mexico City as discussed below, neither had to face considerable financial difficulties upon their arrival. This, too, distinguishes them from other migrants who, despite the common narrative that the reception of Spanish arrivals in Mexico was entirely positive, often struggled economically in their adoptive country. Thirdly, it seems that they experienced a process of gender liberation while many of their female compatriots were pressured into falling back into traditional gender roles as described above. Not only were they among those who retained their professional careers, but —as mentioned previously— Prieto only fully embarked on hers in Mexico. There may have been several reasons for this.

To begin with, both chose —in Zubeldía's case, migration-related— life situations which possibly exempted them from the gendered push-back into the home. Although Zubeldía had been briefly married, both composers lived (as far as known) as single women with no

⁷ According to Tejada Tauste, Prieto “abandoned Spain to escape from the uprisings which took place in Asturias during the Civil War. Looking for a better place for her artistic and personal development, she came to Mexico” (2019, p. 63).

⁸ Of course, the composers' life in Mexico was also shaped by their yearning for the worlds (and people) they left behind. This can be glimpsed from works such as Prieto's *Sinfonía asturiana* (according to Tejada Tauste a result of her “longing for the Asturian landscape” [2019, p. 66]) or Zubeldía's *Soles y Brumas de España* and her *Sinfonía Elegiaca*.

children. In the case of Prieto, and as can be glimpsed from *Pirulín* (1962), she seemed to have enjoyed considerable creative freedom and solitude when living with her brother's family in Mexico City (id.). As to Zubeldía, she was aware of the liberating effect of moving far away from her husband, as evident by her notion of marriage as “the grave of the piano” and thus musical development (in Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 108). Her belief in the potential (artistic) restrictions of matrimony can also be deduced from her work *La muñeca de vidrio* (“The Glass Doll”) composed during the 1920s. This has been interpreted as a possible musical engagement with “the pain of her failed marriage” (in Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 34) and may well be reminiscent of Ibsen's “A Doll's House.”

Another explanation could be that Prieto and Zubeldía found the Mexican musical sphere more open towards female participation, perhaps especially for two “foreign” women.⁹ Interestingly, despite the prevailing “machismo” mentioned by Pulido in her work on Mexican women in music (1983, p. 120), the local musical scene may have been more supportive for female composers, because of the presence of long-established female creative role models¹⁰ and a less powerful hero-worship of local male composers. As to the former, the most significant example is Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Although Sor Juana's enabling impact on the composers' development cannot be established retrospectively with certainty, Prieto and Zubeldía showed a great interest in this female Mexican figure and created compositions based on her poems (see, for instance, Prieto's *Seis Canciones Modales* and Zubeldías choral work based on “Aquella zagala de mirar”). Regarding the latter, Weissweiler explores how “American musical history” is “less plagued by male heroes”¹¹ than its European counterpart (1999, p. 11). This, in turn, can be considered another explanation for Prieto and Zubeldía experiencing a certain musical liberation, as the European musical tradition often powerfully silences female composers (Drechsler, 2001).

Although this certainly deserves more detailed exploration —and the composers lived in a different epoch and cultural context to Clara Schumann— it might be helpful to contrast

⁹ In a filmed interview, Zubeldía complained about being given preferential treatment as a foreigner in Mexico (Fuentes Fierro, 2007).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Lam (2018) on the importance on female role models for women's musical development.

¹¹ All translations from German are mine.

Clara Schumann's notorious lack of self-belief with elements that imply both Prieto's and Zubeldía's creative confidence. Cognitively misguided by the disappearing act of women composers, Clara Schumann pondered how: "I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose – not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to?" (Schumann in Litzmann, [1913], 2013, pos. 5555). Prieto's portrayal of herself as a deeply musical and perhaps even "chosen" figure as displayed by her relationship with the mysterious bird Pirulín (1962) indicate a far more self-assured creative self-image. Similarly, Zubeldía's affirmations that it was easier for her to create a symphony than a choir, or that she was "evidently born for music" (in Lameiro and Barber, 2019) (id.) also illustrate a strong faith in her compositional vocation and musical ability.

It thus seems that the migration process, in connection to their personal life situations, enhanced the composers' development by liberating them from music-specific and more general gender norms.

The Importance of Cultural Transfer

Beyond matters of gender liberation, however, the experience of migration also exposed Prieto and Zubeldía, in common with all other Spanish migrants to Mexico, to a dual/multiple cultural (and therefore also musical) heritage. The composers evidently welcomed these cultural transfer processes, absorbed them, and reflected them in their creations. This was an important ingredient for their strikingly intercultural oeuvre.

Prieto's musical style is varied and complex, and reveals —as has been observed—crucial changes and developments over her life and career (Perón Perez, 2012b). Although Prieto always filtered her learning, adapting it to her own aesthetic and expressive needs (id.), her music reflects the impact of cultural transfer processes through her interaction with numerous teachers from different national backgrounds, such as Ponce, Chávez, Milhaud, and Halffter.

A detailed discussion of these multiple influences or the composer's musical style goes beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the matter may be briefly exemplified through

Prieto's inclination towards an (inter) nationalist style which has been related to her training under Ponce. The latter was, after all "one of the founders of nationalism, able to wipe the dust off folkloric Mexican music"¹² and this "would influence the use of folkloric elements in many of the compositions" by María Teresa Prieto (id., p. 4).

This display of nationalist influences, in turn, makes the manifestations of cultural transfer processes —beyond teaching experiences— easier to trace. In the case of Prieto, the composer started producing work dedicated to her homeland, like the *Sinfonía asturiana*, while also paying tribute to Mexico, as in the symphonic poem *Chichen Itzá*, inspired by a trip to the Mayan site.

Indeed, Perón Perez comes to the conclusion that even in her creations reminiscent of Spain, Prieto ends up being distinctly Mexican, which leads to considerable musical innovations. According to her, Prieto strongly represents

a displaced person from different points of view. The nationalism we define as the composer's "Imagined Nationalism" —despite belonging to Spain— really drinks from the fountain of Mexican musical nationalism ... thanks to this, the composer adapted this Mexican musical position to her Spanish thought, which leads her to a revision and recreation of Spanish musical nationalism (2012b, p. 11).

Hence, the processes of cultural transfer to which Prieto was exposed not only proved decisive for her musical development, but also appear to have enriched her music, perhaps becoming part of the praised "universality" of her work (Casares Rodicio, 1978, p. 715).

Emiliana de Zubeldía, for her part, experienced even more complex, multiple processes of cultural transfer, given that she had travelled extensively and lived in several countries before settling in Mexico. She therefore appears to have been shaped by international musical

¹² A problematization of Mexican nationalism, as well as Ponce's influence and understanding of the latter (see for instance Picún and Carredano, 2012), goes beyond the scope of this inquiry.

influences, notably in France (especially at the Schola Cantorum and during her training with Blanche Selva [Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 25-27]), but also in countries like Cuba (see, for instance her song *In Old Havana* [Camalich, 2013, p. 241]).

Still, the impact of Mexico is powerful in her oeuvre and can be glimpsed from different angles. Like Prieto, her work displays the influence of crucial musical figures of the time, above all her fascination with the theories of Augusto Novaro which form the basis of several of her compositions. Also, Zubeldía's nationalist tendencies make her intercultural affiliations, influenced by multiple processes of cultural transfer, simple to illustrate. As indicated, she produced many pieces alluding to Spain (*Soles y Brumas de España*) and her Basque origins, as in her unfinished *Sinfonía Baska*. Indeed, Zubeldía's music often contains distinctly Basque elements, such as, for instance, parts of folk music in her *Capricho Basko* (Gastesi, 2003, p. 50). But she also reaches deeply into her new heritage of different Mexican music, for example, incorporating indigenous elements into her compositions, as in *Canción Seri* or *Canción Triste (Azteca)*, the "Sad Aztec Song."

Furthermore, Zubeldía, like Prieto, was musically inspired by the landscapes of her new home. This becomes manifest in her symphonic poem *En el Desierto de los Leones*, an area of wooded hills on the outskirts of Mexico City. As she describes in her program notes, this piece was related to her impressions that "the pine trees in the woods strike me as a procession of penitent souls who slowly move forward until they reach heaven" (in Varela Ruiz, 2012, p. 79).

Both composers were thus exposed to multiple processes of cultural transfer which exerted a powerful influence on their music and this further displays the enhancing effects of geographical mobility on their artistic growth, output, and development. Cultural transfer is often something intrinsically intangible, complex, and difficult to grasp. For the sake of this article, however, its occurrence has been traced with regard to the composers' experience of different landscapes and various (musical and non-musical) elements of Mexican cultural heritage, as well as through crucial figures who acted as cultural transfer agents. Apart from manifesting the potential musical benefits of migration, their cases also show a reversal of

former colonial ties between Spain and Mexico. Rather than Mexico adapting and incorporating Spanish cultural elements into its tradition, it is now the previously colonized nation which impacts originally “Spanish” (musical) culture, albeit allowing for the diversity of the composers’ origins.

Significant Networks

As has been partly visible from the accounts of their lives, and the processes of cultural transfer they were involved in, personal networks (again, often acquired through their migration) were fundamental for the musical development and renown of both Zubeldía and Prieto. Of course, social networks and personal relationships are complex and only some relevant aspects can be alluded to here.

Starting with Zubeldía, some of her most significant networks were established prior to her move to Mexico City. Throughout her life, Zubeldía’s Basque origins proved vital and the musical networks of Basque migrants in places such as Argentina, New York, and Cuba became closely associated with some of her performances (Gastesi, 2003). Moreover, Zubeldía’s pre-existing personal relationships with people in Mexico were instrumental in her decision to move there. Such connections are often a “pull factor” for migrants, and as mentioned above, she had established friendships with figures such as Pulido and Novaro in New York, and it was probably the latter’s return to his hometown which contributed to her choosing Mexico.

At this point, we should recall that Zubeldía started working for him upon her arrival in Mexico City; Novaro certainly facilitated her migration experience. According to Gastesi, Zubeldía also frequently met significant musical figures such as Halffter and Salazar in Novaro’s house, both of whom were also present in Prieto’s life (2003, p. 52). (Unfortunately, although it is likely that the two composers in question met each other, I have found no indication of such a meeting taking place.)

In Mexico, the friendship with Pulido also proved significant for Zubeldía, not least because of her pioneering work about women composers. The latter helped to conserve knowledge about Zubeldía's life and music for posterity, as it, for instance, acted as an important source for Meierovich's study of Mexican women composers.¹³

But Zubeldía's involvement in social networks was not one-sided. She was probably the only person who actually created music based on Novaro's complex, innovative system. Also, once Zubeldía started working at the University of Sonora, the institution greatly benefitted from the composer's many contacts. Apparently, she became a "bridge between the students and the outside world" (Gastesi, 2003, p. 53), inviting many renowned musicians she had met over the course of her life to Sonora and sending local students to conduct further studies in Mexico City or abroad (id.).

Prieto's life was also powerfully enhanced and shaped by networks. Like Zubeldía, she moved to Mexico largely due to a pre-existing connection, in this case her brother Carlos Prieto. However, it was through her displacement (although with the help of her brother acting as a "bridge") that she came into contact with many figures who proved vital for her development and career.

Her brother's – and now also María Teresa's – home in the district of San Angel in Mexico City was a hub of intellectual and artistic activity, a meeting point for many important creative figures of the time. As her brother was involved in assisting exiles from Spain (Perón Perez, 2012a, p. 68), many of his visitors, such as the aforementioned Salazar (who eventually lived and even died in the Prieto's home [Vayón, 2008]), were of Spanish origin. But their house also received many Mexicans, such as Carlos Chávez, and international musical figures, including Igor Stravinsky.

Prieto's immersion in this vibrant network most likely gave her access to teachers such as Ponce and Chávez. Both were not only crucial figures as teachers of composition, but also

¹³ Future research may focus specifically on their friendship and the impact this had on both women's life and work.

fundamental in promoting Prieto's work. In fact, Perón Pérez speculates that Prieto managed to have compositions published by the prestigious Schirmer imprint due to her connections to Ponce (2012b, p. 6). Chávez, on the other hand, who was the founder of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Art, [Saavedra, 2015, p. xi]) and an inaugural member of the Colegio Nacional (id.), granted Prieto access to some of the most prestigious musical venues of the time and the opportunity to repeatedly have her compositions played by the National Symphonic Orchestra. As said, these performances were sometimes conducted by Chávez himself.

Nevertheless, Chávez' assistance should not be misinterpreted as an act of "networking" that only benefited Prieto herself. It has been observed about Chávez that "he called to work with him only those people in whom he believed, and he cast aside and left behind many others who eventually resented him" (id., 2015, p. xii). Therefore, Chávez's support for Prieto's work clearly stemmed from his genuine admiration for her compositions and the fact that they suited *his* agenda to "play as much Mexican music as often as possible" (id. p. x).

This section, then, has shown how "symbiotic" networks enhanced both composers' musical development and career. Also, many of their contacts were acquired as a result of their geographical mobility, further revealing their migration as a musically significant experience.

Before moving onto the next section, it is worth adding that close network ties alone, or a more open atmosphere for women composers, cannot be considered omnipotent aids for (female) creators' careers. Manuel M. Ponce's sister, the composer María del Refugio Ponce (1880-1856), for instance, has by now been plunged into almost complete oblivion (Barrón Corvera, 2008). Perhaps in common with the case of Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, the siblings' close connection (and possible rivalry) may have partially inhibited rather than enhanced this Mexican woman composer's renown.

Music, Social Identity Formation, and Regional Claims

On a different level, Prieto's and Zubeldía's involvement in larger rivalries seemed to have added to their "fame." In some ways not unlike their partial contemporary Maria Grever (1885-1951) whose intercultural (Spain, Mexico, US, etc.) affiliations possibly strengthened "Mexican" claims on the composer, both women became immersed in rival collective identity affirmation processes.

This was doubtlessly helped by their own multicultural identities. As to Prieto, one may here remember that she won the prestigious "Samuel Ros" Spanish composition prize using the pseudonym "México." Arguably, this displays Prieto's interest in being musically "present" in her former country as well as her explicit self-association with her new home.¹⁴

Some of Zubeldía's surviving letters also reveal her dual cultural affiliation and admiration. As she writes to Pulido on the September 22, 1982, with reference to her Basque origins: "If I have any talent, it is because of the sap I received from this race – so generous and noble" (Sonora, FEZI/SP/S01/exp. 21/Leg. 3-4/1982-09-22). At the same time, she stresses "how much I love Mexico ... the person writing to you could be among the few who understand the true Mexican temperament and character" (id.).

As to external sources, both composers' lives and creations are typically (re)covered in works dedicated to Spanish and Mexican women composers, such as those by Álvarez Cañibano et. al (2008), Pulido (1958, 1983), and Meierovich (2001). This national focus could simply be regarded as a functional form of delineating research and creating meaningful grounds for comparison. Nonetheless, it certainly helped to make their names known both in Europe and Mexico. Moreover, some of these publications go beyond a mere "listing" of composers and stake claims about which country they may be rightly assigned to. Pulido, for instance, argues

¹⁴ In *Music and Exile in Francoist Spain*, Moreda Rodríguez questions "a long-standing assumption in the scholarship of the Republican exile ... that, being disconnected from Spain, the exiles could no longer make any contribution to the artistic and intellectual life of their home country" (2015, p. 4). The fact that María Teresa Prieto won the "Samuel Ros" prize clearly also helps to challenge this assumption.

in her English article, *Mexican Women in Music*: “Although both Prieto and Zubeldía were born in Spain, they lived most of their lives and composed the best and most important part of their production in Mexico. Thus we consider them Mexican composers” (1983, p. 128).

However, it is with regard to regional identities that rival claims on the composers as “musical allies” in processes of identity affirmation and celebration become most obvious. Especially when research has transcended collective studies of women in music, it is notably centered around the “regions” to which María Teresa Prieto and Emiliana de Zubeldía “belonged.” The early biographical writing on Prieto by Casares Rodicio (1978) was published in the Bulletin of the Institute of Asturian Studies (*Boletín del Instituto de Estudios Asturianos*). Much contemporary research on Prieto has been conducted by Perón Perez, from the University of Oviedo.

In the case of Zubeldía, it is worth mentioning that her frequently mentioned full-length biography (2012) demonstrates her dual regional affiliation and association. It was written by Varela Ruiz from the University of Sonora in Mexico and published by the government of Navarre. Extensive collections of her work can also be found both within the State of Sonora (in the University of Sonora’s historical archive) and Navarre (in the Basque musical archive, ERESBIL).

Indeed, several of the publications and initiatives from the composers’ original regional contexts display an agenda of collective identity affirmation in their appraisal of Prieto, Zubeldía and their work. Given the composers’ connections to various countries, this is initially justified through elaborate allusions —reminiscent of Pulido’s emphasis on Prieto’s and Zubeldía’s “Mexican” identity, yet with the opposite intention— to the composers’ lasting attachment to their regional homes.

As Casares Rodicio, for instance, observes about Prieto:

This composer, born in Oviedo, had a universal reach not achieved by any other Asturian composer, except probably in the case of Julián Orbón. This is why we have tried to penetrate the prolific and varied work of this composer,

who has created all of her compositions in Mexico but who remained lovingly attached to her Asturian roots (*patria chica*) which provided the background for many of them. (Casares Rodicio, 1978, p. 715)

Casares, here still apparently unaware that Prieto had already produced some minor compositions back in Spain, ties the composer to her region on many levels. He stresses her birth in Oviedo and sets her creations within the context of other “Asturian” composers. Also, in the Spanish he refers to “*patria chica*,” referring to her regional as opposed to national origins. While a connection to Asturias is indeed an important part of her life and work, it is still interesting to note the extent to which the biographer apparently feels the need to reclaim and emphasize this aspect of the international and intercultural composer.

Varela Ruiz’s introduction to Zubeldía’s biography, published as part of a series called “Personajes Navarros” (Navarrese figures), also accentuates the composer’s Navarrese origins. It stresses that “despite such a long absence, there are many proofs that she deeply loved her home” (Sánchez de Muniáin Lacasia, 2012, p. 8) and introduces Zubeldía as a “Navarra” who “always had her home in her mind and her heart” (id., p. 9).

Moreover, Zubeldía is not only reaffirmed as Basque, but deployed as an example of general ethnic/regional importance. Nagore Ferrer (2013), in her work on “*Música y músicos navarros en los siglos XIX y XX*,” places her in a wider context to illustrate a kind of innate Navarrese predisposition towards music and the region’s favorable conditions for musical activities (id., p. 115).

Also, in the introduction to her biography, it is mentioned, in celebratory fashion:

Throughout history, many “Navarrese” who, living in Navarre or elsewhere, have had very important careers and have justly found fame in one or several fields of human activity. These are “Navarrese” who deserve to be remembered, studied, and admired; remembering and analyzing their life, work and actions remains unquestionably useful for us, 21st-century Navarrese, giving us the certainty that we can keep learning from the example

of these great personalities from our past. (Sánchez de Muniáin Lacasia, 2012, p. 7)

The composers thus become immersed and instrumentalized (“unquestionably useful for us”) in multiple instances of regional identity politics which appear, at least to some extent, connected to Spanish regional and linguistic divisions and diversity, internal politics and the musical woman’s “rival” homes in Mexico, which also claim them as “theirs.”

Nevertheless, far from criticizing these extra-musical processes, they have been presented as contextual elements related to the intrinsic connection between musical phenomena and (group) identity formation, which ultimately helped both composers maintain a certain renown and visibility. Together with their liberation from gender norms, involvement in processes of cultural transfer and active social networks, it is considered another aspect which made their migration beneficial for their musical development and career, escaping the fate of almost complete oblivion.

Conclusion

A Brief Summary

This article has focused on two Spanish-Mexican woman composers, María Teresa Prieto and Emiliana de Zubeldía. It has explored aspects of their lives and work from an interdisciplinary perspective which has brought together musicological studies of women composers, gendered migration studies, as well as elements from discussions of cultural transfer, network theory, and (collective) identity formation through music.

It has been argued that, contrary to widespread and often justified narratives of migration as a phenomenon involving endless struggles, in this case geographical displacement proved beneficial for the musical development and career of the two composers in question. Among other elements, their move to Mexico triggered a process of liberation from (artistic) gender norms, led to fruitful processes of cultural transfers, the composers’ immersion in powerful, career-enhancing networks and their involvement in rivalling national and regional claims

on Prieto and Zubeldía as “their” composers. Nonetheless, as implied, these elements appear to have been insufficient when it comes to more firmly establishing Prieto and Zubeldía within the musical canon and increasing the visibility of their life stories and work.

All but Forgotten?

Vayón, in an article on Prieto, refers to the composer as “almost unknown today” (2008). Indeed, despite the studies mentioned and several initiatives such as the recording of her symphonic work under the Spanish conductor José Luis Temes (2008), her story and music seem to have almost disappeared.

As to Zubeldía, Pérez Ollo poignantly states, in regards to her low profile in Spain: “We do not find her name in local bibliographies, nor in more ambitious ones; she doesn’t exist here, neither as a composer nor as a pianist” (1993, p. 119). Evidently, much appears to have improved since then.¹⁵ Even so, Varela Ruiz also observes how her works still have not yet been properly compiled and required more in-depth study for her complete compositional output to be known (2012, p. 142). Although Zubeldía published her work early and in some important outlets (*Asturiana*, Paris, La Revue Musicale, 1926), much of her oeuvre remains unpublished.

The “contextual” advantages enjoyed by the composers thus proved insufficiently effective for ensuring a lasting and well-established recognition and circulation of their life’s work. This, in turn, appears to be connected to the overarching contextual historical “disadvantages”¹⁶ that to this day still tend to affect how the work of women composers tends to be handled, evaluated, conserved, performed, and studied.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Moya Camarena for a list of activities and publications aimed at giving recognition to Zubeldía’s legacy (2019, p. 19).

¹⁶ In her article on women composers in Latin America, Piñero Gil interestingly mentions a triple oppression for female creators of music: living in a third-world country, working within the arts, and being a woman (2015, p. 432).

Naturally —and this is a large part of the problem— it is difficult to pin down this assertion. How can one provide proof for the gendered near-disappearance of Prieto and Zubeldía, if invisibility is often characterized by a lack of explicit descriptions of omission? In Moreda Rodríguez’ otherwise excellent study of *Music and Exile in Francoist Spain* (2016), for instance, I failed to locate references to Zubeldía and Prieto. Is this due to a lack of information, related to their partial disappearance? Or are they not considered worth mentioning, revealing —an unlikely fact in this case but possible in other “silent” sources— an unconscious gender bias at work (Roseberry and Roos, 2014)?

When attempting to illuminate the particular through the general, this phenomenon of gendered vanishing acts is in fact so common that Zavala Gironés (2009) alludes to a resulting “pioneer syndrome” among many women composers. Given their constant disappearance, female creators are repeatedly (and often wrongly) assigned the role of being “the first” woman to embark on musically-creative initiatives (p. 215). Casares Rodicio himself falls into this pattern, celebrating María Teresa Prieto as one of the “first” women composers, unaware of the long tradition of female creators that has since been recovered (1978). As indicated, many existing studies on women composers have not had the desired impact or gained them recognition beyond specialist circles (Zavala Gironés, 2009), possibly through a lasting adherence to the long-standing patriarchal musical status-quo. Prieto and Zubeldía appear to have become victims of such generalized, gendered dynamics within the musical sphere.

Ultimately, patriarchy relies on the implicit notion of male superiority, in music and beyond, to maintain and justify its systematic oppression. Women composers, in their direct roles as artists, as well as their symbolical assumption of the role of a female “creator,” pose a potential challenge to such ideas (Drechsler, 2001). It is for this reason, perhaps, that their structural disappearance has been so widespread. By the same token, the continued recovery and discussion of female composers such as Prieto and Zubeldía in academia and beyond plays a significant part in the (musical) construction of a more gender-equal society.¹⁷ Still,

¹⁷ Although Casares Rodicio (1978) already contains a catalogue of Prieto’s creations, he lists only 30 works, whereas more recent accounts mention close to 50 (Rodríguez de la Torre, 2020). In the case of Zubeldía, the

this is arguably not only to do them and other female creators justice, but also because listeners may discover musical treasures they have been unjustly prevented from enjoying, and engaging in, as an aesthetic experience.

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most detailed catalogues can be found in Landavazo Camalich (2013) and Moya Camarena (2019). Despite these sources, it would be helpful for future investigations to provide extended insight into the catalogue of Zubeldía's and especially Prieto's oeuvre.

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