Performing Mexicanidad

VENDIDAS Y CABARETERAS ON THE TRANSNATIONAL STAGE

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CHAPTER I
SEXING GUADALUPE IN TRANSNATIONAL DOUBLE CROSSINGS

The only wetback I have respect for is the Virgen de Guadalupe.
—Luis Alfaro, Electricidad: An American Tragedy

The overwhelming presence of the Virgen de Guadalupe image in all forms of commercial objects across the United States and Mexico, as well as in noncommercial makeshift canvases, primarily human skins (tattoos) and static walls (murals), helps one to easily argue that this image is perhaps the most recognizable one associated with mexicanidad (Mexicanness) and Mexican femininity on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Moreover, in the various instances (or what I would consider to be necessary reenactments) of nationalism and mexicanidad in the context of Mexico and the United States, what performance theorist Diana Taylor may classify as “acts of transfer,” whether these are in the realm of political organizing or mass-mediated cultural representations, the Virgen de Guadalupe figures prominently as both the patron saint of the archives of mexicanidad and its very own measuring stick. Using a performance-studies lens, Taylor, in her book The Archive and the Repertoire, examines the ways in which the Virgen de Guadalupe apparition narrative has been mobilized in different occasions and for different, perhaps even contradictory, motives. Theorizing the importance of both “the archive” and “the repertoire” in the multiple accounts of the Virgen de Guadalupe performative narrative as “acts of transfer,” Taylor proposes that “[t]he multicodelessness of these practices transmits
as many layers of meaning as there are spectators, participants, and witnesses" (49). Because of the Virgen de Guadalupe's performative characteristic [and the continuous reenactment of her narrative of apparition] as well as her status as the principal imperative in the archives of heterosexual national culture, it is thus apropos to open this section, Reimagining the Archive of Mexicanidad, with a chapter that examines the appropriation and sexualization of this image in visual cultural practices as well as the public reactions to them.

One possible way to think about mexicanidad is the material culture associated with "lo mexicano" (that which signifies Mexicanness) and the preponderance connected to this: selling and collecting kitsch objects from Mexican popular culture. One working concept of mexicanidad developed when, during the postrevolutionary period but not exclusively, figures such as filmmaker Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, with his celluloid postcards, and the visual artist Jesús Helguera, with his paintings that were reproduced overwhelmingly in cromos [Mexican calendars], constructed Mexican popular mythologies that continue to dominate the visual landscape of what we consider to be "lo mexicano." These cultural representations, it should be noted, also participated in constructing notions of femininity and masculinity that also continue to dominate our conceptions of what it means to be a Mexican woman and man. These kitsch objects and popular mythologies were reappropriated during the 1980s by visual artists as well as by some musicians not only to inject these objects and representations with new meanings but also to sell to a wider, and even international, audience. Within the art world, the movement was tagged as neo-Mexicanist; visual artists, rather than turning toward Europe or the United States, began to incorporate images, symbols, and even artistic techniques deemed Mexican. There was a comparable movement in the music world, where the postrevolutionary type of mexicanidad was reappropriated "to forge" a more Mexicanized type of rock music. One such example is the Mexican rock band Botellita de Jerez, who created the concept of "guaca rock." One only has to listen to the song "Forjando Patria (Forging the Motherland)" once to get a sense of what is deemed to be important in the "archives of mexicanidad"; for example: "Es mi soldaderas / la Virgen Morena" (It's a thousand female soldiers, the Dark-skinned Virgin [i.e., the Virgen de Guadalupe]). And, as I will discuss in this chapter and the two subsequent ones, Mexican and Chicana feminist artists have reappropriated mexicanidad to both challenge and critique...
its nationalistic, patriarchal, and heterosexist constraints and pay homage to it.

CROSSING AND REFRAMING CONCEPTUAL BORDERS

Toward the end of his extended essay on Mexican identity (last stop!), La jaula de la melancolia/The Cage of Melancholy [1987], Mexican intellectual Roger Bartra takes us back to the founding myth, that of the Mother. Bartra points to the link between alternating and shifting conceptions of female sexuality in Mexican culture and the cult of the Virgen de Guadalupe. He states:

The mother of Mexicans, la guadalupana, is the national expression of one of the most-extended archetypes in the history of humanity. But the cult of the Virgin can only be explained if we also pay attention to the shadow that accompanies her: the indigenous mother, the indigenous goddesses. [171]

A few pages later he adds:

The image of the Virgin expresses the idea that each era is created by the figure of Woman. Similarly, we should not be surprised that the history of the Virgen de Guadalupe’s cult manifests the evolution of Mexican culture’s conceptions that have been generated regarding female sexuality. Although this history is still to be written, we can already detect that the virginal image of Guadalupe is always bordered and besieged by its twin sister, Cihuacóatl. [177]

By positing that the Virgen de Guadalupe and indigenous goddesses embody the same original myth and fuse themselves in the archetype of Mexican Womanhood, Bartra is complicating the existing notion that these cultural and national symbols are contrary and/or antithetical. Moreover, what strikes this particular reader’s attention is that, with this gesture, Bartra is also suggesting that the Virgen de Guadalupe does, in fact, contain a sexual dimension, one that has been historically denied her.

This opening chapter deals with what Bartra perceives to be still unwritten, the history of Mexican female sexuality, or, at the very least, it is an attempt to bring together several intersecting points
regarding sexuality, religion, politics, and nationalism seldom discussed in critical discourse. As the quote above suggests, in compiling this “history” one of the most important elements in its archive is the Virgen de Guadalupe, but she is not alone, her “twin sister,” who borders her, is also highly significant. I read Bartra’s essay and mobilize it here in such a way that it functions as an intellectualized background narrative for the artistic and literary works that have been produced by Mexicans and Chicanas/os during the last three decades and that manipulate the image of la guadalupana, some of which I will examine here.3 Put differently, I interrogate the existing relationship between Mexican (trans)national identity and guadalupismo. However, rather than delving into a critical analysis of the performance of mexicanidad via a close reading of the culturally scripted cult of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a topic that has been widely studied,4 I am interested in analyzing a number of visual images as discursive practices or, in Foucauldian terms, reverse discourses that dissent from the hegemonic and naturalized tie that exists between Mexicans (particularly women) and the Virgen de Guadalupe. More specifically, I focus on works in which visual artists from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border deploy the symbol of the Virgen de Guadalupe and rework her image by sexualizing her. Thus, in attempting to comprehend the significance of this image in the Mexican and Chicana/o transnational circuits of affective economies, as Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano writes, “it is important to remember the semiotic richness of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican/Catholic culture, productive of both religious and nationalist meaning” [185]. This very “intense investment in these particular meanings … is revealed by the violence of responses to contemporary artists’ revisioning” [Yarbro-Bejarano, 185]. In other words, and as can be expected, these contemporary artistic reappropriations of the Virgen image have been unsettling for certain publics. Thus, it is vital to also discuss the public and transnational reactions to these counterdiscursive artistic works and the issues of control, regulation, and censorship that stem from the public exhibition of these artistic images that activate and rework the Virgen de Guadalupe by sexualizing, arguably, the most revered image/icon of the Americas. The overarching question of my analysis is an examination of the anxiety-producing and “unsettling” effect of merging Nation and Woman with sexuality in an attempt to discuss culture wars beyond the limits of the nation-state configuration.5 To a certain extent, the ideas presented in this chapter follow Gayatri Gopinath’s excellent lead regarding South Asian queer diasporic
public culture in Impossible Desires, where she states: “[The] various battles in disparate national locations speak to the ways in which queer desires, bodies, and subjectivities become dense sites of meaning in the production and reproduction of notions of ‘culture,’ ‘tradition,’ and communal belonging” of both, the country/countries of origin and the diaspora (2). In this regard and within the Mexican and its diasporic context, my ultimate goal is to construct a critical intervention that disrupts the following equation: Sexualizing the Virgen de Guadalupe is the same as de-Mexicanizing the artist. If we read this de-Mexicanizing gesture with a nationalist inflection, I hope that, by exploring the space[s] between the “original” representation of the Virgen de Guadalupe and the counterrepresentations, rather than mourning the loss of nation [or national belonging], to begin to theorize new types of transnational Mexican subjectivities that include a queer and/or sexual dimension.

"ASALTO A LA MORALIDAD Y LA BUENA CONDUCTA": RELIGION, ART, AND CENSORSHIP

The first part of this section's title, which I translate as “assaults against morality and good manners,” references the infamous expression within Mexican nationalist public discourse that functions as both a critique and a normalizing gesture when used by the religious right. In particular I am drawing out an aspect of the phrase that places a judgment on all individual or collective behavior and on [popular] cultural texts they deem amoral. Because of the ways in which this floating phrase has exercised power over Mexican society and culture, I use it here to discuss the issue of censorship in contemporary Mexico regarding cultural production with sexualized images of the Guadalupe icon. Additionally, I also deploy this phrase as a prelude to a preliminary definition of the ways in which censorship is defined by visual art critics and historians. Elizabeth Childs, in the introduction to her collection of edited essays, Suspended License: Censorship and the Visual Arts, proposes that “we might begin by defining censorship narrowly as a ‘regulative’ operation—that is, as a process by which works of art that have entered the public sphere are controlled, repressed, or even destroyed by the representatives of political, moral, or religious authority” (4). By way of introducing my initial remarks regarding the vexed relationship between religion, art, and censorship, I will first offer some anecdotal evidence—“ephemera as evidence”—to begin to explore some of the most contentious debates
in contemporary Mexican context. As in the introductory chapter, I am taking my cues from José E. Muñoz and his essay "Ephemera as Evidence," where he posits that anecdotes and gossip can serve as evidence and that ephemera can be useful as a modality of anti-rigor and anti-evidence that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality. Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance. (10)

In my viewing of the film El crimen del Padre Amaro/The Crime of Father Amaro (Carlos Carrera, 2002), the Vicente Leñero (Mexicanized) adaptation of the nineteenth-century Portuguese novel by Eça de Queirós, I was struck by the audience's reaction to the scene in which the protagonist of the film, Father Amaro (Gael García Bernal), wraps his lover's naked body (Ana Claudia Talancón) with a mantle resembling the starred one that we can see draped over the Virgen de Guadalupe's head and shoulders. In an earlier scene a beata (devout woman) had given Father Amaro the mantle that she had made for the parish's Virgin. Sitting among a mostly Latino audience in Chicago (most of whom, I would guess, of Mexican origin), I noticed the slowly increasing level of dis-comfort: the soft-spoken "oh nos!" that subsequently climaxed with an "Oh my God!"—no pun intended—when the priest and his young lover kiss. After reading and hearing much about the outrage that this movie was causing both in Mexico and the U.S, I expected this alleged scandal-causing scene to be much more sexually explicit. Instead, the visceral reaction that this scene elicited from Mexican audiences—both Catholic and guadalupanos, which, as Carlos Monsivais has written, are not necessarily the same6—was based on the metonymic symbolism and codes that surround the construction of the Virgen myth/icon: the starred-green mantle. Within Mexican film history, El crimen del Padre Amaro by far represents the most-talked-about and attacked example of cinematographic religious transgressions.7 The fact that Carrera's film holds the honor of being the most scandalous religious-themed film in Mexican history is perhaps contingent on a set of factors: the production company's perceptive marketing and distribution strategies, the star status of its main actor, Gael García Bernal, the country's move to the right—the governing party, the PAN [or National Action Party], after all,
is unequivocally tied to the Catholic Church—and the relaxation of constitutional articles that stipulate the separation of church and state. It is within this context that several pro-life and other religious right groups as well as priests and bishops across Mexico and, by extension and influence, the United States carried their attack against this film for its “blasphemous” depiction of Mexico's sacred Mother figure.

Carrera’s film also constructs vinculums between the Catholic Church and guerrilla groups as well as narco-trafficking that, if logic were the apparatus that structured the film’s reception, should have caused uproar, but very little, if anything, was said about these links. Another transgressive theme present in the film that speaks to the vexed relationship between religion, gender/sexuality, and cultural representations but did not elicit similar reactions from the Chicago audience is the abortion scene at the end of the film. A few people have tried to argue that perhaps it was this fact that caused the religious right and the Catholic Church in Mexico and Mexican/Latino communities in the U.S. to try to prevent people from watching the film. Though it is a valid argument that could be developed further, I am not entirely convinced by this because Amelia dies at the end of the film as a result of the botched clandestine abortion. The film’s obvious critique of the Church’s hypocrisy suffers a dent at the end of the film with this death, which can be read as deserving because of her “sin.” Most recently Pope Benedict has called for a sort of crusade against the movement in Mexico City that fought to decriminalize abortion. The pope’s intervention, as well as that of the pro-life groups in Mexico’s Federal District, evidences for me that tragic outcomes resulting from clandestine abortions are read as signs, from their perspective, of castigation.

In thinking through some of the issues surrounding this film—religion, sexuality, censorship, and public reactions—I was struck with the disjunction between the multiple warnings that were circulating in the public, semipublic, and private spheres, from mouth-to-mouth and flyers distributed during Catholic masses that explicitly prohibited the viewing of this film, and the people who had actually seen it. The U.S.-based branch of the organization Tradición, Familia y Propiedad/Tradition, Family, and Property, founded in the 1960s in Brazil by Plinio Correa de Oliveira, was the one spearheading the massive protests in this country, including the biggest public demonstration against El crimen in Los Angeles during its premiere. However, most of the people who were protesting the distribution and screening of the film had actually not seen it, which, in turn,
probably stirred more curiosity and propelled more people to attend a screening of El crimen del Padre Amaro. Of course, this contradiction is not new within the modern history of censorship, as Richard Meyer argues in Outlaw Representation: “attempts to restrict or regulate sexually explicit images produce their own theater of sexual acts and imagery, their own fantasies of erotic exchange and transgression” [5]. Meyer is here pointing to the ironic fact that a singular artistic piece or, in my particular argument, a cinematographical text such as El crimen del Padre Amaro, produces just one discourse on sexuality, whereas all public admonitions and attempts to thwart its distribution give way to proliferating narratives that necessitate excessive descriptions of alleged sexual transgressions; the sexually explicit images and stories are not only restaged but also magnified.

Within the Mexican and Chicano contexts, however, the public outrage that the film El crimen del Padre Amaro provoked is not a singular or unique moment in the transnational culture wars I am attempting to document in this chapter. The public response to Carrera’s film was reminiscent of a scandal that had occurred only one year prior to its release, the digital print Our Lady (1999) by Chicana queer artist Alma López. Our Lady was part of the Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology exhibition in the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2001. Among those who were protesting the Santa Fe exhibition was the same organization that would one year later actively mobilize Catholic supporters to denounce the El crimen in public demonstrations, The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property. In comparison to the film, which only alludes to the link between the priest’s object of desire and the Virgen de Guadalupe, López’s image reworks the icon to create a defiant, sexy, and queer Guadalupe. The queer markers that aid in such a reading of the print exist both within and outside the frame of the print: Alma López’s own queer subject position and the naked woman who replaces the angel underneath the horned moon in the traditional depictions of the Virgen de Guadalupe. These almost concurrent scandals, which are different in form and style but nonetheless represent similar “transgressions,” as they manipulate the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe through discourses on sexuality and tease the public’s single-tiered level of affectivity to this sacred and untouchable icon, serve as a sort of springboard for my discussion of female sexuality across the U.S.-Mexico border, more specifically the transnational and cross-border
anxiety produced by the sexualized images of Mexican womanhood as epitomized by the Virgen de Guadalupe. However, beyond this, I am also interested in the ways in which these contemporary artistic examples, particularly those produced by Chicanas, are critical interventions that “counteract an oppressive system that has perpetuated the passive role of women in Christian values and colonial sites” as Alicia Arrizón has stated of Chicana and Latina feminist cultural production in “Mythical Performativity” (39). However, something comes to the surface when we investigate these artistic productions: The artistic practice of sexualizing and/or activating the Virgen de Guadalupe is engaged in overwhelmingly by female artists in the Chicano context and male artists in the Mexican one.

USES AND ABUSES OF THE VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE IMAGE

In Mexican history and culture, there is no other religious figure/icon that has caused more anthropological inquiry and studies, debate regarding its narrative of apparition, and scandals due to its manipulation. Connected to this circumstance is the lack of tolerance for dissenting opinions and/or (re-)creative imaginings and the political uses of the Virgen de Guadalupe, something not exclusive to the present. In “The Virgen de Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?” Jeanette Favrot Peterson proposes that the Virgen de Guadalupe has been used alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, as a symbol of liberation as well as one of accommodation and control” (39). This thus makes the Virgen de Guadalupe, as Chicana scholar Luz Calvo has written, “a polyvalent sign, able to convey multiple and divergent meanings and [able to be] deployed by different groups for contradictory and political ends” (201). One thinks, of course, of the multiple ways that this image has been mobilized in the last four hundred years: from the spiritual conquest exercised over indigenous people during the colonization period to battles over national sovereignty (such as the wars of independence), from the Mexican Revolution of 1910—although it ironically, among its different and competing aims, called for a decrease in Church power (lest we forget the dictator Porfirio Díaz’s oft-repeated caution that, without religion, Mexico would be permanently lost)—to the postrevolutionary Cristero Wars, whose aim was to sufcure the Church and State once again, and, lastly, in the context of the United States, from the early twentieth-century public manifestations in urban centers, which had
been transformed by mass Mexican migration and where an incipient Mexican-American consciousness was being created, to the often quoted example of the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Because of her status as protector of the “underdogs” in these contexts and across the Americas and because of the multiple alleged interventions and miracles that the Virgen has carried out, it is impossible to deny the importance she holds for many people, particularly the most disempowered and marginalized. But as Liliana Felipe keenly asks in one of the songs she performs in *Las Horas de Belén. A Book of Hours* (1999): “Virgen de Guadalupe / que con tantos trabajos nos proteges / acaso pensamos / ¿quien te protege a ti?” [Virgin of Guadalupe / if you could hardly protect us / who did we think was protecting you?]

This very real and overwhelmingly physical presence of the Virgen de Guadalupe has given her more than political cachet; the image’s economical prospects have not been lost on entrepreneurs, who have become wealthy by knowing how to exploit the Virgen’s image to sell key chains and other religious memorabilia, international long-distance calling cards, and other objects that have a predetermined function, such as blankets, towels, and tortilla presses. The Virgen’s economic possibilities were made patent—pun well intended—when the image became the source of religious and international commercial squabbling. In 2003 the Instituto Mexicano de la Propiedad Industrial (IMPI or Mexican Institute of Industrial Property) accepted a Chinese businessman’s petition to register as his and garner trademark status for the Virgen de Guadalupe image that was, as the legend stipulates, imprinted on Juan Diego’s cloak. Such an act caused the Mexican Catholic Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Norberto Rivera, to protest, something that does not seem unwarranted. But what is interesting to consider here is that perhaps what the Mexican Catholic Church was really upset about was the possible discovery of the fact that only one year prior to this, the rector of the basilica erected to worship the Virgen de Guadalupe, Monsignor Diego Monroy, had already sold the rights to the image to the U.S.-based enterprise Viotran for $12.5 million. On February 9, 2003, an article by Rodrigo Vera in the weekly political magazine *Proceso* reported that a contract had been drawn months before between the basilica and the U.S. company, based in Orlando, Florida. It should be noted that Viotran was a company—renamed at one point as Venerare but now defunct—that made its profits from the wire transfers between immigrants and
their families in their nation of origin and from the calling cards sold in immigrant communities that make it possible to keep in touch with loved ones by making long-distance telephone communication more affordable. But the contract—withdrawn a year after it was drafted because it was “totally illegal,” i.e., her image does not belong to the basilica but to “todo el pueblo de México”—stipulated more than giving, for five years, exclusive rights to Viotran/Venerare to use the image to sell telephone cards, key chains, or other kitsch items. It would also commercialize the image [and create profits in the millions] by promoting misas-baile [mass-dances] in stadiums in those cities in the U.S. with high Latino demographics, all with the aid of three other transnational companies: Sony Music, Money Gram, and the U.S.-based television network Telemundo.13 Ironically enough, one of the arguments used against Lopez’s Our Lady was that she did not have the right to reinterpret the Virgen de Guadalupe because she had not gotten permission from the real owners of the copyright to the image, Archbishop Rivera and Monsignor Monroy.14

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND (OTHER) THREATS TO THE NATION

The “ubiquity” of this image, whether mass marketed in the form of key chains or in “original” artistic representations, led Mexican art historian Jorge Alberto Manrique to ask if, perhaps, the “true miracle” of this image was not her apparition of 1531 but the proliferation of her image in art and literature during the twentieth century. In 1996 he wrote for the Mexican newspaper La Jornada:

Let us be satisfied with what is perhaps the true miracle: the primary importance that the image of Tepeyac [the hill where the Virgen de Guadalupe, supposedly, made her apparition] has had for our history, the undeniable fact of the faith in millions and millions of Mexicans, and the vast amount of literature and works of art that she has inspired [my emphasis].15

While Manrique does not mention any direct examples of the proliferating (artistic) images of the Virgen, I cannot help but read Manrique’s statement of “satisfaction” or conformity with a certain sardonic inflection due to the fact that Manrique himself was “victim” of the Virgen de Guadalupe image’s cultural and symbolic capital.
That is, his observations could be construed as derisive comments on two different and quasi-simultaneous art exhibits in Mexico City that featured the Guadalupe image in 1987 and 1988, respectively.

In 1987 the media conglomerate Televisa or, to be more precise, its cultural foundation, organized and sponsored an event that was to be, as Serge Gruzinski writes in “Del barroco al neobarroco,” an expiatory tribute to the Virgen de Guadalupe by turning Televisa’s now defunct Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo into a basilica of sorts. Gruzinski states that in this “makeshift” basilica hundreds of replicas of the original image of the Virgen, which now hangs in the Basilica of Guadalupe, were exhibited, “presenting to the stupefied public the same image endlessly recaptured and repeated” (65). While Gruzinski dismisses the public as atónito—his word for “stupefied” in Spanish—Olivier Debroise’s brief analysis of the same exhibition in “Haciéndola cardiaca” offers a more complex look at the power of this image and the Virgen de Guadalupe’s place in the realm of the “high-art” world. He writes that this exhibition was to be, a priori, boring but that it was at that moment one of the most widely attended in Mexico’s museum history. Because of this phenomenon, Debroise has been forced to rethink the notion of originality as it pertains to modern art in the context of Mexico but to which I would extend to the United States when discussing Chicana/o art. He writes that:

The concept of repetition here acquired a consecrating value, for each copy of the Virgin reinforced, rather than reduced, the power of the original. This might help define the particular function that Mexico’s visual arts fulfill, a function relatively absent at other latitudes: among other factors, Mexican art denies and invalidates the modern concept of originality. (35)

This exhibition and the concurrent one at the Museo de Arte Moderno [MAM]/Museum of Modern Art, which caused a huge scandal at the beginning of 1988, mark an important turning point in Mexico: “the reappearance of strong religious fervor, motivated both by the economic crisis, then at its height, and by the traumatic effects of the earthquake of 1985, which had left deep scars on the face of Mexico City” (Debroise, 35). If Debroise’s words regarding the lack of originality in Mexican art holds any validity, what I would like to signal at this point regarding its reproduction and repetition is that it can serve to further consecrate the image in some instances while proving to be a “dangerous liaison” at others. For, as Luz Calvo
suggests in "Art Comes for the Archbishop," the very same ubiquity and polyvalence causes the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe to become "a sign that is especially available for semiotic resignification and cultural transformation" (202).

In 1987 the above-quoted Manrique was then the director of the MAM and helped to open a new gallery space, "Arte Alternativa" del Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas (Alternative Art of the National Hall of Plastic Arts), which was to feature contemporary experimental art.\(^{18}\) The exhibition that inaugurated the new space included a multipart installation by Mexican visual artist Rolando de la Rosa titled Templo Real (Real Temple) (1987), which featured three collages that superimposed religious icons with secular imagery and a Mexican flag on the floor with two cowboy boots on top. While De la Rosa's collages and installation as a whole could be read as transgressive—because of his artistic impulse to manipulate, juxtapose, and alter what is deemed untouchable—one of these collages now stands as the most unforgettable examples of public "intolerance" and ridiculous fanaticism. This particular piece, which was the most commented and reproduced in the popular press, featured Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe's face and cleavage covering that of the Virgen de Guadalupe's downward-facing look and cloaked breasts. The two other collage pieces by the artist that were part of the installation as well as part of the overall scandal also superimposed the religious with the secular: One was a cheap reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper in which the face of Jesus Christ had been replaced by that of Mexican popular cultural icon Pedro Infante; in the other, the face of El Santo Niño de Atocha (The Child Saint of Atocha) had been replaced by a soccer ball. The collages are, from my perspective, a direct criticism of the ways in which religious representations coexist in a society that is dominated by mass-mediated images that have opened up social and cultural spaces so that these secularized mythologies flourish and, in some instances, supersede the religious ones. Moreover, if taken as a whole, the installation can be, and could have been, read as a criticism of cultural imperialism; after all, the Mexican flag was placed on the floor to symbolically represent Mexico being trampled by a pair of cowboy boots, a representation of the United States. However, these sets of possible meanings were obfuscated when the religious right in its place—it is worthwhile quoting Meyer again—"produce[d] their own theater of sexual acts and imagery" [5]. In this particular case the Mexican culture wars were staged on the female body (the Virgen de Guadalupe and Marilyn Monroe). As I will argue below, it
is my contention that associating Jesus Christ with Pedro Infante—an almost Jesus-like icon, lest we forget his most famous role as the noble carpenter-son in *Nosotros los pobres* [*We the Poor Ones*] (Ismael Rodriguez, 1947)—or the highly revered infant Jesus figure with another, albeit secular, national myth—soccer—was not as polemical as the sexualization of the Virgen de Guadalupe. 19

The exhibition went relatively unnoticed for a few months until the Mexico City newspaper *Excelsior* published an article condemning the exhibit as blasphemous. The story was subsequently picked up by several tabloid journals, which resulted in making De la Rosa a public target of the religious right by reproducing the artist's work in their front pages. For example, on February 10, 1988, the headlines of *Linterna* (Lantern) read: "Ofensa a la bandera y a la guadalupana por un pintor extranjero" (A Foreigner Offends the [Mexican] Flag and the Virgen de Guadalupe). 20 The writers of this sensationalist article depicted De la Rosa as a Guatemalan painter, for they could not fathom the idea that he was a Mexican national. The previously mentioned idea that producing sexualized images of the Virgen de Guadalupe can potentially result in de-Mexicanizing the artist, which is more applicable to Chicana artists, is likewise fitting here, perhaps even in a more obvious way, as De la Rosa’s national AND cultural heritage was being denied. After having captured the media’s attention, the religious-right groups, principally the Comité Nacional de Provida (National Pro-life Committee, referred to from here on as Provida) and the UNPF (Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia/National Union of Parents), began to spew admonitions against De la Rosa’s collages, classified the exhibition as “sacrilegious” and “irreverent,” and protested and worked tirelessly to persuade the public into believing that the images were offensive—even if they themselves had not been to the exhibit. The president of Provida, Jorge Serrano Limón, stated:

Desconozco a un mexicano que no se indigne por ver la bandera mexicana y la Virgen de Guadalupe mancillados. Es una exposición satánica, sacrilega. A la Virgen de Guadalupe la han pintado con una cara sensual, de Marilyn Monroe, la ponen como si fuera una prostituta.

[I do not know a single Mexican who would not become indignant upon seeing the Mexican flag and the Virgen de Guadalupe desecrated. It’s a satanic exhibition, sacrilegious. They have painted a sensual face on the Virgen de Guadalupe, Marilyn Monroe’s, they depict her as if she were a prostitute.] 21

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There is no doubt that Infante was and continues to be as much a sex symbol as Marilyn Monroe, albeit on a national scale or for the Mexican diaspora in the United States. However, Infante's status as a sex symbol is thwarted by the fact that, as Sergio de la Mora convincingly argues in Cinemachismo, his "on- and off-screen image is coded as honest, unassuming, accessible, and incorrigibly playful" (75). The privilege of performing this type of "duality," as de la Mora reads Infante's performance of Mexican masculinity, was not warranted by Monroe's femininity (75). Although she was also a comedic actress, her overall public persona was congealed as overly sexualized, thus pushing leaders of the religious-right groups, such as Serrano Limón, to conflate excessive sensuality with prostitution. These so-called moral leaders participated in the "pleasures of condemnation," a concept coined by anthropologist Carol S. Vance to describe the environment during the 1985-1986 hearings of the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography; such atmosphere, Vance writes, "was one of excited repression: witnesses alternated between chronicling the negative effects of pornography and making sensationalized presentations of it" (quoted in Meyer, 5). Serrano Limón performed his own "pleasures of condemnation" by bringing in an irrelevant issue, the question of prostitution, to the mix and exposing his own deep-seated fantasy of "erotic exchange and transgression" (Meyer, 5). From there on in, functioning as a sort of right arm to the Catholic Church in Mexico City, the president of Provida called for a massive protest—"acto de desagravio" (act of atonement)—in the Zócalo (the main city square) on February 18, 1988. This ultimately succeeded in having part of the exhibition, De la Rosa's collage installations, removed from the museum's premises—the exhibition had already been closed because of the increasing pressures—and Manrique fired; there was much at stake: It was, after all, an election year!

In an essay that discusses Mexican culture in the 1980s and 1990s and that gives a trajectory of the questionable secularization of cultural nationalism, "La utopia indocumentada," Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsiváis contends that after artistically produced images by Chicanas are diffused throughout Mexico, something "curious" arises within this context, an illusion: "it is possible to use irony and postmodernism in the re-creation of sacred symbols" (56). One such early example of these "contemporary" artistic techniques can be found in the photograph La Mujer Maravilla/Wonder Woman (1980) by José Luis Neyra, in which the artist frames within his camera's lens a newsstand where two images, that of the Virgen de Guadalupe above
that of the female superhero, are juxtaposed. What is important to signal here is that, even though Neyra and other artists had juxtaposed and in some cases manipulated the image of la guadalupana, it is not until De la Rosa’s installation received attention from the popular press that a scandal ensued. For example, one wonders why Felipe Ehrenberg’s No la chiflen, que es cantada (Don’t Whistle It, Sing It) from the series Mámá, mamacita, a piece that was part of the Fundación Televisa exhibition I previously mentioned, was not condemned, as it features a nightclub singer, or cabaretera, sitting with a microphone at hand but with the famed Virgen silhouette. In fact, as I will argue in Chapter 3, Mexican popular culture, particularly the films of the so-called golden age, have done more to conflate nightclub performers with prostitution than any other form of cultural representation. Thus, if the leader of Provida wanted to accuse an artist of depicting the Virgen de Guadalupe as a prostitute, Ehrenberg’s No la chiflen would have been a more obvious choice. Was it that Ehrenberg’s piece was in the makeshift basilica sponsored by Televisa, a private company, whereas De la Rosa was in a state-sponsored museum? Monsiváis also puts forth in his essay the notion that the previously mentioned pieces by Mexican artists are in part indebted to the visual work of Chicana/o artists that was beginning to circulate in Mexico. And he makes the case that De la Rosa’s installation during the 1987–1988 exhibition was an “implicit homage” to Chicana/o art and its proclivities to re-create and secularize the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, which Monsiváis reads as examples of postmodern tendencies or techniques. But, as the Mexican intellectual, Monsiváis, ironizes, in his usual humorous fashion: “And [De la Rosa’s installation pieces] . . . [were] not, for the Mexican right either intertextual or postmodern, but rather sacrilegious, heretic, obscene, blasphemous, and perverse” (56). The excessive attention [i.e., critiques and attacks] that De la Rosa’s artistic work received, because of its postmodern take on contemporary popular cultural icons that flood the contemporary urban landscape, seems unwarranted, as other artists were also deploying postmodern artistic techniques in their reimagining of the Virgen de Guadalupe. However, during that historical juncture, the latter part of 1987 and first part of 1988, De la Rosa was not the sole public target of the religious right, who attacked him for his alleged inferior moral standards. Political cabaret performance artist Jesusa Rodríguez, whom I will discuss more extensively in Chapter 3 and the coda of this book, premiered her adaptation of Oskar Panizza’s The
Council of Love (1894) in Mexico City's Foro Shakespeare in 1987. Rodríguez's adaptation and restaging of Panizza's play, as Jean Franco has written, "proved to be as unpalatable in the 1980s as it was in the 1890s. Censorship and prohibitions are still in place, despite the prevailing impressions that we are living in a 'free world'" ("A Touch of Evil," 50). At the end of the nineteenth century Panizza was charged with ninety-three counts of blasphemy, and, after a one-day trial, he was sent to jail for one year. In the late twentieth century the same ultraconservative religious groups that were attacking DelaRosa were simultaneously attacking the director of El concilio del amor; the theater was vandalized and the production was only able to continue with high security. 30

More than ten years later, during the opening of an exhibition by the artist Nahum B. Zenil at the same museum, Monsiváis remembered De la Rosa's infamous image and spoke of the "impossibility" of something similar happening again. In a panel discussion, Monsiváis maintained that the scandal eleven years prior had benefited other artists who work with sexually explicit images and nudity, as Zenil, who integrates visual images of male (homo)sexuality into his visual landscape. 31 Notwithstanding this pre-PAN [National Action Party] positive assertion that does not consider the multiple censorship scandals outside of Mexico City during the decade of the 1990s, Monsiváis's Mexico City–centered perspective fails to integrate an important factor that differentiates these two examples, that is, De la Rosa and Zenil. While visual art that features nudity and sexuality, including here female and/or queer, might not be under attack as much—though this is highly questionable considering the climate of intolerance that continues to build in Mexico, in part thanks to the new ties that the Fox administration constructed with the Catholic Church and right-leaning religious groups—the fact that De la Rosa's image provoked such level of anxiety has to do with the manner in which, however unconsciously, De la Rosa centered sexuality on a religious and female icon. As Bartra posits in the previously quoted comment, if the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe is representative of the time period's conceptualization of female sexuality, what does the following example clarify of the historical present, yet unwritten?

In 2000, a touring exhibition entitled Homenaje al lápiz [Homage to Pencil Drawing] traveled first from Mexico City, then to Oaxaca, and finally to the Museo del Periodismo y las Artes Gráficas [Museum of Journalism and Graphic Arts] in Guadalajara where the director,
Yolanda Carvajal, ordered that thirteen of the two hundred featured works remain in their package because of their “erotic content.” Carvajal stipulated that the majority of the public that would be attending was composed of adolescents who would not possess a high level of maturity to discern and assimilate the pieces’ erotic depictions. The artistic community protested this gesture of self-censorship and succeeded in having the entire collection exhibited. A few days later, however, two young men visiting the museum shredded Manuel Ahumada’s *La Patrona* [The (Female) Patron] to pieces. Ahumada’s image depicts Juan Diego extending before him his *ayate* or cloak with an image of a naked Marilyn Monroe or Monroe-type of blonde bombshell. This violent act of aggression toward an artistic image received much praise from the higher echelons of the Catholic Church in Guadalajara. Carvajal, who herself did not want to unveil the images, received death threats from the religious right. What is interesting to signal here is that with this “incident” something productive did ensue: there was more public discussion around the issues of freedom of expression, the Church’s power regarding the question of censorship, and abortion, a debate that was taking place concurrently in Mexico City that was to make abortion legal. Thus, in spite of Monsiváis’s declarations, twelve years after De la Rosa’s postmodern Virgen de Guadalupe/Marilyn Monroe collage, the control of the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe and, more importantly, female sexuality, in spite of the recent legislative approval to de-penalize abortion in Mexico City, continues to lie in the hands of the patriarchal structure in Mexico, embodied, still, by the Church and the State, under the guise of nationalist movements and, increasingly, by the private sector.

In the work of the artists mentioned above, the appropriation and reworking of the Virgen de Guadalupe image functions in part to make familiar what is considered celestial and untouchable. However, as I have also suggested, when the iconography that is manipulated is considered sacred, the naturalized emotional links between the artist and her/his publics are fractured and/or strained when enacting identity-based practices and producing images that contest a monolithic and/or rigid national and cultural system. This terrain of fracturing “the ties that bind” through a performative sexualization-manipulation of the Virgen de Guadalupe image also belongs to Chicana artists who are considered to be from a “long line of vendidas,” or sell-outs, and who know firsthand what it is like to be the Virgin’s “accompanying shadow.”
TRANSCRIBED TEXT

In an essay on Latina/o affectivity and Ricardo Bracho’s performance work, José E. Muñoz writes that “[c]itizenship is negotiated within a contested national sphere in which performances of affect counter each other in a contest that can be described as official national affect versus emergent immigrant” (69). While Muñoz is arguing for a theory of “feeling brown” as a specific Latina/o set of cultural practices and mode of affectivity to counter the “cultural logic of whiteness,” I want to expand his idea by suggesting that, for Latina/os, citizenship is negotiated within a transnational sphere where feelings of belonging [and/or of not belonging] have to deal with two forms of “official” national affect [Mexico, in the particular cases that I examine, and the United States], as well as making room for an emerging and ever-evolving one. Put differently, the proliferating artistic images of the patron saint of the Americas—as the Virgen de Guadalupe came to be known during the second half of the twentieth century—produced by Chicanas in the last three decades, and the public reactions to them, propel me to move forward Muñoz’s notion of citizenship and place it beyond the U.S. imaginary or, more specifically, Anglo-American and Latino dialectic, in an intra-ethnic one that crosses national boundaries. Thus, in studying the manipulation of the Virgen de Guadalupe icon in Chicana/o cultural production, it is worthwhile to borrow from theorists who have developed such notions as cultural citizenship [Renato Rosaldo] and transnational citizenship [Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Stacey Takacs] in order to be able to analyze the back-and-forth movement of these images across national borders. That is, for colonized and migrant subjects, citizenship is a concept that has been rethought beyond the scope of the civic rights granted to them within a nation-state. What I am primarily interested in exploring here is how the single-tiered level of affectivity—that of high reverence—alluded to previously, which all Mexicans and Chicanas/os alike are socialized to have for the Virgen de Guadalupe, is jerked in the process of its very own manipulation across borders, whether they be national and/or sexual. Thus, following Muñoz but setting him slightly off track with the work that I discuss here, Mexican cultural citizenship is being constantly negotiated within an already contested transnational geographical setting and a transculturated female image, where “performances of affect counter each other” [Muñoz, “Feeling Brown,” 69], at times producing incendiary results.

References


Moreover, and if I may borrow from and paraphrase Muñoz, the reimagined Virgen de Guadalupe artistic products serve “to counter the cultural logic of whiteness” AND mexicanidad, both within the Mexican national context and as it is reproduced in the United States, which will include a particular vein of chicanismo.

In her essay “Mythical Performativity,” Arrízón briefly discusses Chicana visual artists’ deployment of the Virgen icon and its transgressive and revolutionary characteristics in the context of reactionary politics and Chicano heterosexist and nationalist discourse. Arrízón proposes that the visual work that results from the reworking of this image is “radically performative” as it complicates “the ‘authentic’ claim of Guadalupe to reproduce mimetic altered bodies. The performative emerges in the manipulation of the surface of the iconographic image and in the surface of the altered body” (39). The cultural work of Chicana visual artists Ester Hernández and Yolanda López, Arrízón seems to suggest, is based on relationships of sameness, much in the way that Zenil’s iconic art discussed in the previous section is also about (quasi-)semblance or the performative-persistence on going back to the “founding myth” of the mother. However, when contrasted with the sexualized Virgen de Guadalupe images of De la Rosa and Ahumada that I examined previously, in the visual production of Chicana artists the Catholic icon is activated and trans-lated—meaning here that she is not only interpreted but also moved—into a feminist framework. In the reiterative “gesture,” the traditional image of an essentialized female figure, static and submissive, is transformed into an active one where her power to protect, her primary function in the Virgin’s process of mythification, lies in her physical strength. One of the most-often cited examples of this is Ester Hernández’s La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los xicanos/The Virgen de Guadalupe Defending the Rights of Xicanos (1975) where the female figure, with her starred-mantle still intact and her traditional rays framed slightly off, is not only donning a black-belt karate suit but also kicking combatively in the air. The other portrait that Arrízón discusses is Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen de Guadalupe (1978) in Yolanda López’s Guadalupe series, in which the artist paints herself in the Virgin’s radiating frame. The artist’s persona, as she is self-represented, is wearing a pair of running shoes and appears to be running directly toward the spectator—trampling over the angel that is depicted as upholding the Virgin in the “original”—with a victorious facial gesture as she clenches a snake with her bare right hand. Thus,
as can be noticed, these altered representations become performative because, in this ever-expanding repertoire of proliferating Virgen de Guadalupe imagery, the alternating and altered female bodies are not fixed, producing a pluralizing and nonstatic effect of her identity. In the rest of this chapter, I expand upon Arrizón’s brief analysis of these performative images by conceptualizing from a transnational perspective the notion of double crossing in visual production that features the Virgen de Guadalupe from the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border but crosses back and forth.

When discussing Mexican female sexuality from a cross-border or transnational perspective, it is important to consider the discourse of sexuality as being imperative in this double crossing, at least in regard to the visual art representations that I study here. On one level, the term “double crossing” references the basic dictionary definition, in which “to double-cross” means “to betray or deceive” [a person with whom one is supposedly cooperating] but in an act that counterreads it much in the way that Cherrie Moraga has offered a counterreading of “vendida” and has inserted herself within the contestatory paradigm of “a long line of vendidas.” That is, Chicana feminists, in their rereading and reclamation of the archetypical vendida figure, have complicated the nation-building rhetorical projects where Woman [as icon] could only be positioned as betrayer, as a double-crosser. And here is where I think the term “double crossing” can also be reread in a similar vein but with a transnational twist. To a certain extent I am following Mary Pat Brady, who, in regard to Chicana/o literary production in Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies (2002), states: “Crossing scenes in Chicana/o literature often explore the desire to double-cross the border—to trick the extensive machinery of containment, of discipline, and of exploitation that has historically made the border a proving ground not simply for citizenship but for humaneness as well” (53). While the visual art that I study in this chapter does not feature border-crossing imagery within the frameworks in the literal sense of the word, I propose that the manipulated Guadalupe images studied here are “double crossing” in the sense that they are consciously betraying and tricking the gender and sexual regimes of containment. Furthermore, what is important to signal here is that the most scandal-causing examples of artistic production that sexualized the Virgen de Guadalupe within Mexico during the mid- to late 1980s and 1990s—in particular De la Rosa’s Virgen de Guadalupe with Marilyn Monroe’s face and cleavage—are
indebted to the visual imagery created by Chicanas [the epitome of malinchistas] that had crossed back into Mexico. I am proposing that the term “double crossing” be read literally to stress the act of movement across, in this case, borders where this movement is not unidirectional. To counter the ways in which official Mexican nationalist discourse has de-Mexicanized Chicanas/os, Chicana visual artists have contributed to the visual field of proliferating Guadalupe images as they reappropriate her and provide her with contemporary qualities; that is, Chicana cultural workers have been working to disrupt the passive, desexualized, and one-dimensional representation of the Virgen by creating empowered and active images.

Their work is critically interventionist within various discourses, but I would argue that it most specifically challenges the Mexican and the masculinized Chicano ones. One of the most salient examples of what I would label a transnational double crossing is another piece by Yolanda López that was featured on a cover of the Mexican feminist magazine fem, which recently ceased publication. In a special issue dedicated to “Las Chicanas” (June–July 1984), López’s Walking Lupe presented an activated Virgin with shortened attire and wearing high heels, as if walking away. The ultraright religious groups Provida and the UNPF, the same ones that succeeded in having De la Rosa’s pieces removed from the Museo de Arte Moderno four years later, mobilized to have the newspaper kiosks that were selling the magazine trashed. The fem editors also received bomb threats in their offices, the same strategy that these groups used against the theater that was staging Rodríguez’s El concilio del amor.35 With her Guadalupe series from the 1970s Yolanda López knew that she had “hit the twitch meter” because “people were really excited and loved it or were disturbed by it”; she would use this public reaction as a way to fight stereotypes.36 But, by allowing her image to be part of this issue’s cover, López hit the transnational “twitch meter.” The religious right in Mexico, particularly in Mexico City, was more than disturbed by the image of the activated Virgen de Guadalupe; they now had to protect (even by violent means) the static notion of femininity that necessarily served their conservative purposes and that was now being threatened by “Las Chicanas.” Thus it is more than obvious that the artistic work of “Las Chicanas,” both the visual art and the literature contained within the pages of fem, were evidencing that they had crossed back into (double-crossed) the Mexican cultural landscape, carrying on their shoulders the baggage of mexicanidad but reframed as feminist.
A QUEER MOTHER FOR THE TRANSNATION

It is within the context that I have described at great length above that I propose to situate Alma López’s digital image, Our Lady, as a queer mother for the transnation. Our Lady, which I alluded to at the beginning of the chapter when I juxtaposed it with the film The Crime of Father Amaro, is a digitally manipulated image featuring a Chicana (a picture of the Chicana performance artist Raquel Salinas), wearing a 1930s-style two-piece swimsuit made of pastel-colored roses and adorned by other guadalupana elements: the mantle, the angel upholding the Virgin, and the radiating framework. These elements, however, have been transformed in López’s digital image: the starred-blue mantle here contains pre-Columbian deity motifs, the angel (a picture of the Latina performance artist Raquel Gutiérrez) is explicitly feminized and queer as she is naked midway up the torso, revealing her breasts, and the customary angel wings have been replaced here with a set of viceroy butterfly wings, and, lastly, the rays are a bright yellow. Moreover, one could also add another layer to our reading and understanding of Our Lady: The markers of femininity embodied by Salinas and those of masculinity that one can visually trace in the miniscule representation of the angel, notwithstanding the bare female breast, perform an important aspect that is part of most of Alma López’s artistic production: Chicana butch-femme desire. In the specific case of this image, additional elements that are present help to accentuate the performative aspect that Arrizon points to in the reimagined Guadalupe images. Our Lady enhances—and pays tribute to the lineage of—the rasquache aesthetics and camp sensibilities that were not as readily legible in Hernández’s and Yolanda López’s artistic productions by featuring a background with a reddish theater curtain with flowerlike designs and additional roses that form a type of semicircle around the bottom half of the Virgen (see Figure 2). Yet, I argue, there is a third layer of Our Lady’s performativity, which exists outside the framework of the image, something that can also be true in regard to López’s work in general; that is, there is an additional element of public exposure to López’s artistic production not only in regard to the many mural projects she has created and/or collaborated on but also in regard to the fact that many of her images have been used on book covers. Our Lady is featured on the book cover of the award-winning collection of contemporary Latina theater and performance Puro Teatro: A Latina Anthology (1999), coedited by Alberto Sandoval-

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Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, albeit censored, as the angel's breasts are covered with the butterfly's wings, and, most recently, it was used as a book cover a second time, this time for the novel Virgin of Flames (2007) by Chris Abani.57

In early 2001 Our Lady as well as other works by López were part of an exhibition entitled Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology, which opened in the Contemporary Changing Gallery of the Heritage Wing of the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico.58 This exhibition brought together the art of Chicanas—three from New Mexico and one from California (López)—working with digital technologies and folkloric elements.59 In “The Our Lady Controversy: Chicana Art, Hispanic Identity, and the Politics of Place and Gender in Nuevo México,” Tey Marianna Nunn writes:

These strong, talented and intelligent women explore traditional elements in their work by using technology. Whether digitally rendering family photos to convey family histories or constructing

![Image of Our Lady](image-url)
saints out of computer parts, each artist grapples with how to be modern and traditional simultaneously. I realized as the show went up that all four artistas were responding to high-tech modern times and at the same time honoring tradition." (168)

The controversy that ensued upon the mailing of the brochure sent out by the museum as publicity would instead prove to be a case not of tradition meeting technology, understood here as that which is modern, but of a clash. This was the case for everyone, including the artists, but it was particularly true for Nunn, the curator of the exhibit.

The local Catholic church and community leaders considered López's contribution to be "sacrilegious" and "blasphemous" and demanded that the director of the MOIFA, Joyce Ice, remove the piece from the exhibit. As in De la Rosa's case, the way in which the controversy in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and across the nation developed was through the mobilization of a few people who were alleged to be representing an entire group, in this particular case the local Hispanic religious community; the two men who demanded the removal of Our Lady were José Villegas, a Santa Fe community activist, and Anthony Trujillo, a deacon of a local Catholic church. The media were one of the tools these self-proclaimed Catholic community leaders brought in to help them in their quest to have the piece removed by denouncing the exhibition. Moreover, just as in the case of De la Rosa's pieces in the exhibit at the MAM, of the people protesting in the televised rallies, few had actually gone to see the "offensive" and "sacrilegious" digital print in the context of López's other works as well as in the exhibition as a whole. In "The Our Lady Controversy" Cyber Arte curator Nunn writes:

On 17 March 2001, the headline that ran across the Albuquerque Journal's Northern New Mexico edition read: "Skimpily Attired 'Our Lady' Protested," and the subheading read: "Critics say Nudity, Virgin Do Not mix." Personally, I'm not sure how one can be skimpily attired and nude and at the same time, but that discussion would take a whole other chapter. Nevertheless, in the article, the name "Bikini Virgin" was coined by a non-Hispanic male newspaper reporter for this image of a strong, garland-draped Latina. (166)

Additionally, the various articles published in the local press went to great lengths to claim the Virgen de Guadalupe as theirs, with
particularly special connections to New Mexico and were, indirectly, attempting to de-link the artist's own claim to the Virgen Morena, or dark-skinned Virgin. And, as Nunn writes, "From that point on, López's image Our Lady was splashed, in its entirety, all over the local television news and newspapers—above the fold, in color and rarely with permission" (166). This continual reproduction of the image in the press and mass media reached new heights when New Mexico Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan joined the crusade against Our Lady. Or, as Tey Diana Rebolledo writes: "the battle became even more passionately heated when the archbishop... saw the body of the virgin" (178). What Rebolledo is pointing to in her brief essay "The Archbishop Sees the Body of the Virgin" is the double standard being applied to Our Lady. She asked, paraphrasing what critics were asking, "How can an educated man such as the archbishop be so puritanical when Catholic religious art is filled with images that in a more secular age can be seen as even more erotic and scandalous than Our Lady? At least her body was covered," unlike Jean Fouquet's Madonna and Child (ca. 1450), which was reproduced in a newspaper article in the Journal North just to prove the point (178–179). This public reaction recalls the "pleasure of condemnation" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in regard to the framing of the digital print as "The Bikini Virgin," which restaged once again the spectacle of "sexual acts and imagery" when the protestors, most of them men, were using language such as "bosoms" and were labeling the model for the image, Raquel Salinas, as a "prostitute" (Nunn, 174). Rebolledo expressed her feelings in a poem written for Nunn, the exhibit's curator, and her daughter thus: "Ay! Los católicos viejos, los hombres / can't keep their eyes off her, keep printing the image in the newspaper" (175). And, in a fashion similar to that of De la Rosa's image, the performative Virgin reimagined in Our Lady is discursively transformed into a prostitute by the higher echelons of the New Mexican Catholic hierarchy: In a press release dated May 22, 2001, Director of Communications Celine Baca Radigan quotes Archbishop Sheehan: "Instead of showing her as the innocent Mother of Jesus, she is shown as a tart or a street woman, not the Mother of God!" Needless to say here, the archbishop's language does not allow for a nuanced discourse of female sexuality, "innocence" having its counterpart only in the realm of prostitution. Moreover, and in true paternalistic fashion, because the archbishop deemed that the Virgen de Guadalupe needed to be protected, he cast himself in that very role. In fact, the archbishop, a white man, not only saw himself as the true defender of traditional representations...
of the Virgen de Guadalupe but even placed himself in a position to be able to question López's claim to culturally specific Catholic iconography and demand that she present proof of her Catholicism. According to the archbishop, López, who grew up Catholic, had no claims to the Virgen. As with the other moments of intolerance that I have signaled in this chapter, Archbishop Sheehan is just keeping in fashion with other Church representatives who are not able to fathom the possibility that artists raised as Catholic can occupy positions of ambiguity and thus assume that, if an image is not approved by them, the artists must not be of Mexican origin or Catholic or both. Just as in the case of the exhibit at the MAM in 1988, where both Rolando de la Rosa and Jorge Manrique, the director of the museum, were accused of being foreigners by the mainstream media, in 2001 during the exhibition at the MOIFA, Alma López's and Tey Mariana Nunn's identity and their right to use the Virgen de Guadalupe image were questioned; while López's real Catholicism had to be proven, Nunn's latinidad and, specifically, her nuevomexicanidad was denied.44

However, the ways in which the artists, director of museums, and curators, from De la Rosa to Nunn, are de-Mexicanized, denied their right to claim their cultural heritage, and accused of being out of touch with their community paint only part of the picture. Just as in 1988, when De la Rosa, after receiving notice that a death threat had been put on his life by then–presidential candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari adopted a clown suit and wore it for a year to avoid being noticed in the streets, the 2001 scandal had very real (i.e., material) repercussions for López and Nunn.45 In "The Our Lady Controversy" Nunn writes, from a very personal position, about what she and López endured when the scandal was transpiring in New Mexico:

On 4 April 2001, during the first of two museum-sponsored public hearings on the issue, both Alma López and I were scheduled to give prepared statements at the beginning of the meeting, but were silenced by the protestors and prevented from telling our points of view to the large audience and assembled press corps. Law enforcement authorities, because of the extremely intimidating, emotionally charged, and violent atmosphere, canceled the meeting. Upon news of the cancellation, López and I were immediately surrounded by some male audience members, most shouting, "Burn her, burn them." We were escorted away by museum security staff, MOIFA assistant director Jacqueline Duke,
and U.S. Marshals, who helped us get back to the museum in a get-aways car and motorcade. (175)

This type of tense atmosphere—of death and bomb threats, of mass-media attacks and vilifications, and of “the archbishop and many priests [who] sermonized from the pulpit against the museum and the artists”—continued to dominate for both López and Nunn, and particularly for the latter, who lived and worked in New Mexico until the exhibition was closed, early, “against my own and the four artists’ wishes” (Nunn, 176). But the question still lingers. What did Our Lady represent for these men who mobilized thousands of people locally, regionally, and nationally to protest in front of the museum, to hold rosary/prayer vigils, and to send postcards to the museum’s director demanding that the print be removed?

While there have been other artistic pieces that could have been construed as more salacious, as Rebolledo has pointed out, but were not because they were understood as being part of religious iconography of the period that demonstrated the humanity of these figures, such as Fouquet’s Madonna and Child, López’s Our Lady represented a different type of threat for these self-appointed community leaders. So, what are the other circumstances that can help explain why the reaction to Our Lady was so violent? And, furthermore, are there differences among the artists, directors, and curators of the scandals—separated by time (thirteen years apart) and space (across the U.S.-Mexico border)—that I have been delineating thus far (De la Rosa, Manrique, Ahumada, Yolanda López, Alma López, and Tey Mariana Nunn)? In other words, it is important to point out that De la Rosa’s and Ahumada’s sexualized images of the Virgen de Guadalupe and those by Yolanda López and Alma López are substantially different and that this distinction needs to be made. As Rebolledo argues, the archbishop of New Mexico was “seeing” the Virgen’s body, but he was also seeing a Chicana who was projecting strength, boldness, and independence; that is, the way in which Raquel Salinas, the model for Our Lady, was claiming the space where she stood, with her feet fully exposed and well-grounded, and the fact that her gaze was not turned downward in submission, as in the original Virgen de Guadalupe depiction, but toward the spectator, as if beckoning to be reckoned with, make it seem to me that there was more than a sexualized or eroticized issue at play here. In comparison to De la Rosa’s image, which superimposed a secular icon upon a religious one, in Our Lady a young Chicana, who is seldom represented in mainstream media...
and discourse, was occupying a terrain so often, historically speaking, denied to her. As Erlinda González-Berry wrote in an e-mail response to the controversy:

As a mujer Chicana, Alma [López] understands the way in which Catholicism has sought to repress and control the body, particularly the native female body. But the body has always been and always will be a site of unruly behaviors, behavior which seeks freedom from the control of self-interested figures of authority that maintain themselves in power through intimidations (you will burn in hell) and crimes to the body. [Quoted in Rebolledo, 181]

This was only one of many e-mails and letters of support that López's Our Lady received and, because of this, López offered an intelligent response to the mass-media vilification that was taking place simultaneously, by creating a website and posting all the e-mails—regardless of the different senders' position—and the support she received from across the United States. In López's own words:

When I see Our Lady as well as the works portraying the Virgen by other Chicana artists, I see an alternative voice expressing the multiplicities of our lived realities. I see myself living a tradition of Chicanas who because of cultural and gender oppression have asserted our voice. I see Chicanas creating a deep and meaningful connection to this revolutionary cultural female image that appeared to an indigenous person at a time of genocide, and as an inspiration during liberation struggles such as the Mexican Revolution and the Chicano civil rights movement. I see Chicanas who understand faith. (181)

In López's reinterpreted Virgen de Guadalupe icon we, as spectators, are poised to look at and ostensibly identify with this image and find an empowered female figure who is standing in a self-protective and -sufficient stance, a necessary and ultimate feminist characteristic that would be deemed threatening in a patriarchal society. Thus, if we were to stick to the apparition narrative and the belief that the original print of the Virgen de Guadalupe that now hangs in the Basilica in Mexico City is, in fact, the creation of the Virgen herself—making her the first mestiza artist of the Americas [a self-portrait no less!]—Alma López and the other Chicana artists she references in the above quote [Ester Hernández, Yolanda López, Santa Barraza, Yreina Cervantes,
Delilah Montoya, Sandra Cisneros, and Raquel Salinas) are part of a
great lineage of artists who pay homage to a figure and image.

With Our Lady and her other digital prints that belong to the series
Lupe o Sirena in Love, all from 1999, López creates a series of images
in which religious and secular popular iconography intermingle, some
of which are set amidst the site-specific urban settings of Los Angeles,
California, and the U.S.-Mexico border (Lupe o Sirena in Love, Tattoo,
and Ixtal). Just as in Our Lady, in the rest of the series López digitally
manipulates these icons in order to create positive female AND
feminist queer images. In several of the prints in the Lupe o Sirena
series López reworks not only the Guadalupe icon but also another
icon from Mexican popular culture, La Sirena (The Mermaid) from
the popular table game Loteria. This is particularly true in the prints
Encuentro (Encounter) and Lupe o Sirena in Love, the one after
which the series is named. In pairing these two icons—which can be
interpreted as a lesbianizing gesture—López is not only inserting her
own queer desire but also disrupting any heteronormative expectations
or static perceptions of these icons that her viewers may have. For that
reason I agree with Calvo, who has written that “López’s art breaks
open a public, cultural space for the articulation of queer Chicana
desire. The desire is at once sexual and political. Her images seduce
the spectator into new desiring positions by exposing Chicano/a
libidinal investments—conscious and unconscious—in the Virgen
de Guadalupe” (203–204). However, as I proposed in the introduction
to Performing Mexicanidad, in this instantiation of queer desire,
heterosexual national culture is unsettled all the while participating
in the queer world-making projects that critics such as Lauren Berlant
and José E. Muñoz have theorized. Nonetheless, the queer project in
which López’s Lupe o Sirena in Love participates is performative and
ephemeral. In other words, López is aware of the fragility that queer
desire and embraces represent, as Alicia Arrízón notes in Queering
Mestizaje (2006): “While the Virgin and Sirena appear to stand holding
each other, below their figures is a viceroy butterfly instead of the
angel that holds the traditional image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.
The butterfly symbolizes the vulnerability of life demonstrated in the
narrative of queer desire and love” (171).

López’s work, like that of her predecessor, Yolanda López, discussed
earlier, has also had transnational exposure as it was also featured on
the cover of a magazine in Mexico. The image examined above, Lupe
o Sirena in Love, crossed into and circulated within Mexico, at least
in the capital city, when it was featured on the cover of *LesVoz* (Nov.–Dec. 2004), a Mexican lesbian feminist literary and cultural magazine (see Figure 3). The cover, which could be interpreted as more radical than Yolanda López’s *Walking Lupe*, which was featured in *fem* in the mid-1980s, as it represents the Virgen in a homoerotic pose, did not garner the same attention (i.e., attacks) from the religious right. I speculate that it has to do with the fact that the earlier moment was at the beginning of the culture wars in Mexico City, which saw its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Additionally, Alma López’s work circulates in a city “different” from that of the *fem* issue of two decades before; that is, while one may speculate that *LesVoz* has a narrower distribution than *fem* did, either in the 1980s or historically, as it is no longer being published, one cannot turn away from the fact that there have been gains in the realm of LGBTQ rights and visibility in the Distrito Federal (the Federal District). The following year the editors of *LesVoz* invited López to exhibit some of her digital prints for a week in July 2005 at the Capilla Británica in Mexico City. And,
the following year, López’s work was much more present, much more public than it had been in previous years: She created and designed the posters publicizing the Tercera Marcha Lésbica (Third Annual Lesbian March) that were plastered on the city walls in Mexico’s capital city during March 2006, the march for which she also created the banner. However, López’s visual work has been the object of a mediated type of censorship, when the artist was invited to Jacaranda Correa’s “Ventana 22” cultural television show on the public television station in Mexico City, Canal 22, the images of Lupe a’ Sirena in Love were cut off, not shown in their entirety.

POSTSCRIPT(ING) VIRGENES

The visual cultural production that I examine in this chapter, which is not only located in two different national contexts but which has figuratively and materially crossed the very border that divides these two nations, is an attempt to begin to unravel the history of Mexican and Chicana female sexuality. By examining not only the sexualized representations of the Virgen de Guadalupe but also the public reactions to them, we can begin to create critical language necessary to understand the ways in which different institutions—political, religious, social—at different historical times have tried to control women (and women’s sexuality) through the deployment of an image, that of the Virgen de Guadalupe. But, if the right has mobilized the Virgen de Guadalupe icon for its goals, artists have also reappropriated her; thus, in the flows enacted by Virgen de Guadalupe’s (transnational) double crossings, she is transformed and acquiring new meanings. This reproduction of Virgen iconography, which depicts her “outside” her passive frame, is most definitely still contested territory on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The new ways of imagining la guadalupana, however, create much-needed and pluralizing images, which in and of themselves produce different perspectives on the Guadalupe image and Mexican female sexuality in general. On the other hand, there is a middle ground, or, rather, there are middlemen of sorts who, having learned from previous museum directors or art curators, avoid presenting potentially scandal-causing representations in their venues. Self-censorship, as I alluded to previously, is yet another institution in the neoliberal context, both in Mexico and in the United States. I will offer two examples of this in the hope that they be investigated in further detail in the future: in Mexico City, the
director of the Museo de El Carmen, Alfredo Marín Gutiérrez, told the artist of the piece *La comandanta Lupita* (*Lupita, the Commander*), Polo Castellanos, member of the Tepito Arte Acá collective, that his piece could not be exhibited in the show *Promesas guadalupanas* (*Guadalupana Promises*) because it contained “political overtones.” Simultaneous with the Mexican act of censorship, across the border, the Centro Cultural Aztlán’s Cultural Arts Gallery in San Antonio, Texas, decided to not exhibit Anna-Marie López’s *Virgin* during its annual *Celebración a la Virgen de Guadalupe* (*Celebration of the Virgen de Guadalupe*) apparently because it featured a naked (and pregnant) Virgen de Guadalupe with her blue mantle and a snake wrapped around her body.
CHAPTER 2
GENDER PARODY, POLITICAL SATIRE, AND POSTMODERN RANCHERAS
Astrid Hadad’s “Heavy Nopal” Aesthetics

In her numerous performances, Mexican queer cabaret performance artist Astrid Hadad takes pleasure in dismantling dominant conceptions of national, cultural, sexual, and gendered identities. She has been doing this consistently since the late 1980s. Her performances critique Mexican patriarchal structures, the construction of Woman, and the prevailing perceptions of female sexuality through a deployment of the deconstructive strategies of parody, irony, and satire. In *Heavy Nopal*, possibly her most successful performance piece to date, Hadad’s literal and theatrical interpretations of mostly classic Mexican songs are often ironically juxtaposed by her poetic monologues and her own partly disguised or masqueraded body. Hadad’s visual-aural aesthetics can be described as campy, rasquache, Mexican and/or Latina/o kitsch, or, as Hadad herself prefers, “una estética heavy nopalera” (a “heavy nopal” aesthetic). Regardless of the various ready- or self-made terms that might be applicable to her work, Hadad’s performances are ultimately a feminist critical intervention in Mexican cultural and national discourses.

*Heavy Nopal* has antecedents dating back to the late 1980s with a piece entitled *La occisa o Luz levántate y lucha* (*The Corpse or Luz Arise and Fight*), which wittily transposes the famous biblical phrase (“Lazarus, Arise and Walk”) and not only feminizes it but also makes it revolutionary. *La occisa* is a tragicomic performance based on the life and work of Mexico’s first vernacular (female) singer, Lucha Reyes (1906–1944). It is after *La occisa* that Hadad formed her musical group.
Los Tarzanes (The Tarzans), naming them after a song made famous by Reyes. Reyes was a somewhat maligned and marginalized figure because of her crass and sexualized lyrics; her playfulness with the timing, intonations, and pauses in the performances of her songs; and her appropriation of national(ist) symbols deemed untouchable, such as the nopal and the eagle, which she used for her costumes. In Heavy Nopal, accompanied by Los Tarzanes, Hadad uses many of the songs that Reyes performed, but the piece only implicitly references this early ranchera singer.5

Enacting a close reading of the performance piece, I seek to demonstrate in this chapter that Hadad’s aesthetics can help us understand the ways in which nation-building projects of the Mexican postrevolutionary period mobilized popular culture and discourses on gender and sexuality. Via a series of disidentificatory strategies, as José Muñoz has theorized, Hadad’s appropriation of mid-twentieth-century cultural texts, particularly songs, and nationalist symbols for her stage presentations ultimately unsettle heterosexual national culture. In more specific terms, in Heavy Nopal Hadad deploys gender parody to disrupt established and naturalized identities of Mexican womanhood as well as satire to destabilize patriarchal nationalism and political corruption, all the while deriving pleasure from and giving pleasure to her multiple publics, including here queer counterpublics. Hadad’s strategy of delirio, an apparently nonsensical and frenzied onstage behavior, defines not only the (re)presentation but also the reception of Heavy Nopal and Hadad’s performances in general. For her queer counterpublics Hadad opens up the possibility for a Mexican/Latin American/Latina queer sensibility that is at once embedded in popular culture—a recognition of its role in the (self-)construction of subjectivities—while remaining outside the majoritarian public sphere. It should be noted that one of her biggest fan bases is composed of queer men and women; thus, the ephemeral space created during her shows becomes highly exemplary of the queer world-making projects discussed in the introduction of Performing Mexicanidad.

Although Hadad’s sexual orientation cannot be discerned easily during her stage presentations, a campy queer sensibility defines her work. She is part of a tradition of Mexican queer artists who use camp strategies to tease out (and tease audiences with) notions of the Mexican closet or, in an attempt to be more culturally specific, what I coin here as the Mexican zagüán, in which Mexican queer sexualities function as “open secrets.”4 The notion of the Mexican zagüán transposes the closet, as it is discussed and theorized in U.S. queer studies discourses,
to alter the way in which we think about Mexican homosexuality, particularly as it pertains to artists who are, in different ways, public figures. That said, by using the zagüán—a sort of vestibule featured in traditional Mexican and many U.S. Southwest homes that has two doors, one to the street (the public) and the other to the interior of the house, its core being a more intimate space (the private)—I aim to disrupt the idea that Mexicans (in Mexico and in the United States) do not “come out” because of social and cultural homophobia, that is, the highly conservative social and familial structures. Rather, the zagüán trope helps us think about the liminality at play in Mexican queer subject positionalities, that spatial in-between-ness of place between the public and the private that affect an “open secret” around homosexual subjects. Watching her queer counterpublics consuming Hadad’s performances pushes me to argue for the necessity of rethinking the trope of the closet. In its place I offer the zagüán as a respatialized queer epistemology, something that I detect in Hadad’s live performances—a sort of being in the know about same-sex desire (¡entiendes!)—because of the relationship of complicity that she establishes with her queer spectators.5

REFRAMING THE NATION(Al) THROUGH COATLICUE

Toward the beginning of Heavy Nopal, Hadad sings the classic Mexican ranchera “Gritenme piedras del campo (Scream to Me Stones of the Field)” by Mexican singer/songwriter Cuco Sánchez. This ranchera is performed immediately after the following poetic monologue:6

Diosa fui en tu altar y a las diosas no se les puede amar, se les puede venerar, pero para amar, verdaderamente amar, hay que tocar! Gozar! Soy piedra. Soy volcán. Soy monumento nacional. Seré diosa si tú quieres, o, si prefieres, seré todas las mujeres. Por favor, no me veneren, ámenme.

[A goddess I was on your altar and one cannot love the goddesses, one can venerate them, but to love them, really love them, one has to touch them! Enjoy them! I am a stone. I am a volcano. I am a national monument. I can be a goddess or, if you prefer, I can be all women. But please, do not venerate me, love me.] (emphasis added)7

The lyrics of the original song, which could be easily described as absurdist or surrealistic, are left intact. However, Hadad invests...
"Gritenme piedras" with new meaning through the exaggeratedly acted-out plea within the song. As she sings, the imperatives in "Háblennme montes y valles / gritenme piedras del campo" (Speak to me, mountains and valleys / scream to me, stones of the field) are especially accentuated. But this new meaning is also produced by virtue of the song's dialogue with the previously recited poem and the fact that it is a female voice asking to be loved [i.e., touched] physically. Hadad's interpretation or reworking of this Cuco Sánchez classic is further ironized by what she wears.

In this particular scene Hadad, who during a performance goes through several costume changes by peeling off or putting on several layers, is dressed in a costume that depicts her as the mother of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, "la de la falda de serpientes" (the one wearing the serpent skirt), as represented by the famous stone sculpture (see Figure 4). Because of its "grotesque" appearance, this sculpture has been disinterred and interred a number of times since the eighteenth century and is now admired [but not touched!] by the many visitors to the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City's premier collection of pre-Columbian artifacts. Hadad's dress is combined with another iconic figure, that of the archetypical image of Mexican womanhood, the china poblana.

The image of the china poblana that Hadad has appropriated for her performances is one that has circulated in Mexican visual popular culture but was, more or less, consecrated in the 1940s, the postrevolutionary period that was an important moment of nation building. What identifies the china poblana [as an image of mexicanidad or la mujer mexicana] are her brightly colored (preferably green, white, and red) and "typical" accoutrements and a gracious smile that says "I am here to serve you," connoting the origins of the word china [from the Quechua china or chinaca, which means "servant" and not the racialized Asian that the Spanish signifies]. The china poblana wears a full (green) skirt, a folkloric embroidered (white) blouse [revealing cleavage or, at best, worn off the shoulders], a bright (red) rebozo or shawl, and her hair in braids with ribbons, preferably with the colors of the Mexican flag, showcasing her mexicanidad. For her china poblana skirt, dark foam is used to sculpt the pre-Columbian motifs associated with Coatlicue, and to this stone-looking serpent skirt Hadad adds a typical Mexican sombrero in order to produce a hybridized postmodernized version of Coatlicue. In tongue-in-cheek fashion Hadad tells her audience that before their eyes is "la Coatlicue... sólo que ésta es en versión posmoderna" (Coatlicue... only this...
version is postmodern). Moreover, this costume comes with its own “integrated landscape” given that in Mexico City “ya no hay espacio y entonces tenemos que acarrear hasta el paisaje con nosotros” [there is no more space so we even have to carry the landscape with us]. This landscape is an artificially constructed agave plant tied to her waist from the back. This kinetic pre-Columbian yet postmodernized Coatlicue sculpture is among the multiple female masquerades that have paraded onstage in Hadad’s performances since the 1980s.10

In Heavy Nopal, in addition to masquerading and parodying Mexicanized notions of femininity, Hadad more often than not interjects political commentary. Prior to the poetic monologue and the performance of the Cuco Sánchez song, Hadad offers the audience an explanation of the figure of Coatlicue: This mythical figure is the first mother of the Mexican people, thus proving that “los mexicanos siempre hemos tenido madre” (we Mexicans have always had a mother). She allows only a matter of seconds to elapse before she clarifies: “Bueno, no todos, nuestros gobernantes nunca la conocieron” (Well, not all of us, our rulers have never known her).11 With this satirical gesture, she is not only distancing herself and the Mexican people

Fig. 4. Astrid Hadad as the “Postmodern Coatlicue.” Photograph courtesy of the artist.
[i.e., civilians] from the politicians who supposedly represent them but also critiquing the corruption and the hierarchy of the Mexican political system. It is staged relajo at its finest. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance critic and theorist Diana Taylor, stating that relajo “is a liminal mode of action that entails an acting up and an acting out,” contends:

As a form of disruptive or transgressive behavior, relajo manifests both the challenge to and the tacit acknowledgement of a system’s limits. It is an act of devalorization, or what the late Mexican intellectual Jorge Portilla calls “desolidarization” with dominant norms in order to create a different, joyously rebellious solidarity—that of the underdog. [2003: 129]

In Hadad’s “devalorization,” this performance of Mexican relajo—or desmadre (pun well-intended)—Hadad is thus addressing and creating a sort of horizontal affiliation (or identification) with her audience, which is all too aware of the corrupt systems and institutions, while temporarily disrupting the hierarchical notion in the civilian-civil servant relationship.

Thus I concur with Taylor, who has stated that Coatlicue is recovered or, as I would say, disinterred in *Heavy Nopal* “to denounce pollution, unequal north/south relations, oppressive gender and sexual relations, and anything else that occurs to Hadad as she sings, dances, and delivers her commentaries onstage” (2003, 50). In the rest of the chapter I will develop a more in-depth discussion of the strategies that Hadad uses in *Heavy Nopal* to delineate how she offers a critical intervention in contemporary Mexican feminist cultural and performance practices.

**FEMINIST CAMP AND GENDER PARODY**

Mexican writer and public intellectual Cristina Pacheco has told Hadad that she embodies all of those Mexican women who have appeared in film and exist in real life: “la cabaretera, la perversa, la pecadora, la buena, la ingenua,” to which I would add *la borrachita, la rumbera, and la golpeada* (in Alzate, 1997: 158). While she does indirectly reference these popular iconic figures in her performances, I argue that Hadad goes beyond embodying these “characters” or national [arche] types; her intentionally hybridized female masquerades, such as the postmodernized Coatlicue, effectively give way to the gender parody
that she is ultimately seeking in her performances. Consequently, the Mexican cabaret performance artist's strategy is similar to that which Pamela Robertson discusses in her introduction to *Guilty Pleasures*, a study of feminist camp practices in the context of the United States. Robertson states that "[t]he masquerade mimics a constructed identity in order to conceal that there is nothing behind the mask; it simulates femininity to dissipate the absence of a real or essential feminine identity" (12). Hadad self-consciously theatricalizes essentialized notions of Mexican identity and female sexuality, achieving this many times by integrating well-rehearsed yet parodic dance moves. As a result, Hadad's body is used as a stage to act out an excessive *mexicanidad*, a hyperfemininity, and an unapologetic sensuality. But given the self-consciousness and irony with which Hadad mimics Mexican female codes and discourses in her performances, she is able to create the necessary critical distance in order to deconstruct those same gendered and sexualized images or representations in Mexican (popular) culture. As Linda Hutcheon has explained in *The Politics of Postmodernism* in regard to postmodern parody, "[T]his parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical" (1989: 93, emphasis added). Hadad's project of gender parody then engages same-sex masquerade as a process of de-essentializing feminine identity. Thus, in addition to revealing the absence behind the mask, gender parody utilizes "masquerade self-consciously in order to reveal the performative activity of gender and sexual identities" (Robertson, 1996: 13). The female masquerade that Hadad exhibits for her publics in her performances has to be a parody of the masquerade so that, as Robertson points out, masquerade no longer serves as "a placating gesture but instead" as "a gesture of defiance toward the assumption of an identity between the woman and the image of the woman" (13).

In *Heavy Nopal*, Hadad denounces the naturalization of women as has been constructed in and perpetuated through (out) Mexican (popular) culture; she exposes, following Judith Butler, gender performance. In her now classic study on the subject, *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that through the strategy of gender parody "genders can be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible" (180, emphasis as in original). This is accomplished, for example, through repetitive and stylized actions; "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency" (Butler, 175, emphasis in original). Despite enumerating a number of cultural practices in which "the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied," Butler exemplifies her theories via an abbreviated
discussion of male-to-female impersonators (174). This differs from Hadad’s same-sex masquerade, which, following Robertson’s lead, I argue to be potentially more critical and capable of dismantling established and essentialized gendered structures.¹³

Hadad’s strategies of gender performance are better elucidated by Robertson’s writings on feminist camp theories and practices. She posits:

In opposition to drag, the surprise and incongruity of same-sex female masquerade consists in the identity between she who masquerades and the role she plays—she plays at being what she is always already perceived to be. . . . The concept of masquerade allows us to see that what gender parody takes as its object is not the image of the woman, but the idea—which, in camp, becomes a joke—that an essential feminine identity exists prior to the image. (12, emphasis added)

Via multiple masquerades and campy performances of femininity, Hadad wants her audience to consider female-to-female masquerade as potentially more critical of gendered assumptions of human behavior. She demands that her audience be aware that, as Butler argues in regard to gender parody, “the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (175). Moreover, Hadad self-consciously theatricalizes and camps up constructions of a gendered Mexican identity in service to her project, which also critiques essentialist notions of lo mexicano that have been brought about by various postrevolutionary nationalist [or national identity-constructing] discourses.

Since the publication of Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” in 1964, the notion of camp as a strategy [or “sensibility” as Sontag prefers] has come to be almost exclusively associated with a gay male, middle class subculture.¹⁴ Sontag posited camp as apolitical on the basis of its detachment from the politics of representation, as it emphasized an aesthetics; she states: “It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical” (107). Among the list of requirements that Sontag provides, camp is “seriousness that fails”; this kind of camp is “naïve” and less satisfying than “deliberate” camp (110). With a sensibility completely grounded in notions of artifice and frivolity, both types of camp (“naïve” and “deliberate”) are politically detached and, for Sontag, lack any subversive potential as a strategy. In recent years, though, “deliberate” camp (deploying
parody as a strategy] has been read as politicized by some theorists/critics. It is this redefinition that I apply here, since I perceive Hadad's performances to be more closely related to the feminist camp style that Robertson has argued for in her study. This cultural critic states that

... despite camp's seemingly exclusive affiliation with gay men and misogynist tendencies, camp offers feminists a model for critiques of gender and sex roles. Camp has an affinity with feminist discussions of gender construction, performance and enactment; we can thereby examine forms of camp as feminist practices. [1996: 6]¹⁵

Through Hadad's excessive and exaggerated performance of femininity then, this Mexican cabaret performance artist sheds light on the contradictions between reality and the discourses that construct it. By virtue of the double coding, this approach to this reality, an ever-present reference, becomes politicized. This process of rethinking camp is not exclusive to Robertson, however. Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis has argued along similar lines that in the Mexican context, a camp sensibility has to be political.

Originally published two years after Sontag's "Notes on Camp," Monsiváis's essay "El hastío es pavo real que se aburre de la luz en la tarde [NOTAS DEL CAMP EN MÉXICO]" [Faddiousness Is A Peacock That Becomes Bored by the Afternoon Light [NOTES ON MEXICAN CAMP]] attempts to define camp sensibility in the Mexican context. With definitions that closely follow Sontag's requirements for camp, he states that "[l]a sensibilidad camp carece de compromiso, es despoliticizada o apolítica" [camp sensibility lacks commitment, it is depoliticized or apolitical] [1970: 172]. But Monsiváis is compelled to ask the following question: "¿No es fraude o traición la sensibilidad apolítica en México? En sentido estricto, sí" [Wouldn't an apolitical sensibility in Mexico be fraud or betrayal? In the strictest sense, yes] [1970: 172]. For this cultural critic the politicization of camp has to do with the manner in which we approach this sensibility. Monsiváis adds: "La perspectiva Camp, al acercarnos a la realidad en términos de estilo, puede, a contrario sensu, esclarecer las fallas o las imperfecciones de estilo de esa realidad, con la consiguiente derivación política" [A camp perspective, by drawing us closer to reality in terms of style could, ironically, shed light on the stylistic faults and imperfections of that reality with some political consequences] [1970:
Thus, in Mexico and viewed from this perspective, “lo camp es la posibilidad de la revancha” (camp is the possibility for revenge) [Monsiváis, 1970: 191]. Put differently, camp offers members of popular and/or marginalized sectors [as participants or spectators] access to a mode [or style] not only of representation but, more importantly, of criticism, the possibility for revenge, something akin to what Portilla defines as relajo in the practice of everyday life. This reclamation and politicization of camp style can also be found in the critical work of other cultural critics, in particular those dealing with the cultural production of racialized subjects in the U.S. context. In his rearticulation of camp style within the context of Chicana/o culture, Ramón García has stated: “[C]amp style . . . is an ironic use of popular culture; it is a gendered and sexualized way of dealing with the politics of exclusion and inclusion” (1998: 2). Like the street performances of the Chicano collective Asco that García discusses, Hadad’s work is imbricated in a wider discussion of the politics of representation and reception.

Hadad’s performances ultimately critique the same cultural forms that have both included her [as sexual object] and excluded her by historically denying women access to modes of representation. For example, in the performance of a “classical” Mexican song, the artist parodies and ironizes the prevailing idea that Mexican women can only have sexual desires and be agents of seduction rhetorically. Hadad is critiquing the notion that female sexual agency is constrained by a song’s lyrics and its performance. As I will demonstrate, Hadad foregrounds a sexualized subjectivity that goes beyond her stage performances, that is, the ephemeral nature of the performances does not preclude them from lingering in the memory of the spectators, many of whom are women. Consequently, I see Hadad as being one of a number of Mexican female artists who engage [and have engaged historically] in what Robertson calls “feminist camp practices” since they represent “oppositional modes of performance and reception” (9).

Similarly, in reworking older formats and modes of representations, Hadad simultaneously celebrates them and reinscribes these forms [and by extension herself and her reworked style] into the realm of popular musical expressions. Thus García’s claim “that camp is both a strategy of affirmation and self-criticism . . . [which] is not a contradictory practice” in and of itself is likewise fitting here (1998: 17). In the particular case of Hadad, this self-conscious masquerade and gender parody must always involve a hybridizing process, whether it be musical, lyrical, or visual, or a combination of all three.
The hybrid texture of Hadad’s performances does not completely reside in the conflation of female codes as represented by her own body and its costumes; it can also be found in her musical adaptations, a fusion of Latin America’s most notable musical influences. Put differently, in Hadad’s performances a bolero rhythm can easily be tropicalized further to accelerate her dance moves at the precise moment when “normalcy” is about to be reestablished and in order to introduce rupture. Equally, a ranchera can very well have tinges of rock music at the precise moment when she needs to bang her head on an artificial rock. Thus, the [for the most part] serious music that accompanies her stage theatricalities and [often] parodic dance steps also functions as an accomplice in the critical intervention that Hadad seeks in her performances. To this effect art historian and critic Olivier Debroise argues that:

Al establecer un diálogo en contrapunto con sus músicos “Los Tarzanes,” Astrid tensa las relaciones entre la manera tradicional y nostálgica de cantar y su propia interpretación: es parte del asunto; “Los Tarzanes” bien seríecitos y convencionales, intentan establecer el sentido normal de las canciones, mientras Astrid lo explota y lo hace explotar.

[By establishing a contrapuntal dialogue with her musicians, “Los Tarzanes,” Astrid creates a tension between the traditional and nostalgic way of singing and her own interpretation: that’s the point; “Los Tarzanes,” very serious and conventional, try to establish the normalcy of the songs while Astrid exploits it and makes it explode.] [n.d., n.p.] 18

Hadad’s hybridized and crazed aesthetics, which were coined “heavy nopal” by Hadad in collaboration with her then-partner, telenovela producer and scriptwriter Lucy Orozco, could be described as a mélange of artistic forms, sensibilities, influences, discourses, and disciplines. 19 This performance artist is reworking not only performance traditions but also musical expressions and styles, cultural icons, and practices. This same set of proposed aesthetics has also made Debroise declare that Hadad “[l]leva sobre sus hombros el bagaje de mitos, ritos e imágenes del mexicano. Alguien comentaba que Astrid era como un ‘museo ambulante de culturas populares’” (carries on her shoulders the baggage of myths, rites, and images of Mexicans. Someone has commented that Astrid was a sort of “ambulant museum of popular culture”) [n.d., n.p.]. While Hadad’s postmodern parody does not seek...
to completely undo the past—rather, it “is a kind of contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of the representation of history” (Hutcheon, 1989: 95)—this kinetic “museum of popular culture” is definitely dancing to a different beat.

SITUATING THE POSTMODERN FEMINIST CABARETERA

Hadad is part of a group of Mexico City–based cabaret performance artists who are partly responsible for the vibrant independent queer theatrical boom in this capital city. Jesús Rodríguez, Liliana Felipe, and Tito Vasconcelos are three who most immediately come to mind, although the first one has been working offstage mostly, as I explain in the coda of this book. However, there are other less-well-known artists who have acquired some visibility as of late, namely Regina Orozco and Darío T. Pie. Just as for these other artists, the cultural work of Hadad is not created in a vacuum, and her performances are postmodernized transmogrifications of earlier performance activities and traditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from both Europe and Mexico. From the former context it is German-style cabaret that has primarily influenced Hadad and her fellow queer postmodern cabareteras/os. What these contemporary Mexican artists appropriate and rearticulate is cabaret’s much more dynamic and eclectic range of mediums, that is, German cabaret, which, from its earliest inception, sought to utilize popular performance practices, an impulse that has attracted Mexican political cabaret artists.

From the latter context it is the teatro frívolo, a highly important theatrical genre that was an invaluable part of the artistic scene in early-twentieth-century Mexico, particularly among the popular classes and as such could be considered a predecessor to mass cultural and theatrical productions of the late twentieth century. This genre was classified under the género chico category to differentiate it from the género grande that encapsulated operatic stage productions and other “high-art” theatrical forms. Within the “small” or “lesser” genre, the two most important theatrical manifestations and styles that surfaced were teatro de carpa and teatro de revista. In the glossary of terms in his A History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States Nicolás Kanellos defines carpa in the following manner: “From Quechua, meaning ‘awning’ or ‘covering.’ A circus tent in which actors of modest circumstances and means perform” (Kanellos, 221). Kanellos defines revistas as theatrical spectacles “consisting of a series of loose scenes usually inspired by current affairs” and revistas políticas as...
the same but with the additional features of “political themes” and large doses of political satire (221). These popular theatrical spectacles were part of Mexico’s alternative modernism, which was tied to the sociopolitical atmosphere of the period, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the 1920s reconstruction period and moment of nation building. Hadad and her fellow queer cabaret performers, whose work I also analyze in Chapter 3, use these earlier forms of theatrical practices as deconstructive strategies to enact their social and political criticism within their own performance work.

In Heavy Nopal Hadad subverts and/or parodies female representations in Mexican culture to de-essentialize notions of Mexican womanhood and to reinscribe a particularly emancipated and sexualized feminine subjectivity into contemporary Mexican cultural practices. But, just as her aesthetics are a strategy that recycles earlier performance practices, Hadad is also situated within a particular lineage of female singers/performers in Mexico or of Mexican heritage who exist at the margins of the national imaginary, among them Lupe Rivas Cacho, La Pingüica, the first teatro de revista “ambassador” who made famous la borrachita and la peladita characters/types; Lupe Vélez, a tiple (high-pitched singer) who scandalized the public by appearing on stage scantily clad and who was later transformed into the “Mexican Spitfire” by early Hollywood movie studio machinery; Lydia Mendoza, “La Alondra de Tejas” or “La Alondra de la Frontera,” considered to be the “mother” of tejano music and who had an immense talent for arranging boleros, habaneras, corridos, and rancheras on her twelve-string guitar; Lucha Reyes, the “first” vernacular singer of la canción mexicana who, in her time, caused multiple scandals because of her heavy drinking and bisexuality; and Chavela Vargas, who destabilized notions of masculinity AND femininity in musical performance circles in the 1950s and 1960s and is undoubtedly the best interpreter of the compositions by the hypermasculinized ranchera singer José Alfredo Jiménez. Nevertheless, while Hadad pays homage to these women—often by rescuing songs that they at one point sang—she is at the same time her very own model, as she self-reflectively mimics herself: “He buscado en mi misma mi propio modelo. / Para conseguirlo me he entregado a la indolencia. / Es tan agradable malograrse” (I have searched within myself for my own model/ In order to attain it, I have surrendered to indolence. / It is so pleasurable to have achieved my downfall). I propose that Hadad’s aesthetics, which parody dominant discourses and critique normative paradigms, also reinsert these
now-altered discourses and paradigms and, by extension, Hadad's style
back into the realm of popular musical expressions with a queer
feminist twist.

In 1993 Astrid Hadad and Los Tarzanes released their first musical
recording, ¡Ay!, an extension of Hadad's Heavy Nopal performance
since most of the songs are part of the repertoire of the piece. The
title of the CD already points to Hadad's multifarious strategy and
ambiguous use of signifiers: “¡Ay!” here should be interpreted as
the exclamatory [or yell] that is let out after experiencing either
pain or pleasure (or both) in Mexican culture; masochism is, after
all, artistically treated in the songs she performs. While perhaps
not intentional, the “¡Ay!” can also reference the biographical “I”
entangled in her first mass-produced musical product. In the liner
notes of the CD, Hadad writes: “Gracias Virgencita por haberme hecho
el milagro de poder plasmar mis contradicciones de mexicana, maya,
libanesa en este disco modelo Heavy Nopal; crisol donde se mezcla el
cúmulo de vivencias que somos los mexicanos.” [Thank you Virgin of
Guadalupe for your miraculous intervention which has allowed me to
deposit my contradictions as a Mexican, Mayan, and Lebanese in this
paradigmatic Heavy Nopal record, a melting pot of sorts where I mix
the culmination of lived experiences of who we are as Mexicans.] In
this note of thanks, Hadad's multiethnic cultural heritage is proposed
as a possible intersection from which she derives her hybrid aesthetics.
Of Lebanese descent, Hadad was born in 1957 in the Yucatan Peninsula
in Chetumal, Quintana Roo.

Hadad's professional theatrical training took place, in part, in the
Centro Universitario de Teatro [Theatre University Center, or CUT],
where she studied after moving to Mexico City. While she was
a student at the CUT, Hadad participated in a number of dramatic
pieces, including a starring role in Cuban playwright José Triana's
masterpiece La noche de los asesinos [The Night of the Assassins].
Although she never actually graduated, she acted in various theatrical
(re)presentations and subsequently joined the cast of the extremely
successful operatic adaptation of Mozart’s Don Giovanni, feminized
into Donna Giovanni (1984) by fellow Mexican performance artist
and stage director Jesusa Rodriguez. Donna Giovanni, with its all-
female cast, was met with great success when it toured Europe and
closed with a now-legendary performance at the Palacio de Bellas
Artes [Palace of Fine Arts] in Mexico City, considered to be the most
important stage in Mexico. While a student at the CUT, Hadad started
to notice that conventional theatrical structures were too limiting
for the sort of projects that she was envisioning for herself, and it was while working in Donna Giovanni that she began to collaborate with Rodríguez to push the boundaries of traditional theatre. In her reworking of the famous Mozart opera, Rodríguez deploys feminist irony by feminizing it and, for lack of a better word, Mexicanizing it by inflecting the culturally specific humor albur—a form of wordplay—into this “serious” operatic manifestation. In comparable fashion, Hadad began to explore and experiment with different mediums and practices, and, just as Rodríguez, began to humorously rework already established texts.

Consequently, Hadad’s parallel interests in popular musical expressions—such as la canción mexicana (also known as la canción vernácula or ranchera) and boleros—and in the popular performance practices of early-twentieth-century Mexico and German-style cabaret were finally conjoined in the late 1980s. This amalgamation of styles and traditions remains the core, to a large extent, of what she terms her “musical-theatrical spectacles.” In an interview Hadad tells Gastón Alzate that, while not formally trained as a singer, she had always wanted to sing professionally. But, as she also tells Alzate, “me aburria cantar nada más, es decir, como cantante normal” (I would easily get bored by doing no more than singing, that is, by being a normal singer) (157, emphasis added). It was while she was enrolled at the CUT that her studies started to incorporate different characteristics or that, as she states, her studies took a “more serious” turn. Hadad explains: “allí empecé a relacionar lo que era el teatro de revista y la carpa con el cabaret alemán” (that is where I began to relate teatro de revista and carpa to German cabaret) (Alzate, 157). Clearly, Hadad did not just want to be another Thalia, the singing Mexican bombshell and product of the media moguls of the network Televisa. Her answer to being different was to theatricalize songs (her own or those made popular by others) and perform them in a cabaret-revista style and setting. In an attempt to define her work Hadad states: “Hago espectáculo y meto vestuario; realizo un show medio político porque tengo la inquietud, . . . En el escenario combino tres disciplinas: la plástica, el teatro [el cabaret] y la música” [I create spectacles and put on costumes; I affect a show that is somewhat political because I have those concerns, . . . on stage I combine three disciplines: plastic/visual arts, theatre [cabaret] and music] (Hadad, 2000: n.p.). Hadad’s postmodern cabaret performances are a recycling of older formats and female figures in which gender parody and political satire are mixed with the reworking of a number of typical Mexican songs. This particular strategy goes beyond the
notion of theatrical spectacles as mere entertainment. Hadad’s postmodern and yet feminist cultural production offers a critique that functions as the beginning of a possible shift, as perhaps the beginning of what Rosario Castellanos would term “otro modo de ser”28 (another way of being), and that I extend to “otro modo de hacer” (another way of doing).

SATIRICAL POLITICS OR POLITICAL SATIRE

Beyond simply recycling older performance practices to effect a feminist critical intervention, Hadad’s performances, as those of other Mexican cabaret artists, are propelled by an inquietude: the contemporary sociopolitical crises that Mexico has been experiencing on and off since the 1970s. In a fashion similar to that of the artistic and theatrical forms of a century ago—when teatro frivolo and cabaret thrived because those were times of crisis—cabaret, performance, and teatro de revista/carpa are currently flourishing in Mexico.29 The appropriation of these earlier theatrical forms resides not only in the use of loosely knit sketches that are “interrupted” by musical numbers but also in the specific sensibility that they present through the humor they deploy. Writing in the late 1930s about the use of humor by teatro de carpa artists, Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias states that “[h]owever crude, vulgar and tainted with bad taste they [the carperos] may be, they have created a style and a technique of the disconcerting mixture of rough slapstick and fine, biting satire that is characteristic of the Mexican humor” (1938: 596). This type of humor—along the lines of what a number of Mexican intellectuals and artists have proposed as a strategy of “asumir lo ridículo” (taking on the ridiculous)—not only carries over to the work of these postmodern cabareters/as but also defines their sensibility. These performers use this type of humor to assume a critical perspective regarding the current state of affairs of the nation (and beyond).30

The political atmosphere of the last two decades has made itself visibly obvious to Mexican society and has contributed to what I would term, following a number of Mexican intellectuals, the “crisis as spectacle” and to this “theatre of the ridiculous” to which everyone has access. This was also the case in the teatro frivolo days. Monsiváis’s analysis of the role of politics on the revista stages informs us that it was used as a strategy to evoke public response, regarding which he writes: “[a] los espectadores . . . la política les resulta el teatro por excelencia, el escenario infalsificable donde se revela el valer de los

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hombres [sic]” (for the spectators ... politics becomes theatre par excellence, the nonfalsifiable stage where the worth of men is revealed} (1981: 40). Contemporary queer cabaret performers, the principal proponents of cabaret político, credit their audience members with understanding and with having access to this theatre of the ridiculous, which is made self-evident through (and with the help of) the mass media, that is, contemporary performance and cabaret are more than mere vehicles of information or entertainment. These practices are important contestatory sites that challenge oppressive and hegemonic structures, they rectify distorted and pervasive information.

In the particular case of female queer performers, their critique of Mexican society, politics, and economy deploys past representations of women and/or debates around female issues to challenge and rectify the “scattered hegemonies.” This feminist critique also foregrounds a particularly emancipated female subjectivity but does not, in the end, create a unified female subject. In Hadad’s performances the destabilization of gendered identities—and her resistance to the possibility of a universal notion of womanhood—is carried by the deployment of a piquant sexualized humor that also contains large doses of political satire. In order to unsettle any notion of a fixed identity (and its rhetoric), Hadad deploys a strategy of recycling and collapsing texts from the past with contemporary circulating narratives and imagery.

One such example of this strategy is Hadad’s rendition of the bolero “La mujer del puerto (The Woman of the Port)—also known as “Vendo placer (I Sell Pleasure)” —written by Manuel Esperón and Ricardo López Méndez. “La mujer del puerto” was made famous in one of the most memorable scenes in Mexican film history: in the 1933 melodrama La mujer del puerto (Arcady Boytler), Lina Boytler is heard singing “Vendo placer, a los hombres que vienen del mar” (I sell pleasure to those men that come from the sea) while Andrea Palma, in her famous role as the prostitute Rosario, is seen wearing a long black dress, standing against a street lamp and smoking a cigarette. In the most recent versions of Heavy Nopal, after running offstage for a rapid costume change and when the lights of the theatre have all been turned off, Hadad walks back onstage with a flashlight in one hand as the audience listens to the melody of “New York, New York.” Hadad thwarts our expectations of listening to the lyrics popularized by Frank Sinatra when she begins to sing the Boytler song from La mujer del puerto. Soon thereafter Hadad starts to move the flashlight...
in circular motions to simulate a fog light, as if looking for a lost ship and/or man at sea. When our eyes have adjusted to the darkness and as the stage lights begin to slowly go on, we notice that Hadad is wearing a Statue of Liberty mask and that her body is completely covered by a rather big blue cloak. The conflation of texts and signs used here offers a critique that is enhanced when, in the middle of the song, Hadad proclaims: “Visite Estados Unidos antes que Estados Unidos lo visite a Ud” (visit the United States before the United States visits you). This juxtaposition of a prostitute with the Statue of Liberty is further ironized when Hadad loses her cloak to reveal her body in a tight-fitting, long blue dress with a bullet-holder sash across her chest. Toward the end of this number she points her flashlight to one single member of the audience, transforming this particular “woman of the port,” a symbol of refuge, into a mechanism of State surveillance. And at the very end of the “La mujer del puerto” performance, Hadad raises her arm and lifts the flashlight to transform it into the Statue of Liberty’s burning torch. Thus, as I described in the introduction of Performing Mexicanidad, the figure of the prostitute in the classic melodrama is redeemed and disassociated from unethical and amoral behavior and linked to state-sponsored forms of surveillance and violence. Thus, for Hadad, humor and political satire filtered through popular culture are privileged strategies for critiquing the institutionalized systems of exclusion and oppression.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE REVISTA POLÍTICA TRADITION

Of the Mexican theatrical practices of the early twentieth century, it is the teatro de revista that mostly informs the work of Hadad. At once a stabilizing and destabilizing force in Mexican culture, teatro de revista was the site where myriad struggles (political, national, cultural, gender, sexual, linguistic) were fought at the beginning of the last century. Kanellos has explained that these types of productions were “musical reviews that developed in Mexico under the influence of the Spanish zarzuela, French revue and vaudeville” but adopted “their own format” in the Mexican context (59). As theatrical spectacles, revistas consisted of a series of loose scenes—dialogue, local-color scenes, and regional musical and dance numbers—that were usually inspired by current affairs and almost always touched on political themes. These were called revistas políticas and were, as Kanellos points out, “a format for piquant political commentary and social satire” (59).
Moreover, the structure of *revista* performances was not rigid; they sought to integrate audience members within the framework of the theatrical spectacle to give them their improvisational characteristic.

Monsiváis explains that during *teatro frivolo’s* first creative phase [the Huerta years (1913–1914)], *revistas* and the spaces where these spectacles took place became examples of a sort of “melting pot” of social classes (quoted in Argudín, 82). This phenomenon provided a temporary moment/space of fluidity (or democracy) where members of the different social groups crossed social boundaries to meet each other (and see themselves and each other typified onstage). In the words of Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco: “el ‘peladaje’ se mezcla con intelectuales y artistas, con oficiales del ejército y la burocracia, personajes políticos y hasta secretarios del estado” (the “lumpen” mixes with the intellectuals and the artists, with officers from the armed forces and bureaucrats, political figures and even secretaries of state) (quoted in Argudín, 82). It is in these spaces, according to Monsiváis again, where “los hijos del paraíso” (the sons of Paradise), the future leaders of the nation, were being politically formed (Escenas de pudor y liviandad, 30). As opposed to the composition of *carpa* audiences, which were mostly made up of the lower classes, *revistas* enjoyed a more heterogeneous public.

*Revistas* and *cargos* were the first artistic performance forms in which popular classes were able to find themselves reflected, a phenomenon that would later be reproduced by the incipient film industry, which actually borrowed its structures and types from the popular stage. It is in the *revista* and *carpa* spectacles that radical techniques of improvisation gave way to the emergence of a series of popular types along with a new language that was more popular, urban, and “vulgar.” The best-known type that stemmed from one of these popular theatrical performance formats was the *peladito* character, a sort of urban pariah, made (in)famous by the performer Mario Moreno “Cantinflas.” Cantinflas would later migrate to the film industry, taking his *peladito* character to the big screen and popularizing him on a mass cultural scale in the film *Ahi está el detalle/That’s the Point* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1940) next to another famous comedic actor from the *carpa* and *revista* stages, Joaquín Pardavé. While these two comedic actors, because of their work in the Mexican film industry, are relatively well known, in the contemporary period the *carpa* and *revista* female characters from the first few decades of the twentieth century are less known. An example of this would be *la borrachita* and *la peladita* types, which Lupe Rivas Cacho popularized and had just
as large a following as those male types that paraded on the revista and carpa stages (Argudín, 85). During the 1920s (in addition to the creation and the performance of female character types) Mexican women demanded more social, political, and sexual autonomy on and off the stage. It is here that vedettes (or stage divas) gained prominence. The transforming role of Mexican women, particularly in the capital city, was due to a number of factors; Monsiváis lists them:

[L]a sucesión de rupturas sociales a que da origen la Revolución Mexicana, el contagio internacional de los roaring twenties en Norteamérica, la vitalidad artística y cultural de los muralistas y los escritores en torno a José Vasconcelos, la necesidad de romper estentóreamente con la herencia porfiriana, la autosacralización de la mujer consumada por las divas, la novedad de jóvenes deportivas y desprejuiciadas.

[The successive social ruptures affected by the Mexican Revolution, the international contiguousness of the “roaring twenties” in the United States, the artistic and cultural vitality of the muralists and writers around the figure of José Vasconcelos, the necessity to violently break with the Porfirian legacy, the self-consecration of women who have become captivated by the divas, and the novelty of young and unprejudiced female athletes.] (1981: 29)

The teatro de revista shows of the period were among the first places where scantily dressed women were seen and heard singing pieces and performing monologues with a politically satirical tone and in which albur was first rehearsed. Albur, as a Mexican-specific play on words, a double entendre that is always (homo)sexually inflected, was later brought to the screen and popularized by, among others, Cantinflas. Women were involved in theatrical matters that extended their participation beyond their work as performers, and they were also theatre proprietors and directors. Thus, the teatro de revista was the first mass cultural industry where previously marginalized sectors of society had access to the production and distribution of images and discourses. Women played an important role in the representational shifts taking place. Perhaps one of the most important contributions was the way in which their language and onstage physical presence caused (consciously or not) the sexualization of the social and political criticism being presented onstage. In Escenas de pudor y liviandad Monsiváis writes:
En boca de las tiples, cantadas por María Conesa o Celia Montalván, acusaciones y befas son de inmediato, algo más, lo que el auditorio aplauda festejando la sexualización de la crítica. Tal es la índole del teatro frívolo: entreverar y fundir las dos excitaciones... el teatro frívolo se alimenta de la repartición de estímulos entre sexo y política: la crítica, si bien representada, dos veces deleitosa.

[In the voice of the tiples and songs by María Conesa or Celia Montalván, mocking accusations and taunts suddenly become more. What the public is celebrating through applause is the sexualization of criticism. Such is the inclination of the teatro frívolo: to intermingle and fuse these two excitements... teatro frívolo feeds off the distribution of stimuli between sex and politics: criticism, so well represented, twice as pleasurable.] (41, emphasis added)

The numerous vedettes that sexualized political and social satire were, of course, considered to be feminine, that is, their singing voice and style (they were, for the most part, tiples) and their attire, or sexual excesses maintained them within dominant constructions of femininity. For example, one of those vedettes that Monsiváis mentions, María Conesa, was popular on revista stages for her performance of “La gatita blanca (The Little White Female Cat [or Pussy])” that, through inflected tones, gestures, and corporeal movements, sexualized the story of an otherwise innocent cat. However, once the Revolution came to an end and the nationalist discourses began to take precedence, the political satire and sexual excesses in these types of performances started to decline. The newfound national stability of the late 1920s and 1930s was diffused via the cultural practices of the period; that is, a didactic and homogenizing nationalism was part of the flourishing film and music industries, both of which served as cultural counterparts to the educational policies instituted to teach children and others the merits of the Revolution. Consequently, the so-called indecent revista and carpa stages that threatened the family (and, by extension, the nation) were strongly suppressed and shut down. In relation to popular cultural practices only a few nonnormative voices were able to persist within this atmosphere, among them the ranchera singer Lucha Reyes, but, as opposed to the vedettes, which were excessive in their feminine self-representation, gender transgression began to take hold in the cultural realm in postrevolutionary cultural practices. During the 1930s and 1940s Reyes was a popular vernacular performer and the first woman to begin singing in “bravía” (or so-called manly) fashion.
Reyes breaks with a number of traditions and introduces important shifts into Mexican musical expression by resisting the notion that women can sing only in high-pitched voices, by introducing popular speech (lexical, syntactical, and grammatical) into the lyrics and performance of her songs, and by foregrounding an ambiguous yet sexual subjectivity into Mexican popular cultural discourse.

LA LUCHA CONTINUES

Beyond having chosen as her vehicle a female icon to be rescued, the relevance of Lucha Reyes to Astrid Hadad’s contemporary performance work is multiple. This earlier singer provides a sort of paradigm for Hadad’s “heavy nopal” aesthetic because of her vernacular yet tragic style, her sexual ambiguity, and her unapologetic sensuality. Hadad’s particular brand of aesthetics is foreshadowed in the song “La Tequilera [The Tequila Drinker],” originally written by Alfredo D’Orsay, made somewhat popular by Lucha Reyes in the 1940s, and recorded by Hadad in ¡Ay! This particular (and now postmodernized) ranchera is part of the performance piece Heavy Nopal and symbolically represents Hadad’s aesthetics. With the exception of the inclusion of the nonsensical verses below, Reyes’s song is left intact: “Ay, ua, ua—tequilera, / tequilera ra, ra, ra—/ Heavy Nopal tequilera guapa / pagaba, no pagaba, tequilera guapa / tequilera, tequilera ra, ra, ra.”37 In this set of apparently incomprehensible lyrics, whose musical style simultaneously engages and parodies already established genres [rancheras and rock/heavy metal], Hadad transforms the static and aestheticized meanings of these previously recorded cultural products. Thus, she is arguing for the further destabilization of normative structures and, by extension, identity markers. In addition to the integration of the above lyrics into Reyes’s ranchera, Hadad literally acts out the rest of the lyrics to produce new meaning.

In Hadad’s theatricalization of “La Tequilera,” she deploys a number of strategies in order to subvert and deconstruct the already established meaning of various iconic symbols of mexicanidad and femininity. With a bottle of tequila, Hadad becomes a transgressive china poblana when she appears onstage wearing a full skirt with an embroidered image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a fiery-red charra hat, and high-heel shoes with spurs. The conflation of the sacred with the profane and the masculine with the feminine serve to expose the malleability of these iconic symbols. For example, with regard to the use of high-heel shoes with spurs, Hadad ironically muses over
who can actually wear them. She warns that these shoes “are not for anybody.” And following a hierarchical order of Mexican male icons, Hadad chooses one of Mexico’s premier macho figures. She states that only those “del Indio Fernández pa’ arriba” [from Emilio “El Indio” Fernández up] can wear these spurred heels because if anyone else dares to wear them, “[s]e pueden rayar... el alma y las medias” (you could tear... your soul and your stockings). With this gesture Hadad thwarts the categories of both femininity and masculinity to undo their rigid oppositionality. Moreover, Hadad pushes the limits of these established categories by deploying parodic mimicry while, at the same time, advancing theories of reception.

Just before Hadad interjects the aforementioned nonsensical lyrics, she sings “Como buena mexicana / sufriré el dolor tranquila / al fin y al cabo mañana / tendré un trago de tequila” (Like a good Mexican woman / Quietly, I will suffer pain / Tomorrow’s another day, and / I will drink more tequila then). And soon after, when she begins to sing the previously quoted incoherent lyrics, Hadad frantically flagellates herself with a make-believe whip that has an uncanny resemblance to the ones used in ascetic (Catholic) practices. By flagellating herself, Hadad literally acts out the masochism that is believed to exist in Mexican society, particularly among women, but, with ironic distance, she creates a double mimesis or parodic mimicry. Thus, from the vantage point of the spectator there is recognition at the same time that there is misrecognition, and it is at this point that the critique resides. More to the point, this critique creates complicity between the performer and the spectator, particularly if she is female and Mexican. It is here that I would situate the possibility for transformation. I am completely aware that, as Coco Fusco has stated, “[r]eworking stereotypes leads to heated debates about the extent to which the artist’s ironic reinterpretation of an established paradigm can be discerned by different audiences, and hence the danger of inadvertently recapitulating the scenarios they seek to subvert” (1996: 161 and 164).

In the particular case of the performance of “La Tequilera” with its self-flagellation and masochism, Hadad’s feminism might be questioned since some might argue that what she is doing is actually reinscribing stereotypes of Mexican womanhood or, in other words, the idea that all Mexican women are self-abnegated, passive, and enjoy suffering. Instead Hadad’s performance leads us to reinterpret masochism.

In her book-length consideration of masochism, A Defense of Masochism, Anita Phillips argues that this reinterpretation must come “from the side of art rather than science” [8]. In this process,
there are also a number of distinctions that need to be made. Phillips states that:

> Being a masochist and being a victim are different, even opposed. . . Sometimes feminists use the term “masochist” as a denigratory shorthand to mean “the kind of woman who colludes with patriarchy.” But female subservience is not attributable to masochism, and these women may be responding to the generalized violence that male domination involves, seeming to collude while actually feeling forced. (14)

Hadad advances this notion when she exposes the ridiculous character of the original song’s lyrics; that is, the notion of the “good Mexican woman”—part of the archive that has forged the nation and constructed femininity and, by extension, masculinity—is debunked here and not reified. Deploying parodic mimicry to allow female audience members to identify at the same time they disidentify themselves is one way in which Hadad chooses to expose the pervasive falsehoods in Mexican society. However, I would argue that the manner in which the category Woman is constructed within the Mexican context plays a significant role in this process of thinking about Mexican feminisms. In other words, the category Woman is constructed historically, socially, and culturally, and the manner in which feminists theorize issues related to women will differ depending on the context. Thus, as Hadad has told Roselyn Costantino, given the cultural and national differences among women of the United States and of Mexico, it would then make sense that the feminist strategies that Mexican female artists use would also be different (2001: 415–417).

Hadad’s gendered redefinition of masochism is extended throughout her performances, sometimes making itself evident only in a discreet manner. But in other instances this masochism is blatantly present, as in the case of her performance of another song recorded by Reyes in the 1940s. This female masochist song, “Me golpeaste tanto anoche (You Beat Me So Badly Last Night)” was originally written for Reyes by Ray Romano. The lyrics of the song proclaims:

> Me golpeaste tanto anoche / por eso me voy / después que llegas
> tan tarde / llegas todavía a insultarme / y no tienes razón, / en lugar
de darme besos / de mi amor tú te burlaste / ahora sí te las sacaste /
> despreciando mi amor, / yo que estoy acostumbrada / a tus besos
In performing this "classic" ranchera, Hadad is both aligning herself with those popular female singers of the past and parodying them. In bringing to the present these earlier cultural texts, Hadad wants her audience to reconsider two seemingly contradictory and/or paradoxical positions: the beauty and the absurdity of the historical intertexts in her performances. For, in spite of the representation of women as physically abused, these songs were not antifeminist. Rather, they expressed a particular form of popular consciousness where pleasure and pain are not necessarily antithetical feelings, or, if they are, their intensity conjoins them in the end. The first position, beauty, is related to those songs popularized by women singers that expressed longing for the man who had abandoned, been unfaithful to, and/or beaten the female subject, very similar to Billie Holiday's classic blues/jazz torch songs.

During the first half of the century then, Reyes's and Holiday's songs of female masochism (and later Hadad's) were part of what Phillips has termed a type of "counter-culture" that "acts as a counterpoint and refuge from modernity's pervasively gung-ho, superhero values" (Phillips, 57). I agree with Phillips, who suggests that women do not...
have to identify with these modernist values in order to “claim an authentic voice” (57). Phillips argues for alternative practices and approaches to these practices. She states:

There are other kinds of feminine voices. Women sing exquisitely about the kind of damage that love brings with it, from Billie Holiday to Marianne Faithfull. When Lady Day sang the blues, telling of lovers who left her or beat her or had other women, she evoked a harsh poetry of drug dependency and her voice held within it a despair of racial oppression. . . . The masochistic voice is poignant, expressing the pathos of what women suffer at the hands of men, not as a complaint or as a celebration, just as a deep, soulful kind of truth to experience. These songs are about passionate love, the kind that has . . . everything to do with obsessional longing. (57-58, emphasis as in original)

Such is the case with the female masochism present in Billie Holiday’s “My Man.” In the fourth stanza of this blues/jazz classic, Holiday sings: “I don’t know why I should [love him] / He isn’t true, he beats me too / Oh my man, I love him so / He’ll never know / All my life is just despair / But I don’t care / When he takes me in his arms / The world is bright, all right.” In Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, Angela Y. Davis points out that these expressions have not necessarily “endeared” Holiday to feminists but have, in fact, done quite the opposite (178). However, Davis suggests that Holiday’s now classic song has “retained its appeal” not because of its representation of women as victims but because “its aesthetic dimension reworks that content into an implicit critique” (178). Davis states:

In holiday’s performance of “My Man,” an ironic edge in her voice warns against a facile, literal interpretation. And in case this is missed, the slow tempo with which she sings the words—expressing uncertainty as to whether she should love him because “he isn’t true, he beats me too”—emphasizes an ambivalent posture rather than an acquiescence to the violence described. (178)

Just as earlier Reyes and Holiday, to name only two female singers, had done, Hadad participates in the creation of alternative voices and subjectivities. Thus, when Hadad evokes this classic song (and by extension the singer), she is likewise resisting a literal interpretation of “Me golpeaste tanto anoche.” The strategy that the Mexican cabaret
performance artist deploys to resist this literal interpretation, ironically and/or paradoxically, is to literally and visually represent the song. However, it is important to point out that Hadad embraces parodic mimicry in this process, bringing us to the second consideration, absurdity.

After singing a few verses of “Me golpeaste tanto anoche,” Hadad walks offstage and then walks back onstage with the help of crutches and with bandages around her head, exaggerating and parodying the effects of a beating. As she sings this typical ranchera, the visual effects of her theatricality and the intercalated direct monologues create ruptures in an otherwise cohesive narrative. Through the process of constant shifting and juxtaposing, Hadad produces slippages within the text to further prevent her audience from accepting a literal interpretation of the lyrics and, perhaps most importantly, from identifying women with notions of victimhood. For example, as the spectator sees Hadad for the first time with bandages and crutches, Hadad tells us: “Ahora si me siento ... ya saben como me siento” (Now I really feel ... well, you know how I feel). And, instead of saying “like a good Mexican woman,” she states: “... como monumento nacional. Es más, de hecho, me siento como la República Mexicana ... ahorita ... to’a fregá” (... like a national monument. In fact, I actually feel like the whole Mexican Republic ... right now ... I feel all screwed up). In this strategically postmodern reinterpretation of the Reyes classic, Hadad suggests that we consider how nationalist and masculinist (political, governmental, and commercial) projects have abused Mexico and all of its citizens. In other words, she is redirecting our attention to those abusive entities that are not necessarily identified as machista [but are in their aggressiveness] as well as demonstrating that women do respond to acts of violence by men and/or governments. A second rupture is created by way of gestures: When Hadad sings “for another night of your love, I am an addict,” she simulates a marijuana toke. It is from within the interstices created by these inherent contradictions that Hadad creates new possible modes of representation, interpretation, and reception.

The contradictions between the lyrics of (nationalist and masculinist) songs—once again, the songs that have forged the nation—and reality are made explicit in this literal representation. Hadad uses yet another strategy to complicate this notion; she interweaves monologues and/or poems with her songs. For example, “Me golpeaste tanto anoche” is juxtaposed with a monologue in which Hadad challenges the perception that Mexican women are the ones who are
most physically abused by men. Hadad notes that it is actually German women who suffer more at the hands of their husbands; she explains: “[L]o que pasa es que nosotros los mexicanos nos hemos ganado la fama por las películas de charros. . . . Las películas donde aparece el charro, con su caballote, y su pistolota, su sombrerote y sus botototes” (What happens is that we Mexicans have acquired such fame from the charro films. . . . Those films where the big ol’ charro comes on with his big ol’ horse, his big ol’ gun, his big ol’ hat and his big ol’ boots).39 Hadad’s interjection helps in deconstructing stereotypical representations of women in Mexican film. At the same time, she is challenging popular perceptions of Mexican masculinity—a hypermasculinity as represented by the size of the Mexican charro symbols—but, as she continues to clarify: “Bueno, yo creo que cargan tanta cosa que luego no sirven pa’ nada. Están tan cansados que luego no sirven pa’ nada. Miren, miren, suavecitos” (Well, what I think is that they carry so much that they are worthless. They are so tired that you have no use for them afterward. Look, look, what softies [she points to her male musicians] [emphasis added]). This deconstruction of the Mexican Man, epitomized by the charro, is further advanced with the statement: “Lo único realmente democrático y que transcende fronteras es el machismo” (the only really democratic thing that transcends borders is machismo). This remark is juxtaposed with her final comment on pain and pleasure, which is in the form of advice. She tells the female members of her audience: “Así que por lo tanto, mujeres . . . miren, yo nomás les voy a decir una cosa. Si vas a golpear, por lo menos que se las cojan bien. Porque miren, golpeadas y mal cogidas van a acabar muy deprimidas ¿eh?” (That is why you, women . . . look, I am only going to tell you one thing: If you’re going to be beaten, at least make sure that you are well fucked. Because look, beaten and badly fucked you’ll end up very depressed, OK?). As a result, Hadad’s contradictory and complex feminism, with the above-outlined constant shifting, cannot be easily aligned with any particular feminist orthodox discourse. On the one hand, she disengages the belief that (only and all!) Mexican men are essentially machistas, and on the other, advises women to demand sexual pleasure.

REFASHIONING MASCULINE DISCOURSE

Hadad’s feminism is further complicated by her lack of complete satisfaction with the so-called advances of feminism and the manner in which it is frequently only understood as a celebration of a select
number of contemporary female icons. After performing the song “Soy virgencita (I'm a Virgin)”, originally written by the famous Mexican stage and film comedian Joaquin Pardavé, Hadad turns to the audience and asks, “¡Saben lo que están viendo?” [Do you know what you are looking at?] Ignoring the comments from her musicians and noticing that the members of her audience have not said a thing and are instead laughing, she explains, “Es un Diego Rivera en vivo” (It is a live Diego Rivera). The costume she is wearing is perhaps one of Hadad’s most memorable ones; she appears onstage wearing a full skirt with the embroidered image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, her typical Mexican blouse, also embroidered, and enormous white calla lilies tied to her back. In a photograph that she uses for publicity purposes, Hadad is wearing this costume and sitting on the ground, in the way that Diego Rivera depicts the indigenous women with huge white calla lilies in his famous paintings. However, Hadad is not perfectly centered since within the frame of the photograph there is a big bright red armchair placed next to her (see Figure 5). The juxtaposition of Hadad (“as a live Diego Rivera”) with this chair is an ironic critique on the value of having a Rivera in a yuppie or bourgeois household. Yet, a second possible interpretation of this visual image is that Hadad is critiquing the insistence (for consumption) on folkloric and/or traditional representations of indigenous women à la Rivera: They prefer to sit on the floor in spite of the comforts that modernity provides. Mexican visual culture then is appropriated and ironically reframed so visual images (as opposed to spoken discourse) intervene critically.40 However, in other instances the criticism is verbalized.

In Heavy Nopal, and after the performance of the song “Soy virgencita,” Hadad continues to explain who Diego Rivera was: “¡Si se acuerdan veda? Diego Rivera era el esposo de Frida Kahlo. Bueno, antes Frida Kahlo era la esposa de Diego Rivera. Ahora él es el esposo de Frida Kahlo porque ella es más famosa que él.” (You remember, don’t you? Diego Rivera was Frida Kahlo’s spouse. Well, before Frida Kahlo was Diego Rivera’s spouse. Now he is Frida Kahlo’s spouse because now she is more famous than he is.) And, in true ironic double-voiced fashion, she finishes: “Porque pues, vamos, época de mujeres, tiempo de mujeres. ¡Arriba, arriba las mujeres!” (Because well, come on, this is the epoch of women, it’s a women’s era. Long live women!) Hadad says this as she turns her back to the public, then parodically lifts an arm up to symbolize feminist victory, and goes searching for her gun, the prop that she will need for her next number. Thus, in Hadad’s work, women are not relegated to the supposed passive and victimized
Fig. 5. Astrid Hadad as a “live” Diego Rivera. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

position of a prefeminist movement discourse. Nor are they solely the femme fatale figures whose role is to seduce then abandon as depicted in the classic melodramas of Mexico’s so-called golden age of cinema. These reductive images of women as either/or are parodied and ultimately deconstructed in Heavy Nopal.

Pardave’s “Soy virgencita” is a song whose lyrics are a dialogue between a man and a woman in which the former wants to seduce the latter, who resists all forms of seduction since she is (or claims to be) a virgin. A few verses from the song:

—En una mesa te puse, un ramillete de flores,
 Maria no seas tan ingrata, regálame tus amores.
—Señor no puedo dar mis amores, soy virgencita, riego las flores. Soy virgencita, riego las flores, y entre las flores me encontrarás.
—Disculpa tú señorita, disculpa lo que te diga,
 si yo te trato de amores, es por casarme contigo.
—Señor no puedo dar mis amores . . .
—El defecto que yo tengo, es querer a las mujeres.
 Esta canción que te canto, se llama “al cabo no puedes.”
—Señor no puedo dar mis amores . . .
On a table I have placed for you a bunch of flowers.
Maria don’t be such an ingrate, I want us to be lovers.
—Sir I cannot give you my love, I am a Virgin, I water flowers. I am a Virgin, I water flowers and amongst the flowers is where you’ll find me.
—Forgive me Miss, forgive for what I am about to say,
If I come around spouting love, it’s because I want us to marry.
—Sir I cannot give you my love, I am a Virgin, I water flowers . . .
—The only defect that I have is that I love women.
This song that I am singing, is called “in the end you can’t.”
—Sir I cannot give you my love, I am a Virgin, I water flowers . . .

As can be noted, it is the male voice that propels the narrative. The woman’s part is merely a repetition of words that resist the man’s propositions. In this performance of “Soy virgencita” the cabaret artist sings and acts out both parts, to do this, she alternates gender-coded props. When Hadad sings the part of the seducer, she wears a tejana (cowboy hat) and a removable moustache, but when she acts out the “virgin’s” role she removes these items, and with a watering can she waters her flowers (i.e., the calla lilies tied to her back).

Hadad parodies masculinity throughout the performance of “Soy virgencita”: She masquerades as the male in the song, interjects one of the most popular piropos (or “pickup” lines) in Mexican popular culture—“¡A qué hora sales al pan, reina?” (At what time do you go out to buy bread, sweetie?!)—and mimics a stereotypical man out on the prowl by raising her eyebrows at the same time that she strokes her mustache.

But at the same time, by consciously speaking through a masculine voice and directing herself to women, Hadad masks an implicit lesbianism. Hadad’s coded lesbianism is an example of what she revels in: sexual [and cultural] ambiguity. In this sense Hadad’s endorsement of a strategic ambiguity is akin to Jesusa Rodríguez’s character “la soldadera autógena” (the self-made female soldier), which was discussed in the introduction to this book. In regard to this strategy, Rodríguez has stated: “I propose: let’s be ambiguous, let’s break with the tabu[sic] of ambiguity as something we permit ourselves only in dreams, like incest, let’s be ambiguous, not as something involuntary, but full of intention, as objective; let’s assume the ridiculous and failure as an option in order to grow, to get to know ourselves” [quoted in Costantino 2000, 67]. Ambiguity is another one of Hadad’s strategies for engaging the spectator in a complicitous critique while at the same time positioning herself against any smooth form of interpretation of
her representations. In this process and in the performance of “Soy virgencita,” where the term “gender-bending” would be appropriate, Hadad decenters phallologocentric discourse not only by consciously appropriating patriarchal discourse but also by employing the detachable moustache, which symbolically represents the phallus. Hadad is aware that identity and meaning (regarding gender and sex/sexuality) are produced by repeated performative speech, gestural acts, and, equally important here, the use of gendered props. Thus, in order to destabilize these rigid gender structures, Hadad humorously exposes the ways in which removable, detachable, and malleable objects have been charged with symbolic power and by exposing them she not only critiques them but also disengages the established meaning.

Hadad is also critiquing the feminine—used here deliberately—discourse that women sometimes employ to masquerade (i.e., cloak under virtue and purity) their sexuality. Virginity for women is, after all, an overvalued concept in many societies, including Mexico. In this performance of “Soy virgencita,” Hadad advances the notion of gender-bending one step further. Toward the end of the song Hadad sexualizes the image of the virgencita figure—with a very innocent gesture and just as the beat of the music becomes accelerated—by simulating the watering of her own “flowers,” that is, her breasts and sex. Moreover, Hadad subverts the masculine threat (“This song that I am singing, is called ‘in the end you can’t’”) by demonstrating that she actually can. Put differently, she adds “water” to her erogenous-sexual corporeal parts to prove that sexuality is self-sufficient. In the performance of this song, both female and masculine gender parody is accomplished by literally acting out the lyrics of the song. Hadad’s reinterpretation of the songs that have forged the nation—and that express, for the most part, machista attitudes—ultimately exposes their ridiculousness.

Hadad achieves new meaning of “Soy virgencita” not only by virtue of her being a woman interpreting Pardavé’s song but also by her ingenious combination of theatrical gestures and movements, the Mexican icons onstage (the nopal, the bottle of tequila), and her masqueraded body. Hadad’s campy performances are thus attributed to her ironic deployment of excessively artificial yet deeply Mexican symbols. Thus, in “Soy virgencita” Hadad camps up the comedian Pardavé, who, according to Monsiváis, is himself an example of “high camp” (or “Camp Superior”) in Mexican culture (1970: 182). Monsiváis’s notion of “high camp” is derived from his own understanding of Sontag’s use of high camp; “un estilo llevado a sus
ultimas consecuencias” (a style taken to its extremes) (1970: 179). For Monsivais, in Pardave’s multiple film roles:

En su capacidad para animar clichés, Pardave halla su predestinación. De tan perfecto, es también incorpóreo, no corresponde a realidad alguna . . . Es la certidumbre de que la realidad imita lo arquetípico.

[In his capacity to animate clichés, Pardave finds his predestined path. He’s so perfect, he cannot simply embody, he cannot correspond to any notion of reality . . . He is the guarantee that reality imitates the archetype.] (1970: 182, emphasis added)

It is through the performance of his song that Hadad takes Pardave’s irony, aesthetics of artificiality or theatricality, and humor to a higher level, she makes Pardave’s already transparent (and, by extension, her own) campiness obvious to the spectator. This strategy is constant in Hadad’s performances. Mexican camp symbols (whether they are high, middle, or low) are recycled and transmitted as ironic citations through Hadad’s masqueraded body and voice.

UNSETTLING HETERNORMATIVY

Another song that Hadad reworks and camps up in Heavy Nopal is “Te voy a olvidar (I’m Going to Forget You)” by Mexican singer/songwriter Juan Gabriel. As in “Me golpeaste tanto anoche” and “Soy virgencita,” in her performance of “Te voy a olvidar,” Hadad pushes forward the process of resignifying songs and discourses. Hadad’s inclusion of Juan Gabriel in Heavy Nopal is noteworthy for two reasons: (1) This Mexican popular culture icon is one of the most prolific and revered singers and composers, and (2) his own homosexuality is considered to be the best-kept secret in Mexico, despite the fact that everyone is aware of it. It is hardly ever publicly discussed, but because he is so much more famous than Hadad, he stays more in the zagüíaan than the political cabaretera does. His popularity and his “open-secret” strategy regarding his sexual orientation are two intersecting axes from which I engage Hadad’s work. And, as I will argue, they also serve as a starting point from which Hadad appropriates and rearticulates this iconic figure and his music. Juan Gabriel’s songs are cultural texts that almost everyone, even those—often of middle- or upper-middle-class bourgeois sensibilities—who consider his work “bad music” (kitsch and/or cursil), knows well enough to sing along with them. In his
performances Juan Gabriel is undoubtedly an example of Mexican gay camp. As García ingeniously describes him, the Mexican singer is “like a Mexican George Michael and Liberace all rolled into one” (13). In *Heavy Nopal* Hadad, through her rendition of “Te voy a olvidar,” camps up this Mexican popular icon, thus generating multiple readings of this reworked contemporary “classic.”

Just as in the performance of “Soy virgencita,” the social and cultural construction of masculinity is parodied and deconstructed. In addition to the presence of the symbolically charged moustache (as in “Soy virgencita”), the gun—another phallic symbol of masculinity—is present. In *Heavy Nopal* these two symbolic representations of the phallus are ridiculed. Hadad mocks popular and dominant notions that equate the size and length of the phallus to virility. She appropriates one of these symbols, the gun, and compares its size to that of the moustache. More than gender-bending here, the appropriation of the gun by Hadad, to symbolically represent the phallus, is an example of “gender-fucking,” as June L. Reich would describe it. In her theorization of this concept, however, Reich repositions the phallus through the dildo. Of “gender fuck” Reich states: “At the very least, repositioning the phallus as dildo radically alters the meaning of ‘being’ and ‘having’ in such a way that the construction of sexuality cannot be reducible to anatomy, even though we can acknowledge primary sexual difference” (262). Rather than temporarily repositioning the phallus as dildo, Hadad opts for the gun. As the song begins, Hadad walks offstage to measure her gun against the moustache of a man sitting in the front row. She tells him: “A ver tú, que tienes bigote, déjame probar” (Hey, you, with the moustache, let me try). As she measures her gun against his moustache, she finds that his moustache is “poquitito más grande que mi pistola” (just a tiny bit bigger than my gun). This strategy symbolically and temporarily disempowers men or, to be more precise, patriarchal discourse. In the process, she is empowered and has the privilege of discourse and shifting identity.

Initially, if we consider that most members of the audience would know that “Te voy a olvidar” is a Juan Gabriel song (particularly in Mexico or among Mexicans in the United States), another possible reading would be that Hadad is further blurring the lines between constructions of masculinity and femininity. Hadad, in her very feminine attire yet wearing high-heal spurs and a waving gun, is presenting the transparency of these symbols. In this manner, she is challenging the audience to think about the ways in which they construct their Mexican male (and by extension, female) idols. But,
perhaps more importantly, she is also critiquing the heteronormative expectations the public (aided by mass media) has of these same idols. Thus Hadad, however indirectly, is vindicating Juan Gabriel, whose onstage effeminate gestures are often and easily mocked by other popular performers. This notion of masculinity and the privileged position that males occupy in society are further scrutinized in the poetic monologue that Hadad pronounces prior to the song.

In her deconstruction of machista behavior she inevitably has to offer a critique of the biggest machista of them all, the U.S. government, symbolically represented by Uncle Sam. The notion of machismo is further disassociated from Mexican men from everyday life, and repositioned to evoke more destructive and oppressive entities. In this deliverance of thanks to Tio Sam, “por todo lo que nos han quitado y no nos han devuelto” (for everything that he has taken from us and not given back) she asks her musicians to help her in her parodic poetic version of “Our Father.” As they kneel in a row and face the audience, Hadad states:

Tío Sam que estás en el país del norte.
Santificado sea tu nuevo orden.
Vénganos tus dólares.
Hágase tu voluntad así sea en EEUU,
Así como en el mundo entero.
Danos hoy nuestros McDonald’s de cada día.
Perdona a los cubanos
como nosotros perdonamos a los de la DEA.
No nos dejes caer en el nacionalismo.
Y libranos de los hombres de negocios japoneses.
In God We Trust, Shalom, Amén.
[Our Uncle Sam who art in that northern country.
Hallowed be Thy New Order.
Thy dollars should come to us.
Thy will be done in the United States
As it is in the rest of the world.
Give us this day, our daily McDonald’s.
And forgive the Cubans,
As we forgive those from the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency]
And lead us not into nationalism,
But deliver us from Japanese businessmen.
In God We Trust, Shalom, Amen.]
U.S.-Mexican (as well as U.S.-Cuban) relations, masculinist constructions of nationalism, transnationalism, and neoliberalism are all ridiculed in this poetic monologue. When this monologue is juxtaposed with the lyrics of Juan Gabriel’s contemporary classic, the “mentirosa” (liar) in the song becomes the U.S. government, the one that “siempre mientes, mientes siempre” (always lie, you lie always) to seduce and take advantage of the poetic voice (“si me buscas, es porque te conviene” [if you look for me, it’s because it’s what’s convenient for you]). But, at the same time, this repositioning begs the question: Can Mexicans (given their country’s “codependency” with the United States) actually swear “to forget” the United States?

Yet, given that, there is another dimension to Hadad’s performance of Juan Gabriel’s song. Toward the middle of the song Hadad jumps back onstage, thus discarding the men in the audience whom she has been taunting and sings: “y ahora vete, ya no quiero verte” (and now leave, I no longer want to see you). At this point, the song, with its otherwise typically ranchera rhythm, is transformed by virtue of a flamenco beat in order to push Hadad’s femininity and sensuality to the forefront. As Hadad begins to simulate a flamenco dance, she removes her embroidered blouse and unveils a much more revealing one. Her provocative attire brings up another issue that could also call into question her feminism, particularly from a U.S. perspective.

In regard to her sexually revealing female body onstage, Hadad has told Costantino, that “to remove the female body from the stage is only to deny access to it by females; to attempt to force such choices upon a work in order to be considered feminist is as authoritarian as the systems she attempts to dismantle” (2001: 417). In this particular performance of “Te voy a olvidar” Hadad hints at another possible meaning of the above-mentioned ideas. After singing “yo te juro que te tengo que olvidar, te voy a olvidar” (I swear to you that I must forget you, I am going to forget you), then lifting her arms (all while dancing) and licking them with great exaggeration, she interrupts the lyrics of the popular song with the following words: “Si no te pido, tengo conmigo. ¡Cómo me gusto! ¡Qué bella soy! ¡Qué bien me hizo mi madre!” (I ask you for nothing, I have enough with me. How much I like myself! How beautiful I am! How well my mother made me!)

By reclaiming the stage as her space and infusing it with her own sensuality/sexuality, Hadad disrupts the notion that women are mere objects of the male gaze and need a man to be complete. Moreover, she offers the possibility of not only her own enjoyment of her body...
but also that of other women (lesbian or heterosexual). As in the poetic monologue at the beginning of the chapter, “one has to touch, enjoy,” Hadad insists that women take pleasure from their own bodies and their sexuality. Deploying the strategies of gender parody, camp, political satire and postmodernism within a feminist framework, Hadad challenges the notion that women occupy the object side of the subject/object binary.

CONCLUSIONS

_Heavy Nopal_, originally a performance piece that paid homage to the tragic and forgotten figure of Lucha Reyes, is a richly layered and humorous text that adds nuances to the numerous discourses it utilizes. The Mexican cabaret performance artist succeeds in inserting a female subjectivity into Mexican discursive and critical practices. Hadad’s own hybrid background is an invaluable source for her critique of false truisms, particularly those of Mexican society. The ironic juxtaposition of images, monologues/dialogues, facial and bodily masquerades, music, and corporeal movements ultimately challenges and deconstructs essentialist notions of gendered and cultural identity. Through a hybridized self, an unorthodox feminism, and a multifarious aesthetics, Hadad’s _Heavy Nopal_, as it engages a process of continuous shifting, is constantly producing different meanings. By engaging older and more traditional and/or classical Mexican cultural texts, particularly songs but also gestures and vernacular language, she pays homage to them. Far from being nostalgic, however, Hadad is ironically framing them in order to render a critique of patriarchy. Ultimately Hadad’s feminist criticism is not celebratory of women; through gender parody she exposes performativity of gender in Mexican culture and society. As writer and well-known intellectual Cristina Pacheco has stated, Hadad “es uno de los grandes detonadores para hacer cambiar la sociedad mexicana” (is one of the most powerful detonators to affect change in Mexican society) (Semichon and Favre, n.p.).
collective Las Reinas Chulas, who are an example of this newer generation of cabaret artists. For more information on Las Reinas Chulas, including their annual international political cabaret festival, which has been running for more than five years now, see: www.lasreinaschulas.com.

27. In using the notion of “anecdote as evidence” I am echoing and am indebted to José E. Muñoz—as I am in other parts if not throughout this book—who has written about the “invisible evidence” as ephemera in his brief essay “Ephemera as Evidence.” Here the queer cultural theorist reflects upon ephemera as “modality of anti-rigor and anti-evidence that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality” (10).

28. Among the scholarship that I want to mention here as exemplary is the work within dance studies, such as the work contained in Jane Desmond’s collection of edited essays, Meaning in Motion and Dancing Desires.

29. Anima Sola has been used as part of Hadad’s promotional/press material. The artist Lucía Maya digitally manipulated Adolfo Pérez Butrón’s picture of Astrid Hadad, so credit should be given to him as well. Pérez Butrón, in addition to having directed a music video, is a well-known photographer who has worked with other female Mexican singers, such as Eugenia Leon, to help elevate their already “diva-esque” stature. He has also photographed other singers such as pop icon singers Daniela Romo and Lucero, balladeer Francisco Céspedes, and opera singer Ramón Vargas.

CHAPTER 1

Note on epigraph: It is the character of Abuela in Luis Alfaro’s most recent (as yet unpublished) play Electricidad who utters the epigraph’s words. I saw this play in Tucson, Arizona, in the fall of 2003, when it was produced by Borderlands, a local community-theater company. In this campy yet tragic Chicano version of Sophocle’s Electra—set in a present-day South Tucson barrio—Abuela’s daughter-in-law, Clemencia, a “wetback” from the other side of the border (Nogales, Mexico), has killed her son in order to take over the family business. Abuela despises Clemencia because of the latter’s racially marked skin (she is supposedly darker) and her lower class status. This rather simplistic intra-ethnic racial and class discrimination is complicated when the story’s plot propels/compels Abuela to undergo an unveiling process that makes the spectator acknowledge the similarities between these two women: Clemencia, La Mexicana, and Abuela, La Chicana.

1. Also see my articles “Reframing the Retablo: Mexican Feminist Critical Practices in Ximena Cuevas’s Corazón Sangrante” and “Mexican Nationalism, Mass Media, and Gender/Sexuality: Unmasking Lies in Ximena Cuevas’ Video Art.” Here I would also like to point out that we may [and should] also speak of a different type of mexicanidad, a more insidious one at work, which I also deploy in several instances. In his foreword to Sex Notes to Pages 16–32
in Revolution Carlos Monsiváis writes that “[c]onservative women, the guardians of tradition and ‘eternal values,’ have been studied insufficiently” (11). In particular, what would be productive is to examine the ways in which these conservative women’s groups have mobilized culture to their gains and to begin to map their so-called feminist activism at different historical junctures, all of which demonstrate the subtle strategies of conjoining nationalism, myth, and religion or, I should say, a nationalism imbued with a high percentage of normative and conservative morality. One point on this map, for example, is Antonio Velasco Piña’s novela espiritual [spiritual novel] Regina, which narrates the story of a prodigal daughter who, because of her innate powers, is destined to wake up first the [quasi-]dormant volcanoes [i.e., Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl] and, subsequently, the dormant Mexicans. During the Fox administration, and with the help of his wife, Martha Sahagún, Antonio Calvo staged this novel as a musical in Mexico City. This musical project not only was intimately connected to Sahagún’s Vamos, México campaign but included several of the songs that had been used during the closing ceremonies of Fox’s presidential campaign, which Calvo himself composed. This points to an interesting continuation, if not concrete consolidation, of the ruling party PAN’s association with nationalism tinged with religious fervor. See Verónica Maza Bustamante’s article “Regina rompe el silencio,” published in Milenio, Semanal [no. 191] (http://www.milenio.com/semanal/191/mil3.htm).

2. Bartra, La jaula de la melancolía, 177; my translation.

3. In this chapter I will only be discussing visual art that revises and/or reconfigures the Virgen de Guadalupe. Within Chicana literature there are numerous examples of literary production that rework the myth of the Virgen de Guadalupe: poetry by Carmen Tafoya and Pat Mora, the work of Denise Chavez, and several stories in Sandra Cisneros’s Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991) as well as her short essay “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess.” To my knowledge, Mexican writers have not engaged with the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe as Chicanas have; for a schematic, and perhaps skewed, approach to the much-fractured Chicana-Mexicana relationship in the literary realm (as it is uncritical of Chicana writers), see Elena Poniatowska’s “Mexicanas and Chicanas.”

4. There are numerous studies, particularly from the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, that could be cited here (Jacques Laffaye’s Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1532–1815, trans. Benjamin Keen; Eric R. Wolf’s “The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol,” Journal of American Folklore [1958] 71; and Enrique Florescano’s Memoria mexicana stand out), but, for a critical analysis of the contemporary cult of the Virgen de Guadalupe as it is celebrated every December 12, Carlos Monsiváis’s chronicle “La hora de la tradición” in Los rituales del caos [39–52] is particularly astute.

5. During the 1980s and, most definitely, during the 1990s both countries, Mexico and the United States, went [and continue into the new millennium to go] through culture wars. This chapter is an attempt to bring...
to light the existence of transnational culture wars. Because the Virgen de Guadalupe is a transnational figure, she has been at the center of public debate—regarding her use and her representations as well as the scandal around the selling of rights to her image for reproduction—surrounding issues of censorship and sexuality.

6. See his essay on the December 12 annual festivities in Mexico City’s basilica honoring La Virgen de Guadalupe’s apparition and other miracles, it was published in Los rituales del caos.

7. Censorship in Mexican cinema, for the most part, has concentrated on films with a political theme that question the institutionalization of the party that ruled for over seventy years, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), the infamous dedazo and destape as political processes, and the political repression during various regimes: La sombra del caudillo (Julio Bracho, 1960), Rojo amanecer (Jorge Fons, 1989), and La ley de Herodes/Herod’s Law (Luis Estrada, 1999). The few films produced nationally that transgress religious (i.e., Catholic) order have not caused huge scandals principally because not many people have seen these films, that is, they have suffered from “bad distribution.” Something interesting to consider is the question of censorship of foreign films that featured alleged blasphemous story lines, as was the case with Martin Scorsese’s The Last Temptation of Christ (1988). As Carlos Monsivais points out in “La utopia indocumentada: la cultura mexicana de los noventa,” this film’s screening was prohibited by the clergy in Mexican theaters but could be bought in the streets, I assume, in a pirated version on VHS (60). Very similar to what happened more recently, although El Crimen del Padre Amaro was exhibited in some theaters in Mexico, it could and still can be bought very easily in the streets, in VHS or DVD, to be viewed privately without the public admonition of attending public screenings. Another recent Mexican film that references the Virgen de Guadalupe through a discourse of sexuality is Japón (2002) by Carlos Reygadas. In this film, Ascen or Ascension (Magdalena Flores) tells her houseguest, El Hombre (Alejandro Ferretis), that she prefers the image of Jesus Christ—this moment in the scene is preceded by an erotic kiss that she delivers to the Jesus Christ image of her home altar—while her nephew, who was jailed for some time, preferred the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe because it (“she”) facilitated his masturbating. On a side note, here Ascen functions as the vehicle for El Hombre’s ascent to Heaven, the two do copulate toward the end of the film. Because it is an “art” film, that is, reminiscent of the European art films of the 1960s and 1970s in form (slowness and sparse dialogue) and (some) content, and not a commercial endeavor, like El crimen del Padre Amaro, Japón was not widely distributed and seen.

8. From personal anecdotal evidence: While visiting my family in Chicago, my sisters and I were planning a trip to the movies and, as we discussed [in English] what movie we were going to see, we mentioned El crimen del Padre Amaro. At this point my mother, who does not speak much English, looked up from her reading and said “No!” She expressed her
opposition and prohibited us from seeing it, insisting that the priest of the church she attended at that point had told them that there was no worse movie anyone could see. According to my mother, during one of his most recent sermons the priest had warned that anyone who saw El crimen del Padre Amaro would be condemned to hell. We went anyway.

9. This same organization had protested against Scorsese’s The Last Temptation of Christ in the late 1980s, and, after El crimen, they also promoted nationwide TFP-sponsored protests against Ron Howard’s adaptation of Dan Brown’s novel The Da Vinci Code (2006). For more information see Edgar González Ruiz’s Cruses y sombras: Perfiles del conservadurismo en América Latina (2005), available on the information agency NotieSe’s website (www.notiese.org), which provides information related to sexuality and public health, and also visit the website of The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, www.tfp.org.

10. In the second half of this chapter I will discuss this piece in more detail and in the context of a few other works by López that reimag(in)e the Virgen de Guadalupe. For additional information on the controversy, from the artist’s own perspective, see Alma López’s website: www.almalopez.net and her essay “Silencing Our Lady: La respuesta de Alma.”

11. Much has been written on the use of the Virgen de Guadalupe to organize and fight for different causes in the context of the civil rights movement, but little has been said of the importance that this image has had on the ways in which Mexicans and Mexican Americans have used the image to build consciousness and create a Mexican-American community in the early twentieth century, see George Sanchez’s Becoming Mexican American. However, as I stated earlier, examinations of such phenomena go beyond the purview of this chapter, which instead chooses to focus on contradictory and ironic examples of intolerance that involve the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. A primary pre–twentieth century example of intolerance is the case of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier who was exiled due to his dissenting theory regarding the apparition of the Virgin; see the first volume Apologia of his Memorias.

12. The translation is not mine. The lyrics of this Mabou Mines theatrical production were written by Catherine Sasanov and translated into Spanish by Luz Aurora Pimentel and Alberto Blanco. Las horas de Belén is a theatrical piece that was the result of a bi-national theatrical collaboration between El Hábito [Jesusa Rodriguez and Liliana Felipe] and the New York City–based avant-garde theater company Mabou Mines (www.maboumines.org), Liliana Felipe composed the music and performed the songs [live and on the CD] while Jesusa Rodriguez carried out the choreography and performed in the stage production. It premiered in Mexico City at the Festival del Centro Historico (Historical District Festival) in 1999 and toured briefly in the United States; I saw the production in Chicago at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum—recently renamed National Museum of Mexican Art—in 2000. Las horas de Belén won a Special Citation for Performance at the 2000

13. The deal that was made between the basilica and the archdiocese and the U.S. company did not include the use of the image in art, such as the images that I analyze in this chapter, which we can say still stand on the margins of the neoliberal transnational double crossing—a concept that I will later develop. But the “double crossing” evidenced by the ways in which the right to this image was sold—in different instances no less—deserves a study all in itself. For further discussion of the scandal regarding the selling of the commercialization of the Virgen de Guadalupe image, see the following Proceso issues: February 9, 2003—particularly the one that “uncovered” the story, “La Guadalupana, “Marca Registrada”—February 17, 2003, and August 10, 2003. For an English-language account, see: San Francisco Gate Chronicle, “Catholic Church Cancels Deal to License Virgin Image,” February 18, 2003.

This scandal, it should be noted, was obfuscated by another transnational scandal that involved Archbishop Norberta Rivera a few years later: In 2006 Cardinal Rivera was named as a defendant in a lawsuit brought by Joaquín Aguilar Méndez because Rivera—when he was head of the Archdiocese of Tehuacán, in the state of Puebla in Mexico—allegedly helped priest Nicolás Aguilar escape prosecution for sexual assault against minors.

Additionally, one thing that I also would like to consider here is the possibility that there may be yet another level of religious kitsch (a fourth degree?) beyond what Celeste Olalquiaga discusses in her study Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities [1992]. It is possible to stipulate that Olalquiaga was not able to foresee the post-NAFTA years.

14. See Tey Marianna Nunn’s “The Our Lady Controversy” [166].


16. See the accompanying catalogue to this exhibition, Imágenes guadalupanas, cuatro siglos.

17. The essay is part of the bilingual catalogue for the exhibition El Corazón Sangrante/The Bleeding Heart that opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1991 and toured afterward to various cities in the Americas. Maria Louise translated Serge Gruzinki’s essay.

18. The MAM is a state-funded museum under the auspices of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA or the National Institute of Fine Arts).

19. For Manrique’s own account of the controversy see his essay “Ataque al Museo de Arte Moderno” in Luna Córeme’s special issue “Intolerancia [Intolerance],” [1997] II.

20. Another tabloid, Peligro/Danger, put it this way: “¡Sacrilego! La Virgen con cara de Marilyn y Cristo con la de Pedro Infante” (Sacrilege! The
Virgin with Marilyn’s Face and Christ with Pedro Infante’s [1988] 79]. The front pages of these tabloids are reproduced in Manrique’s account of the scandal, “Ataque al Museo de Arte Moderno.”


22. In Chapter 4 I offer a more elaborate reading on the place of Marilyn Monroe in Chicana and Mexicana cultural production when I examine Nao Bustamante’s America, the Beautiful.

23. This contradiction has continued to be part of Serrano Limon’s modus operandi. Most recently, in April 2007, as Mexico City’s assembly was debating the legalization of a women’s right to abortion, he was ambushed by a crowd of women who threw him a wide assortment of thongs when he was entering the Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal (ALDEF, Federal District Legislative Assembly) headquarters to make his case for the continued status of antiabortion legislation. Using thongs in this protest was a clear reference to the news that became public in 2005 regarding Serrano Limon’s use of public resources to purchase a wide array of these feminine undergarments, among other things such as fancy suits and expensive pens, he is alleged to have one of the biggest thong collections. Or, in the very least, this misuse of public monies was used to signal the hypocrisies of the religious right’s leaders in Mexico City. Although Provida had been receiving public resources since 1994, during President Fox’s administration these resources were multiplied. I read the women’s act of protest as the increasing consciousness of the potentialities of pacific civil resistance in Mexico City, something I will discuss in further detail in Coda, the closing chapter of this book.

24. A comprehensive analysis and rundown of the retrograde politics of groups such as Provida and UNPF are beyond the scope of this chapter; for an interesting and important historical documentation of the lack of tolerance in Mexico regarding sexuality, see Edgar Gonzalez Ruiz’s La sexualidad prohibida: Intolerancia, sexismo y represión/Prohibited Sexuality: Intolerance, Sexism, and Repression (2002).

25. This idea of the separation of church and state as prevalent in Mexico since the nineteenth century during the reform period and, most definitely, in the postrevolutionary period, needs to be rethought. I am taking my cues from a group of revisionist historians, particularly Pamela Vockel, whose research has begun to question the notion that secularization was not as tacit in nineteenth-century Mexico as is widely believed. In fact, argues Vockel, during the nineteenth century a new form of piety took place.


27. What would be interesting to investigate further is why this image, and other contemporary ones in the Televisa exhibit, such as Adolfo Patiño’s, Mónica Mayer’s, and Nahum Zenil’s, did not cause a scandal while De la Rosa’s did. See the catalogue Imágenes guadalupanas to see Ehrenberg’s image as well as Zenil’s [324–325].

28. The most obvious example is Yolanda López’s image of the Virgen de Guadalupe sporting a pair of heels and being depicted as if walking
away; this print was used as the cover for a special issue of fem. whose consequences I will discuss in the next section.

29. My translation. In spite of the difficulties associated with being a public target, De la Rosa continued to work (mostly underground for one year) in Mexico in what I would term “public art.” In an August 2003 visit with the artist, I was able to see his work-in-progress—a project he has been working on for more than ten years—“Icnocuicatl SidAids: cantos de angustia del SIDA,” in which De la Rosa merges a Chicana/o pre-Columbian sensibility and aesthetic with contemporary health issues to raise awareness of the spread of the AIDS virus among Mexican immigrants in the United States. De la Rosa works with SidArte, an art collective that includes his main collaborator, Yamina del Real, and that blurs the line between art and politics and public (popular) and institutionalized (high) art. Monsiváis’s statements in relationship to the influence of Chicana/o art in the work of De la Rosa and his current work in the realm of public (and more accessible forms of) art should be studied with more detail.

30. In “A Touch of Evil” Jean Franco writes: “The Council of Love was originally written to mock Bavarian society, in which, despite or because of the Catholic religion, prostitution and syphilis flourished. In [Rodriguez’s] adaptation the play becomes both a comment on the AIDS crisis and on freedom of speech, with the many new forms of censorship and self-censorship” (49). In 1992 Boston public television produced a series of documentaries compiled in ten volumes on social, economic, cultural, and political issues in Latin America entitled Americas; the seventh one, “Builders of Images,” features an interview with Jesusa Rodríguez in which the political cabaret work she was doing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including El concilio de amor, was captured.


33. In her essay “‘Lúpe’s Song’: On the Origins of Mexican-Woman-Hating in the United States,” Deena J. Gonzalez mentions the “Mary Page” online project at the Marian Library at the University of Dayton that features López’s images from the Guadalupe series; see http://www.udayton.edu/mary/gallery/exhibits/chicana/works.html.

34. Brady continues to write: “Chicana writers insert into their texts the means to identify social relations, to critique the minutiae of gender oppression, cultural imperialism, and racism. But here they write from the vantage point of trying to get over, to identify the machine, to acknowledge its prowess, and yet create social locations not only from which to critique the border-as-system, but also from which to partially escape it, to step aside, even for the moment, for the ongoing effects of domination” (53).

35. In “'Lúpe's Song’” Gonzalez references López’s “Walking Lúpe” and the controversy in Mexico City, and though she states that the incident
occurred in 1994 (a year already highly significant in Mexican culture and politics), she means to say 1984 (258).

36. On May 14, 1995, the Salt Lake Tribune ran an article entitled “Yolanda López’s Art Hits ‘Twitch Meter’ to Fight Stereotypes.”

37. When instances like this occur, I cannot help but read the novel’s title as a metaphor of sorts for what transpired in New Mexico with Our Lady. Moreover, Abani’s protagonist is a Los Angeles muralist, as is Alma López, who inhabits a world of contradictions, dealing with the Catholic ghosts from his Catholic upbringing as well as with his emerging queer identity.


39. The three other artists were Teresa Archuleta-Sagel, Elena Baca, and Marion Martínez. See Nunn’s essay/testimonio in Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory, edited by Phillip B. Gonzales.

40. For more information and to access the images, see Alma López’s website: http://www.almalopez.net/ and Tey Marianna Nunn’s essay “The Our Lady Controversy,” published in Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory [Univ. of Arizona Press, 2007].

41. One could argue that the controversy also reached international levels, as it was written up in Mexican newspapers such as Mexico City’s La Foruenda, with reference to the controversy involving De la Rosa twelve years earlier.

42. In “The Our Lady Controversy” Nunn also adds to this: “The use of the sensational term ‘Bikini Virgin’ . . . recalled other recent ‘catch phrases’ in art controversy such as ‘Piss Christ’ (by Andrés Serrano) and ‘Dung Virgin’ (a painting titled The Holy Virgin Mary by Chris Ofili shown in the ‘Sensation’ exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999)” (166).

43. The letter can be found on Alma López’s website: http://www.almalopez.net/ORM/news/010522asf.html.

44. See Jorge Manrique’s own account of the scandal at the MAM, “Ataque al Museo de Arte Moderno,” Tey Diana Rebolledo’s “The Archbishop Sees the Body of the Virgin,” and Tey Marianna Nunn’s “The Our Lady Controversy.” In Rebolledo’s account, there is reference to the fact that Archbishop Sheehan asked Alma López to reproduce a letter of support from her Catholic parish priest (180), whereas in Nunn’s version of the controversy at the MOIFA we can come to understand how she was, in fact, amidst the fire even more so than López during this period, because, as López has told me in private conversations about the controversy, she was in Los Angeles.
while Nunn was in New Mexico, and she was a member of the regional community that was attacking her, she writes:

> For me personally, the things most difficult to swallow in interviews, articles, and editorials were words to the effect that because I was educated, I had lost touch with my community, and that I was a thinker—and not a believer. My integrity, scholarship, and identity were all challenged, and for most of that year, I was vilified in the local press. Because of my unusual first name and slanderous misconceptions by some protestors, a rumor spread that I was the head of a secret Vietnamese lesbian sisterhood. [175]

45. This information comes from personal conversations with the artist in August 2003. Also, there is reference to De la Rosa’s strategy of wearing a clown suit in Monsiváis’s “La utopía indocumentada” (56).

46. The banner and the posters featured Christina Serna, a Californian Chicana who, along with López and other Chicana queer activists and scholars, has been creating bi-national links with their mexicana counterparts. In the Marcha Lésbica poster and banner, Serna is presented from the side, torso up, flexing her right arm to show off her digitally imprinted tattoo of the Virgen de Guadalupe and La Sirena centered on a thorny heart.

47. Something similar occurred to Astrid Hadad, the subject of the following chapter, when she appeared on Canal 22 wearing her china poblana skirt with the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe: The camera framed the image so that it would stand outside its frame and by so doing prevent it from appearing on television. More than censorship, this is an example of self-censorship, something that affects not just the main television networks Televisa and TVAzteca in Mexico but also the public, educational ones. In Chapter 3 I discuss the issue of self-censorship in Mexico briefly. Something interesting, albeit ironic, or perhaps interesting because it is ironic is the scandal that ensued at the beginning of 2007, when a particular dress was selected from among other possible choices for the reigning Miss Mexico to wear to the 2007 Miss Universe competition that spring had it not been eliminated after much public protest. The dress, designed by María del Rayo Macías Díaz, featured on its long ample skirt historical representations of the Cristero War that tore Mexico apart during the 1920s. The dress’s skirt included a large and front-center image of the Virgen de Guadalupe uncannily similar to the one used by Hadad in her performances. This skirt, sanctioned by the state and the media (Televisa is the producer of such events), was not censored, nor was the Virgen image the reason why the public protested. See the front page of the April 1, 2007, issue of La Jornada.

CHAPTER 2

1. For more information on Astrid Hadad and a glimpse at her aesthetics, I encourage the reader to visit her websites: www.astridhadad.com and www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Picture/6781.

2. Within Chicana/o academic discourse rasquachismo, or the rasquache aesthetic, is a concept used primarily to describe Chicana/o cultural production. See Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Ramón García.

3. The research that Hadad conducted on this once-forgotten figure was used to write the screenplay for the film La reina de la noche/The Queen of the Night (Arturo Ripstein, 1994), but Hadad was not given any credit. For a brief description of this debate, see Alzate’s “Expansiendo los límites del teatro.”

For my analysis of Heavy Nopal I used a video recording from the 1996 version (Monterrey, Mexico), which is the first one I saw. All quotes from Heavy Nopal were derived from my transcription of this video recording; thus no page numbers are given in the body of the text. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

4. To my knowledge, in her performances and in her public presentations Hadad has never come out as lesbian, nor has been outed by others. Of course, this being the case, I am in the awkward position of having knowledge and access to this personal information and thus having the choice to write about Hadad as queer.

5. For an explanation of the concept of ¡entiendes! see the introduction to the collection of critical essays ¡entiendes! Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings (Duke, 1995), coedited by Emilie L. Bergman and Paul Julian Smith.

6. As I noted earlier, I first saw this performance in Monterrey, Mexico, in the mid-1990s; a recorded version of that performance is what I used as my primary text. However, as it is a transmuting performance, I will, in some instances, step away from that one particular Monterrey show. I have seen Hadad do the musical performances and monologues that I analyze here in various locales and numerous times. For those not familiar with her staged shows, in 1999, during the Festival Internacional Cervantino, Hadad performed a version of the Heavy Nopal that I describe and analyze here. I encourage the reader to visit the two-part video that I have uploaded on youtube.com to better appreciate not only Hadad’s onstage delirio but also my nuanced reading of the piece (the first part: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBOS72-ZI48 and second part: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j5CDoXPoVH0).

7. This monologue is indicative of Hadad’s interest in the goddess in history and mythology, something that she has continued to work into
subsequent performances, in particular her show "Oh diosas!" from 2006, also released as a CD.

8. In his article "Heart Attacks: On a Culture of Missed Encounters and Misunderstandings," Olivier Debroise gives a brief account of the destiny of the Coatlícu sculpture in the colonial and postcolonial period. One of the reasons why the gray basalt sculpture (which stands almost three meters high) was reburied was because the viceregal authorities feared "irrational" attention and devotion on the part of the indigenous populations (28–33).

9. For an excellent essay on the confusion/confusion of signifiers and meanings in relationship to the china poblana, see Jeannie L. Gillespie's "Gender, Ethnicity and Piety: The Case of the China Poblana."

10. The postmodern Coatlícu costume was the result of the artistic collaboration between Hadad and visual/conceptual artist Maris Bustamante. As this dress was deteriorating from excessive use, it had to be completely redone, and for this Hadad collaborated with Tijuana/Mexicali writer Rosina Conde, one of the designers and artists who currently work with Hadad in achieving the "plasticity" that has come to define her shows. Another artist who has worked with Hadad in the making of her dresses—as well as being instrumental in injecting the right doses of campy humor—is the director/actor Dario T. Pie. Pie, besides having had small roles in various telenovelas and films, achieved some notoriety when he took briefly to television his successful theatrical show La Roña... se pega, in which he cross-dresses as and parodies the famed diva María Félix, also known as "La Doña." Pie was fired by the media conglomerate Televisa after only three shows. He also has directed and appeared in successful theatrical shows such as La Marta del Zorro, one of the most recent examples of the teatro de revista revival.

11. In Mexican popular culture, to denounce corrupt politicians, one accuses them of "not having a mother," which highlights their unethical comportment.

12. At the very beginning of Heavy Nopal and immediately before the performance of "Gritenme piedras," Hadad walks onstage wearing the same costume and begins to sing another song made popular by Lucha Reyes, "Yo me muero donde quera (I Die Where I Damn Well Please)," written by Federico Ruiz. Taylor's reference to her critique of pollution draws on the fact that Hadad sings this song through a gas mask. With its intentional use of the vernacular "quera," in her performance of this song, in addition to critiquing pollution, Hadad is also critiquing an excessive nationalism. In other words, she is blatantly defying the modus operandi of masculinist constructions of nation that spew an I-only-want-to-be-buried-in-my-homeland rhetoric as exemplified in the famous song's chorus: "Mexicó lindo y querido / si muero lejos de ti / que digan que estoy dormido / y que me traigan aqui" [Beautiful and dear Mexico / If I die far away from you / let them say that I am asleep / and have them bring me back here].

13. In her follow-up study, Butler does explain that drag (male-to-female impersonation) does have limitations in the subversion of these structures,
see Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’ (1993). In a sense Hadad is advancing the critical intervention that Mexican (popular) male cross-dressers are undertaking to demonstrate the construction of gendered identities.

14. I agree with Moe Meyer, who argues that Sontag did not detach the notion of camp from its homosexual connotation but merely “sanitized” it for a wider public, rendering it popular, see Meyer’s “Introduction” to The Politics and Poetics of Camp.

15. Butler’s theory of gender performance has also been critiqued on the basis of its dehistoricizing process of gendered constructions. In this sense, “deliberate” camp (because of its doubly coded parody) is historically and culturally more grounded than Butler’s writings.

16. In addition to Robertson and Garcia, see Andrew Ross’s “Uses of Camp” and Moe Meyer’s “Introduction” to The Politics and Poetics of Camp. Particularly helpful is the work of José E. Muñoz; see his Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.

17. In the documentary Astrid Hadad: La Tequilera (Aurélie Semichon and Pierre Favre, 2001), the filmmakers interview a number of audience members, many of whom are women who have gathered in groups to attend one of Hadad’s performances. Many of these women divulge how they both identify with and are made uncomfortable by what Hadad does onstage. See Astrid Hadad: La Tequilera.

18. This quote comes from the introductory essay [no title, no date] by Olivier Debroise that appeared on Hadad’s original website: www.redint.com/astrid, no longer accessible. I visited [and printed the contents of] the page on December 2, 1998.

19. In Astrid Hadad: La Tequilera Astrid Hadad and Lucy Orozco discuss the origins of this concept. Orozco states: “Y yo dije: pues, eres como una rockera ranchera; porque no le ponemos heavy, porque eres muy heavy y nopal porque Astrid siempre tenía un elemento mexicano, que normalmente era un nopal. Y entonces, una noche buscando un título para un espectáculo que iba a llevar de gira. . . . le dije Heavy Nopal porque eres Heavy y Ranchera” (And I said: well, you are like a ranchera rocker, why don’t we use “heavy” because you are “Heavy” and “nopal” because Astrid always had a Mexican symbol that would usually be a nopal. Then, one night we were in search of a title for a show she was going to tour with. . . . I told her Heavy Nopal because you are “Heavy” and Ranchera).

20. Chapter 3 focuses on Hadad’s fellow political cabareteras.

21. In his book-length study, Berlin Cabaret, Peter Jelavich discusses how a number of late-nineteenth-century playwrights started to mix vaudeville and variety theatre techniques with their own socially satirical dramas to create early forms of cabaret (20–30). Oskar Panizza—a highly important figure in the work of theatre director/cabaret performance artist Jesusa Rodriguez who was one of these controversial playwrights—wrote on the effect that variety shows and vaudeville had on his own work: “Whoever
sees a serpentine-dance with its ravishing mysticism in the evening cannot quietly sit down the next morning and continue to write a fifth act in the classical mode” (quoted in Javelich, 1993: 25). Witnessing such popular performances transformed not only these playwrights’ work but also the sensibilities of the audiences that attended these spectacles (Javelich, 24–25). The cultural hierarchies of the nineteenth century in Europe were being shaken by the popular performance practices, and artists were aware of this shift in creation and reception, which, in turn, affected their own production. This continued to the early part of the twentieth century and among those artists in the avant-garde movements of futurism and Dadaism.

22. As I said before, in Chapter 3 I will elaborate more on these earlier forms of popular theater in Mexico but with the intention of linking them to melodrama and, in more specific terms, the ways in which they are incorporated into contemporary cabaret político performances.

23. After recording her first two CDs with the independent label Discos Cabaret—Ay! and Corazón Sangrante/Bleeding Heart (1995)—Hadad signed with Discos Continental, which later rereleased the previous two recordings under the names El calcetín/The Sock and Corazón Sangrante, respectively. In 2000, Hadad and Los Tarzanes recorded their third and first live CD, Astrid Hadad y su Heavy Nopal, and in 2003 she released La cuchilla/The Shaving Knife [2003]. Since then, Hadad has released two more CDs: ¡Oh diosas! [a play on words that translates as Oh, Goddesses, but, if the two words are read together, it can be read as “odiosas” [hated ones]] and Pecadora [Female Sinner, with religious connotations]. See www.myspace.com/astridhadadproductions.

24. The Centro Universitario de Teatro is the theatre and drama school of Mexico’s Autonomous University, the UNAM. Biographical and professional information on Hadad has been gathered in a number of ways: an early press packet that contained a brief biographical essay; her current press kit on CD-Rom, which contains her curriculum vitae; newspaper articles; and personal conversations I had with the artist in July 1997, March and June 1998, July 1999, July 2001, and August and October 2003.

25. Rodríguez used a similar strategy in her filmed interpretation of another Mozart opera, Cosi Fan Tutte (o La Escuela de los Amantes) [1996–1997]; in this nonliteral adaptation of Mozart, high art (opera) meets Mexican popular culture (the lucha libre or wrestling subculture in Mexico and the B-movies featuring the famed lucha libre wrestler-hero Santo “El Enmascarado de Plata”).

26. In order to be able to experiment, pay her musicians, and live during this period, Hadad also acted or sang in a number of Televisa-produced telenovelas: Teresa [1988], Yo no creo en los hombres/I Don’t Believe in Men [1991], Los secretas intenciones/Secret Intentions [1993] and Cenide bien/Well-To-Do People [1997]. In addition to these telenovelas, she also appeared in Alfonso Cuaron’s first full-length feature, Sólo con tu pareja/Only with Your Partner [1991].
27. The reason why I say Thalía is not so much because of the interview with Alzate but because of the manner in which Hadad uses Thalía in her performances to juxtapose her own aesthetics. For example, before she performs the gitano Spanish song “La bien paga [The Well-Paid One],” she says, “Yo soy la bien paga de mi misma” (I am the well- and self-paid one). This is to foreground her own independence from (and Thalía’s, among others, dependence on) Mexico’s mass-culture industry. I should state that while Hadad signed with a recording company for a few years, her contract did not preclude her from being free to stage the theatrical cabaret spectacles that have made her (in)famous.

28. From Rosario Castellanos’s “Meditación en el umbral,” in which—after listing some of the most prominent historical, mythical, or literary female figures (from Madame Bovary to Safo and from Sor Juana to Mary Magdalene)—she asks if it is possible to be different: “Otro modo de ser humano y libre. / Otro modo de ser.” [Another way of being human and free. / Another way of being [in Poesía no eres tú, 1972, 1993: 316].]

29. In Chapter 3 I discuss the competing definitions of “cabaret” in the Mexican context and how contemporary queer cabareteros appropriate it. Also, in the second chapter of my doctoral dissertation, I draw a link between critical intervention in contemporary Mexican and Chicana/o performance and political criticism in earlier popular theatrical forms. See Performing Identities: Chicana and Mexicana Performance Art in the 90s [University of Wisconsin, 2000].

30. This revival of critical interventions in live entertainment has been thriving more or less since 1988, when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (presidential candidate for the left-of-center opposition party, the Partido Revolucionario Democrático [PRD]) lost in an obviously fraudulent electoral process. This moment signaled a shift in the national imaginary: Mexico’s much-needed and longed-for transition to democracy (thirty years in the making) was not only put into question but seemed far from sight. The crude “awakening” that Mexico was not a democracy—where citizens had the right to demonstrate their objection and demand change—took place when student protestors and union leaders were massacred in the Plaza de Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. However, with the Zapatista uprising in the state of Chiapas in 1994 and with Cárdenas’s election as mayor of Mexico City in 1997, democracy (for some) seems or seemed to be peering through and altering the Mexican sociopolitical landscape. Nevertheless, coinciding with the indigenous and popular uprising in Chiapas, Mexico’s neoliberal policies, in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), became entrenched the same year. This restructuring of the Mexican economy has undoubtedly benefited a number of people, the majority of whom have been entrepreneurs from the higher echelons or ruling classes of Mexican society. NAFTA has affected negatively primarily those from the popular classes and many from the middle class, the latter having suffered more acutely since the 2000 election to the presidency of a Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) candidate, Vicente Fox. Between 1988 and 2000, Mexico has experienced
blatant political corruption: money laundering, governmental links to drug lords, electoral fraud, multiple high-profile political (and as yet unresolved) assassinations, and an even more perverse U.S. invasion, all under the guise of neoliberalism.

31. I am borrowing the term “scattered hegemonies” from Indepal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, who have used the term to characterize the different and sometimes discreet forms of oppression women suffer. See their introduction to *Scattered Hegemonies*.

32. See the section entitled “Revista costumbrista o nacionalista” in Duenas’s and Flores y Escalantes’s *Teatro Mexicano: historia y dramaturgia*, 21-27. While the authors concentrate on popular male actors of the *frívolo* stages, they mention two other women who were also popular comedic actresses, Elena Ureña and Celia Padilla.

33. This linguistic practice continues to be associated with a Mexican-specific comedic strategy and is ever-present in films from the 1970s and 1980s—films like *Mecánica nacional* (Luis Alcoriza, 1972)—and, presently, in television shows in Mexico—for example *La hora pico*—many of which are transmitted in the United States via the Spanish-language television network Univisión, which has ties to the Mexican mass-media conglomerate Televisa.

34. The strategic use of femininity as masquerade by these early twentieth-century artists is a discussion that merits more attention than I can devote at this moment. However, self-conscious use of femininity by these *vedettes* was similar to that of Mae West and, later, Carmen Miranda both in Brazil and in her sojourn in the United States.

35. In 1942 Gilberto Martínez Solares directed *Yo bailé con don Porfirio*, a film that “rescues” much from the theatrical performances of the Porfrian period [1876, 1877–1880, and 1884–1911]. In the film the singer, dancer, and actress Mapy Cortés plays the role of a *revista* star and performs “La gatita blanca” in one of the major theaters in Mexico City during the Porfrian dictatorship and scandalizes and delights the mostly elite audience.

36. Gender transgression is, however, not specifically connected to postrevolutionary discourse. Mexican historian Gabriela Cano has done amazing archival work to unearth the ways in which dominant notions of masculinity were disrupted by virtue of a biologically born woman who passed as a man during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the rest of her life. See her essay “Unconceivable Realities of Desire” in *Sex in Revolution*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano.

37. I will resist trying to translate these lyrics as their nonsensical characteristic makes them, for the most part, untranslatable.

38. Emilio “El Indio” Fernández (1904–1986), arguably the most recognized filmmaker in the Mexican film industry, wrote as well as acted in some of his most famous films. Fernández worked alongside cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa and some of the most iconic actors and actresses (Maria Felix, Dolores del Rio, Pedro Armendariz) to propel Mexican cinema to international recognition during the golden age period. His hypermasculine on- and offscreen persona is evident in films such as *María Candelaria* (1943),...
La perla/The Pearl (1945), Enamorada/The Woman in Love (1946), and "Víctimas del pecado/Victims of Sin (1950), a film I reference in Chapter 3.

39. An interesting and almost coincidental response to the "beaten woman" figure—an image that is constantly being replicated in Mexican visual popular culture—is the film De cuerpo presente/Present Body (1997) by Marcela Fernández Violante. In the late 1990s Fernández Violante was asked to produce a half-hour film summarizing Mexican cinema of the past hundred years that would be part of the larger film project Enredando sombras/Weaving Shadows that was being coordinated by Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa to mark the centenary of film production in Latin America. Enredando sombras is a collection of different Latin American auteur films that was to be part of a film festival in Havana, Cuba. Rather than producing a classic documentary, Fernández Violante (with the collaboration of video artist Ximena Cuevas) produced a montage documentary by splicing and compiling scenes from classic Mexican melodramas in which men have slapped women (and a few in which the roles had been reversed, particularly at the "hand" of the actress María Félix). This is undoubtedly a feminist intervention that acknowledges the pervasive images that have been ingrained in the Mexican psyche through the repetitive gestures—not only by the similarity of their plots [these films all narrate the same basic story regarding gendered relations] but also by those of video releases and televsional reruns—as well as critiques the main contributors of the classic melodrama in Mexico who, with the exceptions of Adela Sequeyro and Matilde Landeta, were all men.

40. For a closer analysis of the reworking of popular visual culture in the work of Hadad, see my article "Reframing the Retablo: Mexican Feminist Critical Practice in Ximena Cuevas's Corazón Sangrante," in Feminist Media Studies.

41. In her most recent presentations [both in Mexico and the United States] of "Soy virgencita," Hadad chooses to perform the song bilingually to comment on, among other things, the way in which Latin American art has become such a hot commodity.

42. A piropo such as this one is more than a compliment (usually directed toward a woman by a man); in this instance it is more like a catcall, highlighting a suggestion of sexual engagement at night, away from the purview of the watchful eye of the parents and/or father figure. My translation here is literal and loses much of the innuendoes of the Mexican piropo.

43. Another possible interpretation of this verse could be that Hadad is reversing this masculine threat. Knowing that it is a woman underneath the moustache, hat, and language, Hadad is critiquing masculine impotence or how masculinity has been constructed to be intrinsically connected with erectile dysfunction: "in the end you can't."

44. I am not arguing that the members of Hadad's audience will apply this terminology to her work, or that they will consider Pardave as representative of "high camp." Rather, what I am trying to prove is that Hadad's spectators (particularly if Mexican) will be able to identify the
cultural references in her work given their shared social, cultural, and historical memories and will know that she is parodying these constructed and discursive memories.

45. I should clarify that Juan Gabriel's music is very popular among people of Mexican descent residing in the United States, too. He was born in the state of Michoacán but raised in the border city of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Having been raised an orphan (no last name for his stage name!), he is now a transnational popular cultural icon. Juan Gabriel repeatedly tours in the United States, where his concerts sell out.

46. The popular Julio Zavala is the most recognized Juan Gabriel impersonator.

47. Here Hadad points to the Afro-Cuban member of Los Tarzanes who is repeatedly denied a visa to the United States.

CHAPTER 3

1. In Chapter 2 of Performing Mexicanidad, I describe Hadad's strategy of delirio as an apparently nonsensical and frenzied stage behavior. This strategy, I contend, is also deployed by the other political cabareteros working within the context of contemporary Mexico whom I examine here.

2. In the introduction I discuss the implications embedded in the network of translations in relationship to differences: national, cultural, gender, and sexual. But also how my project and I, as a bilingual and bicultural critic, are both part of that network of trans-lations, that is, part of the movement of words, concepts, theories, and products across “borders.”

3. It is important to mention at this point that my use of performance to describe this politically charged form of theatrical activity follows a U.S.-based performance-studies trend that incorporates any form of theatrical and social performance under the catchall term performance. Thus, what in U.S. academic discourses is considered performance, in contemporary Mexican performance production the use of the anglicized word el performance is used to describe the artistic production coming from the visual arts, or artes plásticas. In U.S.-based performance studies then, what falls under the rubric of cabaret politico would be considered performance. In Diana Taylor's "Opening Remarks" in Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America and her chapter “Acts of Transfer” in The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas, she alludes to this divide. Two principal performance studies scholars who are working more directly on the politics of performance definition in the context of Mexico are Antonio Prieto-Stambaugh and Amy Sara Carroll.

4. See Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess (1976). Carlos Monsivais's translations are mine; from here on, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.