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# Performing nation in the twenty first century: female bodies and voices of greater Mexico

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# PERFORMING NATION IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY: FEMALE BODIES AND VOICES OF GREATER MEXICO

by

Kathleen Angelique Dwyer

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
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The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Denise K. Filios
Assistant Professor Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes how three female artists of Greater Mexico (the Mexican cabaret artist Astrid Hadad, the Mexican-American singer Lila Downs and the Chicana digital artist Alma López) construct and represent national, ethnic, and gender identity in their performances within a border and/or transnational context. I explore how their choice of art form facilitates the construction of their own identities. My theoretical methodology embraces a cultural-studies approach to dramatic, visual and performative texts. All of these play an important role in redefining female Chicana/Mexican-American/Mexicana identity as a site of cultural and political contestation and struggle. The interdisciplinary character of this project corresponds to the nature of performance itself and to the search for female identity formation within Greater Mexico.

I use the term Performing Nation to focus on how these artists embody and enact specific regional and national identities through, among others, costume choice, vocal inflection, song choice and imagery. The Mexican cabaret singer Astrid Hadad ironically performs Mexico through cabaret. Her humorous critiques of Mexican gender norms encourage her audience to envision a more egalitarian future for Mexico. The Mexican-American pop singer Lila Downs performs Greater Mexico through folk culture. I discuss how her oscillation between the new and the "authentic" promotes the idea that folklore is malleable and willing to change. The Chicana visual media artist Alma López performs a queer Greater Mexico in cyberspace through digital art. I show how her play on female dualisms found in Mexican and Chicano culture helps open a space for the contemporary Lesbian Chicana.

In their work these artists play with iconography from the Post-Mexican Revolution period. Astrid Hadad highlights female figures such as La Soldadera, La Muerte, Coatlicue, La Virgen de Guadalupe and Frida Kahlo that are important to Mexican culture. Downs incorporates imagery through myth and storytelling, both central

to her performances. Alma López plays on indigenous and Chicano art in her digital prints. Through the absorption of symbolic, religious and popular iconography these artists construct mobile identities that extend the Mexican cultural sphere across the northern border into the U.S. The porous nature of the border enables these northern identities to circulate back to Mexico. By participating in this cross-border identity building process, Hadad, Downs and López situate themselves as public figures, as women artists, within the Greater Mexico that they are reshaping.

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Kathleen Angelique Dwyer

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for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
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To Holly, for reminding me of Martha Luna,
and to all of the women in my life,
especially my daughter.

*"Cada uno de nosotros lleva 'su' México y 'su' Estados Unidos consigo mismo."*

Carlos Fuentes
Gringo viejo

*"Soy del sur y del norte, crecí zurda y norteada."*

Gina Valdés
Comiendo lumbre

*"I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry home on my back."*

Gloria Anzaldúa
Borderlands/La frontera

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This dissertation analyzes how three female artists of Greater Mexico (the Mexican cabaret artist Astrid Hadad, the Mexican-American singer Lila Downs and the Chicana digital artist Alma López) construct and represent national, ethnic, and gender identity in their performances within a border and/or transnational context. I explore how their choice of art form facilitates the construction of their own identities. My theoretical methodology embraces a cultural-studies approach to dramatic, visual and performative texts. All of these play an important role in redefining female Chicana/Mexican-American/Mexicana identity as a site of cultural and political contestation and struggle. The interdisciplinary character of this project corresponds to the nature of performance itself and to the search for female identity formation within Greater Mexico.

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# INTRODUCTION

This dissertation analyzes how three female artists of Greater Mexico construct and represent national, ethnic, and gender identity in their performances within a border and/or transnational context. This study explores how their choice of art form facilitates the construction of their own identities. In my analysis I take into consideration the notion of performance as a theory of identity as opposed to performing the everyday life.

My theoretical methodology embraces a cultural-studies approach to dramatic, visual and performative texts. All of these play an important role in redefining female Chicana/Americana/ Mexicana identity as a site of cultural and political contestation and struggle. The interdisciplinary character of my dissertation corresponds to the nature of performance itself and to the search for female identity formation within Greater Mexico.

It is important to mention that though the three artists I study here – Lila Downs, Astrid Hadad and Alma López – are not performance artists per se their work can be described as *performative* (particularly in the case of Hadad). The intention is not to propose these women as performance artists, but rather to study their artistic work through the lens of performance studies as a means of better understanding identity, belonging, and citizenship in our current time. My interest in choosing these three women relies in working with artists from Mexico and the U.S. (or to reference Américo Paredes "Greater Mexico") who deal with identities in struggle and negotiation, and who do this particularly through the incorporation of multiple genres and disciplines.

In their work these artists incorporate iconography from the Post-Mexican Revolution period, a crucial time in the construction of the modern Mexican nation. Astrid Hadad highlights female figures that are important to Mexican culture like La

Soldadera or Adelita, La Muerte and Frida Kahlo. Downs incorporates imagery through myth and storytelling, both of which are central to her performances. Her songs on "Malinche" and "La llorona" are examples of this. Alma López plays draws upon indigenous and Chicano art in her digital prints. She appropriates female images like La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Sirena and Ixtaccihuatl. Through their integration of symbolic, religious and popular iconography these artists perform Greater Mexico. Through the absorption of symbolic, religious and popular iconography these artists also construct mobile identities that extend the Mexican cultural sphere across the northern border into the U.S.

Lila Downs, Astrid Hadad and Alma López perform their identity/identities in their off-stage personae, which is evident through their manners of dress, their speech, their hairstyles, where they live, their names, etc. As artists, they are conscious that their image is an embodiment of identity. They perform their onstage identity/identities through the use of different artistic mediums: music, cabaret and digital art. Each artistic genre tends to be linked to a space or in some cases, to multiple spaces. The combination of the two –genre and space– dictates the tone, set up, costume and ambiance of the artistic piece. A space can be a physical location such as La Bodega del Bataclán, the cabaret/theater in Mexico City where Hadad performs regularly on Friday and Saturday nights. A space can equally be metaphorical and is attained by placing oneself in-between grounds. López's "Our Lady" is a digital photograph of a woman wearing a 1940s-style bikini made out of roses, posing as la Virgen de Guadalupe. Her cape is digitally edited to include fragments of female Aztec images, which indicate López's incorporation of Aztec heritage, as read through Chicano nationalism. "Our Lady" stands on a black moon

that is being carried by a topless butch angel with (viceroy) butterfly wings. The metaphorical space that is being articulated is that of the Lesbian Chicana in contemporary society. Each artistic genre, or the overlapping of genres, used by the three artists in question mediates what they communicate. Recalling Marshall McLuhan's basic concept of communication (an emitter, a message and a receiver), the genre envelops the particular message. This affects how it is emitted, as well as how it is received by the public, which is why I have decided to focus each of the following chapters around the notion of genre –specifically, cabaret, folk and digital art.

Throughout my dissertation I focus on key terms that I use as theoretical groundwork. These terms are Transnational, Greater Mexico, Performance and Performing Nation. In what follows I will discuss the terms in turn with an emphasis on spatial concepts.

## Key Concepts

According to Neil Smith in "Homeless/Global: Scaling Places" a vast amount of social and cultural theory in the latter part of the twentieth century has depended heavily on spatial metaphors, such as subject positionality, locality, mapping, grounding, travel, (de/re) centering, theoretical space, ideological space, symbolic space, conceptual space and space of signification. Smith finds that these spatial metaphors see space as dead (98). In the work of Gloria Anzaldúa the contrary seems to be said. The Borderlands are described poetically as an "open wound" or "*herida abierta*," which bleeds against the fence that grates it. Her personification of the Borderlands gives it life. The same can be said in Gina Valdes' poetry. In "Where You From?" she writes of her daily crossing from Los Angeles to Ensenada and ends with "the word *frontera* splits on my tongue" (9). In

this sense, the poetic voice embodies the Borderlands through bilingualism; thus, it is alive.

According to Smith, geographers, physicists and philosophers recognize what is called "absolute space," conceptualized as a space that is "represented as a field or container, within which the location of all objects and events can be fixed using a simple coordinate system" (99). However, he argues that metaphorical space finds its richness by looking at a material place. In other words, the combination of the two elements produces the best results. This incorporation of both metaphorical and material spaces is a technique that Hadad, Downs and López attribute to their work in different ways. In Hadad's 1995 album Ay the cover reveals a painted headshot of Hadad wearing a red felt *sombrero de charro* with silver accents. Her hair is braided, her earrings are big, and her make-up is dark and heavy adding to the drama within *ranchera* music. Physically, Hadad's head is raised, and she is singing what seems to be a *grito* or cry. These elements are essential to the performance of this genre. On the cover, the words *"y ha sido llorar y llorar"* are placed by Hadad's mouth, representing the words she is singing. Her body is submerged in water all the way up to her neck. The material space for this image is a CD cover in which there is a figure drowning in a body of water. The metaphorical space is the victimized position of suffering into which Mexicans, and specifically Mexican women, are placed. Yet, in spite of the suffering and the complaining, the singing always continues. In Downs' 2001 album Border/La línea she is featured on the cover wearing a black *huipil* with orange embroidery, braided hair, dark lipstick and eclectically beaded necklaces. The landscape behind her is the U.S./Mexico border. The material space is both the CD cover and the desert on which she stands. The metaphorical space is embodied within Downs, a Mexican woman who grew up in two countries. López's 1997

digital print "California Fashion Slaves" features an old black-and-white photo of (presumably) Chicana seamstresses. In the forefront, there is a photo in color of a woman (Macrina López) sewing what appears to be the Virgen de Guadalupe's cape. These images overlap the Los Angeles skyline. An image of Coyolxauhqui hangs in the sky, and at the bottom of the print, the U.S./Mexico border is overlaid with an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the date 1848 and the words "Manifest Destiny."[1] The material space the artist uses is the state of California, juxtaposing the border to Los Angeles, the big city. The metaphorical space that is being argued here is a space of recognition for Chicanos, specifically for Chicanas, who have over the decades and perhaps throughout the century, been "slaves" to the fashion industry.

## Transnational

I use the term "transnational" as a spatial concept that references geographic and/or metaphoric spaces. I also incorporate it as a theory of identity because of how it informs the construction of identities within the work of the artists in question, as well as the construction of identity present within the current landscape of the United States.

In the introduction to Minor Transnationalisms, Lionnet and Shih explain that "The transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents"(5) in other words, subjects that situate themselves on liminal grounds (literally and metaphorically speaking), like the borders between nations, the limits between cities or the streets that separate certain urban neighborhoods. "The transnational (…) can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization

[1] Coyolxauhqui was the daughter of Coatlicue, mother of all things in the Aztec philosophy. This image is part of López's collection entitled "1848: Chicanos in the U.S. Landscape After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," which will be discussed and fully addressed in Chapter Three, which features López's work.

occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center" (5). Can there be a transnational body? If we understand the body as a physical "space of exchange and participation," as stated above, this is so. In the same regard, identities that travel across physical and metaphorical boundaries are transnational identities.

Currently, across the world, not only are economic goods being exported and imported, but also people are doing the same, traveling back and forth, some remaining in a different land and settling for generations to come. A struggle and negotiation of identity (or identities) is only natural under these circumstances. The cultural production created by these (transnational) peoples will naturally travel back and forth, across, and between nations. Lionnet and Shih begin their study with the notion that "Transnationalism is part and parcel of the process of globalization" (5). The journey of music (as well as other forms of media and popular culture) traveling throughout the world is one of the clearest examples today of globalization and transnationalism. It is what allows a Pakistani man living in Seattle to hear his country's national music on his satellite dish TV, or a college student in Toronto to download a techno pod-cast from a dance club in Amsterdam. Although Lionnet and Shih see the transnational as "not bound by the binary of the local and the global and occur[ing] in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities" (6). They also clarify that when speaking of minor, or minoritized transnationalism, a re-evaluation needs to take place. In such cases "the minority and the diasporic live within the space of increasing global integration brought on by globalizing forces in communication, migration, and capital flow, within the circulation of global cultures, ideas, and capital" (7). To this

effect Lipsitz argues that popular culture needs to be further explored "as a mechanism of communication and education, as a site for experimentation with cultural and social roles not yet possible in politics" (17). His book deals with the crossroads of contemporary culture, focusing on place and politics. He examines a plurality of practices within popular music to understand how popular culture contains different meanings in different countries. The book is based on the premise that the power of transnational capital means that all of us must become transnational, too.

## Greater Mexico

Greater Mexico, a term coined by Américo Paredes in his 1958 study With His Pistol in His Hand, was initially used to describe the American Southwest or the U.S./Mexico border.[2] The concept of Greater Mexico was further explored by José Limón, in American Encounters, who explains that the term "refer(s) to all Mexicans, beyond Laredo and from either side, with all their commonalities and differences" (3). Héctor Calderón calls it "América Mexicana" in his book Narratives of Greater Mexico in which he studies the work of Chicano writers and their incorporation of the Borderlands in their work either as a location, subject or as a framework. Lynn Stephen suggests that the term Greater Mexico is used broadly to incorporate other cities within

[2] This geographic area has later been reimagined as Aztlán and the Borderlands. Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs, was used by the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s as a way claim a historical justification for the Mexican presence in the southwest. The term has been used by scholars, intellectuals and activists as a banner for the Chicano community. In the 1980s, Gloria Anzaldúa proposed a reformation of this Chicano homeland as a space that she named the Borderlands.

the U.S. that have large populations of Spanish speakers of Mexican heritage, like Chicago, New York or Philadelphia.[3]

## Performance

We perform our identity, or make it evident, through distinct markers such as language, dress and behavior, which label us as members of particular groups. The interpretation or de-codification of these markers depends on the recognition done by other social beings. The recognition depends on a shared understanding of the meaning of these markers. The similarities and commonalities of these markers usually define in which group the person chooses (or is chosen) to belong. Identity negotiation occurs as a process in which a person negotiates with society at large which group, if any, he or she becomes identified with. The body plays a key role here in that through the employment of specific markers, it brings to life a particular identity. With regards to this notion, Neil Smith argues that the body is "the primary physical site of personal identity" (102). He argues that it marks the boundary between self and other, as well as focusing on the construction of what he calls a "personal space." This notion, then, serves as a basis upon which to study the analysis of a performance of identity. The physical body becomes central to this study, and to the understanding of performance theory and practice, as it focuses on the subject and not on the object.

Identity can be seen as having opposite tendencies: on one hand, it is tied to common ancestry, heritage and biological characteristics; and on the other, it can be seen as a political choice. Some aspects of identity are elective; others, however, are unintentional and normative. There are some social aspects a person can control about his or her identity, and others that cannot be controlled. So, even though you can change your

[3] In "Expanding Borderlands" Stephen argues that: "[r]ecent U.S. scholarship in the field of immigration studies has embraced the idea of foregrounding the large Mexican population in many parts of the United States as a part of greater Mexico, thereby extending the borderlands concept to include geographic parts of the United States far from the southern border, such as Chicago and New York."

hair color by dying it you may not be able to mute your Anglo accent when you speak Spanish. How these opposite tendencies are read change according to the location in which they are practiced. In "The Story of My Body," to return to this example, Ortiz Cofer writes about being seen as "white" in her native Puerto Rico, but being seen as "brown" in the U.S. Because class within society is attached to race, she experienced firsthand discrimination.[4]

If we view identity as a process of becoming self-aware and of belonging to a particular community of people, and we view people as primarily social beings, then the performance of a specific identity pre-exists the self-awareness of identity. If we view performance, as leading performance theorists Richard Schechner and Marvin Carlson do, from the perspective of ritual, play, and from an anthropological standpoint then it is something that occurs in all human beings before they even analyze their actions.

In psychology, the collection of social roles that a person might play is known as either social identity or cultural identity. Judith Butler's theory of identity applies the notion of performativity to gender. The term has also been used actively in the fields of anthropology and linguistics. In Butler's use of the term performance, the body becomes central, as it is the medium that brings a particular gendered identity to life.

Generally speaking, and within a performing arts context, a performance is an event in which one group of people (the performer[s]) behaves in a particular way for another group of people (the audience). Sometimes the dividing line between these two groups can become blurred, as in the case of Brecht's "participatory theatre" where audience members have the option of getting involved in the production.

Within performance studies, a performance, at its most basic definition, requires three elements: a space; a person crossing that space; and another person watching.

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[4] Ortiz-Cofer, Judith. "The Story of My Body." Patricia Foster, ed. Minding The Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul. New York: Doubleday. 1994.

Although this definition is broad, most performance theorists (Schechner, Carlson, Taylor, Turner) agree on these three elements as basic components of what entitles a performance. Some variations occur with regards to the particulars for each element, one of which states that the third person watching the performance can be the self with a socially conscious eye. With regards to space, some theorists (Goffman, Evreinoff) include all social spaces and social events; others limit it to artistic stages. Richard Schechner provides an inclusive and broad definition of performance:

> Performance must be construed as a 'broad spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, performance arts, and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing and shamanism, the media, and the internet. (…) The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance. (2)

Schechner differentiates between what *is* a performance piece and what can been studied or seen *as* performance. I will elaborate on this further ahead.

In Diana Taylor's introduction to "Negotiating Performance," she argues that the term "performance" and specifically the verb "performing" "allow for agency, which opens the way for resistance and oppositional spectacles" (xxii). Agency and resistance are two central elements in performance art. As a genre born from the avant-garde, performance art is opposed to traditional representations where actors/subjects and audience members are passive. Rather, it focuses on opposition (and creation) through the resistance of existing models. In both Carlson's and Schechner's introductory books on performance, there is a vast range of disciplines that have been mentioned as having been influenced *by* or having been an influence *on* what is known as the study of

performance.[5] Within those disciplines, a wide range of practices, theorists, artists and performers are mentioned, which heightens the nature of performance as an eclectic and collaborative discipline.

Erving Goffman sees social behavior as performance; that is, he sees social life as theatrical, because he finds that life itself has many dramatic qualities. Goffman, being among the first to study performance in every day life, argues that all social encounters have a theatrical aspect to them. A theorist mentioned in Schechner's Performance Studies is Nicholas Evreinoff, a Russian playwright, who talked about the theatrical qualities present in mundane activities. In his book The Never Ending Show he argued that every individual in society is constantly playing a part and the director of the show is the self. Both Goffman and Evreinoff see their quotidian surroundings as theatrical, as performative. This notion, however, is problematic. Are we to assume that *everything* is a performance? Even when there is no one observing? Goffman's answer would be to say that there *is* someone watching: the self. That self comes to represent the (inner) voice of society. Schechner argues that not everything is performance, but rather, that everything can be seen or read *as* performance. That is, brushing your teeth while you look at yourself in the mirror is not a performance, but we could look at it as if it were one. If we part from Schechner's definition of performance as "being, doing and showing doing" (that is, being in a physical place, employing an action, and having someone witness that action), then we could argue that Goffman's definition of performance is valid even here, because that witness is oneself. Goffman's perspective can be read as controversial. However, I find it convincing because as human beings we are always looking for ways

[5] Performance: An Introduction and Performance Studies, respectively.

to communicate with others, to belong to a community, to be accepted, and to accept ourselves. Therefore, that "inner voice" or "inner eye," is always present within ourselves. Carlson agrees with Goffman to a certain extent. He believes that all human activity can potentially be seen as performance because the activity is done with a consciousness of itself. The difference, however, between "performing" and "doing" something is in the attitude with which it's done. It will be a performance as long as it's *for* someone (an audience) who will ultimately recognize it as such. For Carlson, this even applies if the audience is the self. Some theorists disagree with Goffman and Carlson, as they clearly separate performance from everyday life. In The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau distinguishes between "strategies" which have a script, or a text that guides them and serves as framework, and "tactics," which are spontaneous moments. Schechner also provides a distinction between the two. He calls "make believe performance" that which has very clearly marked boundaries between everyday life and performance, and "make belief performance" that which intentionally blurs both. Another approach to the study of performance is that of Victor Turner, who looks at performance through the broad lens of anthropology, taking in consideration ritual, rites of passage, play, social contexts and theater. Schechner also has a theatrical/anthropological approach that focuses on behavior as the object of study. Both Turner and Schechner have worked together and compiled a list of types of performances, which range from rituals, rites of passage, ceremonies, arts, everyday activities, leisure, business, play, technology, sports, games, etc. Turner looks at cultural performances and believes they show not only a shared humanity but also unique aspects within particular communities.

Judith Butler's multidisciplinary approach on the subject fuses linguistics, psychoanalysis and identity. She looks at performance through the eyes of gender. In her essay "Performative Acts," she borrows from Beauvoir's notion of women not being born women, but rather "becoming" women –that is, being molded by society into women. She argues that every individual, from the moment he or she is born, has a "his" or "her" notion violently imposed by society, which has a fundamental role in identity formation. Gender is, then, performed, acted out. Each gender (male/female) learns to perform his or her gender, specifically through tone of voice, by taste in clothing (color choice, etc.), the use of perfume, the way in which he/she walks or carries him-/herself, and the use of gestures, sitting positions, etc. She uses the example of men in drag to show that when they mimic the opposite sex they reveal the nature of mimicking within the performance of gender itself. Butler argues that gender consists of a repetition of acts. The individual must have enough time to memorize and produce these acts as if they were "natural." Ultimately, Butler is interested in the cultural transformations of gender (if any, or in the possibilities of there being some) through these corporeal acts –that is, what results (if anything) from these socially constructed roles that men and women are forced to take on and reenact every day. This approach is groundbreaking in that it contests commonly known, or traditional, patriarchal constructions of identity. It is useful in understanding her constructionist point of view, which opposes that of most feminists who fight for female agency against a patriarchal society. Butler does not direct her argument to the opposite sex to fight against it; instead she directs her argument to society as a whole by addressing how we have constructed our own views of identity in a patriarchal way. In my dissertation I use both constructionist theories of identity, such as Butler's, as well as

materialist theories, which accept that race and gender are biological and not only social constructs.

In the understanding and study of performance, it is important to consider all of these approaches so as to have an ample background on the subject. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will be studying performance as essential to identity formation. The perspective employed is that of Schechner, who delineates between what is performance and what can be studied as such. The latter applies to this case.

## Performing Nation

I use the term Performing Nation to focus on how Hadad, Downs and López embody and enact specific regional and national identities through their choice of costume, vocal inflection, song and imagery. How do the artists at hand perform nation? Both Hadad and Downs perform nation by referencing the work of famous Mexican female singers. They reproduce classic *rancheras* written by men and sung by both men and women. "La tequilera" is a *ranchera* written especially for 1930s actress Lucha Reyes, who epitomized the lyrics of the song in her everyday performance of self. In other words, the song was written *about* her, as much as *for* her. This same song is performed by both Hadad and Downs in very different ways, which exemplify how each performs nation. As a cabaret artist, Hadad performs this song as sung by Reyes (with minor changes in the intro and chorus) but alters it through her stage performance of the piece. Hadad performs Mexico from within the nation. Downs alters the song itself by changing it from a *ranchera* to a *corrido*, referencing migrant peoples of the Borderlands. With this she performs Greater Mexico as a transnation, moving beyond borders. Alma López's wedding photos to Chicana art scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba feature the bride dressed in a white lace dress with colorful Mexican embroidery. Her bridesmaids and flower girls were all in brightly colored Mexican dresses in a similar style. López

performs a queer nation (that responds to Chicana/o constructions of nationalism) in her everyday life as well as in her visual work.[6]

In Nations and States, Hugh Seton-Watson defines nation in the following way: "a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation or behave as if they formed one" (5). Benedict Anderson admires Seton-Watson's work and adds to his definition by arguing that the community "narrates" itself as a nation. He argues that nation is: "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). Anderson believes it is imagined because no matter how small the nation is, the members will never be able to know everyone in their community. These communities are "limited" because of geographical boundaries and "sovereign" because the term was born in the era of Enlightenment and Revolution. Anderson believes a nation is defined as a "community" because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). Nationalism, in other words, is a construction created ("imagined") by a community of people who consider themselves members. Their identification with this nation begins in a very anthropological manner, with rituals, rites of passage, ceremonies, etc. To this effect, Mexican anthropologist Roger Bartra states in La jaula de la melancolía that "*lo mexicano*" does not exist; it is merely imagined and constructed by artists, musicians, intellectuals and writers. "Lo mexicano," he argues, "existe principalmente en los libros y discursos que lo describen o exaltan, y allí es posible encontrar las huellas de su orígen" (17). Bartra calls Mexican nationalism a myth. Furthering this discussion, in Claudio Lomnitz' book on the anthropology of nationalism entitled, Deep Mexico. Silent Mexico, he states:

> Anderson's book explains nationalism as a specific form of communitarianism whose cultural conditions of possibility were

[6] Jesusa Rodríguez and Liliana Felipe made the headlines in La Jornada, Mexico City's left-wing newspaper when they got married on August 3rd, 2007.

> determined by the development of communications media (print capitalism) and colonial statecraft (especially state ritual and state ethnography- for instance, bureaucratic 'pilgrimages,' censuses, and maps) (3).

Hadad, Downs and López incorporate fragments of what Lomnitz mentions as "state ritual" and "state ethnography" into their work in order to, in the case of Downs, add to the credibility of her personal image as "authentic," and in the case of Hadad and López, to reach out to a particular audience, which are Mexicans and Chicanos/as respectively.[7] With regards to audience reception, these cultural signifiers are received and understood as national and/or regional culture by the in-group(s); they are received differently, however, by the out-group(s). The aspect of communitarianism mentioned by Lomnitz is reiterated in the definition of nationalism used by Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood in their book Remaking the Nation, which studies various practices of popular culture throughout Latin America and its relationship to national identity. Radcliffe and Westwood define nationalism as "a movement whereby symbols or belief attribute communality of experience to people in a regional or ethnic category" (15). They go on to say that national identity is "…a wider and more multidimensional category than nationalism, as national identity can exist within subjects (collectively or individually) without there being a process of mobilization around a specific goal. National identities can mean different things to different people even within one nation" (16). National identities can be considered a collective self-awareness or self-consciousness. The commonality for these groups usually pertains to a specific territory, but when looking at

[7] Hadad's audience also consists of an international (mainly European) market, as well as scholars and artists of the U.S. and Latin America. López's audience is primarily Chiacanas/os in the U.S., scholars and artists of the L.A. area, though she is becoming more popular in academia due to her marriage to Gaspar de Alba.

Américo Paredes' Greater Mexico coinage, we find that this is not necessarily so. In the case of all three artists, national identity can be multiple. Hadad is Mexican, but her heritage is Lebanese. She also feels that the Mayan philosophy and the culture of the Caribbean have influenced her.[8] Downs is Mexican-American with Mixteca and British heritage. López is Mexican-American, and she finds comfort in the term Chicana.[9]

What happens when nationality does not match geographical region? Or when the collective subjects' national identity does not match the country in which they reside? Because the artists in question have a multiple ethnic/national identity, and because I observed their performances in Madison (Downs), in Mexico City (Hadad), and in Cyberspace (López), I find it important to distinguish between practices of nationalism within the nation and within a different geographical location –in this case, within Greater Mexico. Radcliffe and Westwood call those who participate in practices of nationalism outside of the nation state as having a "dis-located sense of space" (20). They explain: "There can be a disjuncture between the national place and the national identity; the 'space of the nation' can be imagined by populations which have no 'place' in which to express and consolidate that identity" (20). The answer they propose is that these "dis-located" populations re-create the links between people and place in the new land by creating a social and/or symbolic space, which is dedicated to the belonging of these people and to the separation of "others" not pertaining to it. This space reminds the dislocated people that "we are not they" (26) and separates them from the predominant cultural group living in that land. Although not all immigrants feel nostalgia, certainly

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[8] As stated in the album Ay, 1995.

[9] López refers to herself as a Chicana in www.almalopez.net.

being displaced from one's national grounds may create nostalgia for all that reminds the displaced person of the homeland or *la patria*. Of course, the circumstances for leaving one's country of origin or ancestral homeland (political exile, search for economic growth, professional and/or intellectual development, family, etc.) influence this aspect. Radcliffe and Westwood argue that "…memories, acts of remembering, within spatial/territorial boundaries are crucially productive of national identities and these productions are revisioned within popular cultures through festivals, television, songs and stories articulated with current politics to re-cast the political imaginary" (83). That is, what Schechner would see as basic elements of performance, Radcliffe and Westwood are posing as practices that produce, create and/or reinforce national identities.[10] In "Vodou, Nationalisms and Performance," Kate Ramsey argues that "The 'folkloricization' of national identity through performance (…) has played a big part in twentieth century nationalisms more generally. Yet such formations have often been overlooked or trivialized in scholarship on nationalism…" (346). Perhaps this is because issues of folklore seem to be, placed on a minor scale, as opposed to issues of politics, law or globalization.

This "dis-located sense of space" is timely and relevant in the contemporary U.S. because of globalization, immigration and transnationalism. In the words of Edward Soja, quoted by Radcliffe and Westwood, "we live in times where 'postmodern geographies' are a commonality" (22). What Soja means here, as an urban planner and social critic, is

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[10] "Performance must be construed as a 'broad spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, performance arts, and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing and shamanism, the media, and the internet. (…) The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance" (2).

that our common surroundings –streets, bridges, oceans– and our understanding of them, should no longer be looked at in a static, permanent way. Currently in the U.S., and in many regions of the world, there is a disjunction between territory, language and culture. Because of this, as Radcliffe and Westwood have said, "Identities are not static," and dislocated subjects living in a "dislocated sense of space" have "multiple subject positions" (24), which change and expand in time. Hadad, Downs and López can be viewed in light of these arguments. The inclusive ethnic identification they employ (in their own way) is what Radcliffe and Westwood refer to as multiple subject positionality. I wouldn't say that any of them are living in a dislocated sense of space, but rather that they create, and live, in a Greater Mexican space, which each extends to her audience through her work.

On the topic of national identities within the nation state and abroad, Radcliffe and Westwood define them as those that are "expected to arise from ceremonies and practices which draw citizens into the national sphere. Individuals acquire consciousness of a national identity at the same time as they acquire the national language, an education and other cultural resources" (14). That is, the nation is already socially embedded in the intellect, thanks to what Louis Althusser would term "Ideological State Apparatuses" (303), and because being away from the homeland can make this sense of nostalgia stronger (or weaker) generationally. Nonetheless, the feeling is present whether it be increased or diminished. We can reaffirm these notions by looking again at Ramsey's article, which discusses how the people of Haiti grew closer to their folklore following the occupation of the U.S. Marines (1915-34). Haitians grew close to the term *indigénisme* so as to reaffirm their roots and return to what was important in the

preservation of their culture.[11] While quoting Yúdice, Radcliffe and Westwood mention *Indigenismo* as something that "…was used in the local bourgeoisies' cultural and political battles to reform the balance of national power: 'Part of elite aesthetics tapping into unalienated local cultural capitals'" (18). These two cases, Haitians and Chicanos, are of course very different, particularly in that Haitians, according to Ramsey's study, reaffirmed their cultural beliefs after the U.S.'s involvement in their country. Within the U.S., Chicanos don't return to their roots, so to speak, until they identify and unite as a people (different from both Mexicans and Americans). Many historic instances lead up to this. Anzaldúa argues in Borderlands/La frontera that Chicanos were born with the Chicano movement in the mid sixties because it was then that they saw each other as a community, as a group under the banner of Aztlán. She also mentions important factors such as the work of César Chávez in the farm workers' union (UFW) in California; the writing of "Yo soy Joaquín," the political poem by Rodolfo "Corky" González in Colorado; and the creation of La Raza Unida political party in Texas (85). To this list of events I would add the land dispute with Reies Tijerina in New Mexico and the creation of Teatro Campesino in California. All of these events as a whole show that the birth of the term Chicano did not occur in one place, but rather it spread across different regions of the U.S. until it became a coalition of voices and strengths. Based on these arguments,

[11] It is important to mention the difference in the use and circulation of the terms *indigénisme* and indigenismo. *Indigénisme* refers particularly to a movement of cultural and literary renaissance that occurs in reaction to American Occupation in Haiti. It demanded a celebration of Haitian indigenous culture and a rejection of European/American influence. Its main authors are Emile Roumer and Normail Sylvain who publish in La Revue Indigéne. *Indigenismo* is a term used to describe the intellectual production regarding indigenous people in Latin America. In the twentieth century many artists, writers and intellectuals focused on the Indian as a central subject of study. Although the term is mainly associated to Mexico, Guatemala and the Andes, as of the later part of the twentieth century it is applicable to Latin America as a whole. Some known *indigenista* writers are Juan Rulfo and José María Arguedas, among others.

we might say that Mexicans living in the United States who feel nostalgia for their homeland use their *indigénisme* to have a tighter grasp on their cultural roots. In Downs' case, this *indigenismo* is used in a two-fold manner: firstly, because she belongs to this ethnic community through her mother; and secondly, because she uses this elite aesthetic as a marketing technique for her public image. Hadad makes a point to play off of this *indigenismo* as a sacred backbone of Mexico to promote critique, and although López venerates it, she incorporates specific fragments of it so as to update culture to reflect reality.

In her writing on the "Deconstruction of the Mythical Homeland," Laura Gutiérrez argues that "the notion of home (or homeland) is among the most important preoccupation for diasporic communities residing permanently in the U.S." (65). As Gutiérrez goes on to mention, however, Chicanos should not be defined as being a diasporic community because of their shared historical heritage. Some of the historical events that she is referring to here are the Mexican-American War, the Texas-American War, and the Guadalupe Treaty, which hurt Mexico's pride with the loss of what is now Texas, Arizona, California and New Mexico. Alicia Gaspar de Alba echoes this in her introduction to Velvet Barrios by stating that Chicano is not a subculture of the United States, but rather what she calls an "alter-Native population." She argues: "Chicano culture is not immigrant, but native, not foreign, but colonized, not alien but different from the overarching hegemony of white America" (xxi). When paired with the notion of Paredes' Greater Mexico, this idea is extended to encompass all of the geographic areas where Chicano culture can be found. Gutiérrez has rightly argued that the U.S. is a "territory where one can also find signs of Mexico in material and symbolic form" (64). It

is not uncommon to see a Virgen de Guadalupe tattoo, T-shirt, or sticker on the windshield of a car. Even here in the Midwest, symbols standing for Mexico and Latin American popular culture are commonly found.

In their work, Hadad, Downs and López incorporate iconography from the Post-Mexican Revolution period. This incorporation of nation-shaping elements is done in very different ways. Hadad references images containing a strong symbolic connotation: La Soldadera, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera's unmistakable calla lilies, the eagle and cactus. She plays on these elements to suggest the areas of improvement for her Mexican audience. Downs sings about La Llorona and La Malinche, and she dresses like Frida Kahlo and Rigoberta Menchú. Her shows and videos display images that are symbolic to Mexico and to Greater Mexico like: *la víbora*, *la iguana*, *la cucaracha*, *el mole*, beans, the border, etc. She uses myth and storytelling in combination with other aesthetic genres to rewrite folklore and blur boundaries. López plays on pre-existing images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the mythological Aztec princess Ixtaccihuatl, the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, and her daughter, the moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui. López reconceptualizes these images to include a space for the Chicana Lesbian. Through the incorporation of symbolic, religious and popular iconography these artists perform Greater Mexico.

The way in which these three artists make use of iconography could be considered parodic. In A Theory of Parody Linda Hutcheon broadens the notion of parody defined as an intention to ridicule. Instead, she finds that parody should be more closely related to the term imitation. She argues that before the twentieth century, art that applied parody merely did so by referencing the desired text through structural incorporations. During the twentieth century a distance is taken so as to attain a critical perspective and an ironic

commentary is made. Hutcheon defines parody as “ironic imitation” (7) and suggests that the twentieth century is the period that shows this phenomenon through its sophistication. Parody according to her can have a political edge to it or not.

How is what each of these artists does with these icons parodic? In the case of Downs, this parodic imitation is found by her ability to mimic accents and oral styles of speech, referencing a particular group or region within Mexico. Downs is appropriating, reusing and recontextualizing images through myth, storytelling, song and music. All of these constitute parody in Hutcheon’s view. In the case of López, she incorporates known images like that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatépetl as a base on which to build a new version, allowing the public to have a clear (and visual) reference of her intended message. Interestingly to this effect, Simon Dentith notes that: “parody has a paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy, even if the hypotext remains only ‘under erasure’” (35). In other words, the new images used by López to replace the old ones only call more attention to them. A supposed risk is that: “Parody can act to preserve the very forms that it attacks.” In the context of López’s work (and Hadad’s) as well, parody serves to frame the past so as to delineate the present and illuminate the path for the future. What is lacking in the present becomes more evident by looking at the past. Out of the three artists in question Hadad is the one who is most notably parodic. She sings known, classic songs, but inverts or modifies the context surrounding the piece so as to strip it of its familiarity and hopefully attain critical distance.

Hybridity, as a tool for social constructions of identity, is useful to the discussion at hand. As Lauro Zavala argues:

> La escritura cómica, irónica y paródica son formas de construcción híbrida, y se prestan muy bien para expresar condiciones históricas de naturaleza, liminal, híbrida, trancisional y paradójica. (…) Las culturas liminales, debido a su condición histórica consciente de sí misma, tienden a hacer un uso carnavalesco de las tradiciones y de las fronteras tradicionales, ya sea en términos geográficos, culturales, históricos o politicos, o bien en términos estríctamente linguísticos o literarios (34).

The hybrid forms that Zavala refers to are irony, parody and pastiche. Hadad, Downs and López make use of hybridity in the construction and representation of their identities. Specifically, Hadad uses parody, Downs uses hybridity, in the form of pastiche, and López uses pastiche, collage and parody. Specific examples will be explored in the content of each chapter.

## Chapter Outlines

The structure of this dissertation begins with a theoretical methodology present in this introduction. The three chapters that follow are structured as case studies featuring the work of contemporary female artists of Greater Mexico: Astrid Hadad, Lila Downs and Alma López. Each case study highlights how these performers use their particular genre (cabaret, music and digital art) to comment on the location and construction of identity/identities.

Chapter One features a case study of Mexican cabaret artist Astrid Hadad based on my observation of her live performance of "Divinas Pecadoras" in Mexico City during May of 2008. Hadad discusses Mexico from within it, touching more recently on external cultural practices and globalization. She performs Mexico ironically and parodically through the use of cabaret as both an artistic space and a genre. Her humorous critiques of Mexican gender norms encourage her audience to envision a more egalitarian future for Mexico. She encourages Mexicans to become self-critical, willing to listen, reflect and grow as a community.

Chapter Two features a case study of Mexican-American singer Lila Downs based on my observation of her World Music tour through the Midwest during May of

2008. Downs discusses Greater Mexico within a border context relying on a transnational imaginary that informs her work. She is concerned with representation and cultural "authenticity," which make folk culture, music and dress central to her style. Downs' fluctuation between the new and the "authentic" promotes the idea that folklore is malleable and willing to change.

Chapter Three features a case study of Chicana digital artist Alma López based on my observation of her work while navigating through her website. López's digital art focuses on what it means to be a Chicana in the United States. I study her work in relation to Chicana/o cultural nationalism and in alliance with Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. López plays on female binarisms found in Mexican culture to delineate a space for the contemporary Lesbian Chicana. In doing this López performs a queer Greater Mexico through digital art.

The conclusion of this project focuses on the common iconography that all three artists employ, which is an iconography that originated during and after the Mexican Revolution. Hadad, Downs and López use this iconography as a strategy of nostalgia, mapping the Mexican nation's past and projecting (as a binarism) the future: Greater Mexico.[12]

## Conclusion

Through the critical analysis of the works and lives of these three artists, my objective is to discuss that in this century the questions of place of origin, race, and citizenship should no longer be problematic, but should, rather, take strength in the multiple, in the in-

[12] All images referenced in subsequent chapters, as well as the appendix, will be placed at the end of this dissertation.

between. Identity, belonging and self are firstly asserted in the spaces between and secondly, mobile, like Anzaldúa suggests: “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry home with me” (21). Plurality is the common ground on which the future of the U.S. and Mexico stands in performing identity politics.

# CHAPTER 1

# PERFORMING NATION THROUGH CABARET:

# ASTRID HADAD

Astrid Hadad emerges onto the Teatro Hidalgo stage in downtown Mexico City dressed in a long white cloak with deer horns on her chest and a headdress made of a bow and arrows.[13] The music of "El venadito" begins as Hadad opens her cloak dramatically to reveal the famous self-portrait of Kahlo as a wounded deer. The audience gasps and applauds loudly. Hadad's show "Divinas Pecadoras" is dedicated to many goddesses – among them, Hadad includes Frida Kahlo. As the music to "El venadito" fades out, Hadad states, "Los mexicanos somos los más felices del mundo. ¿Saben por qué? Por pendejos." The laughter that follows is the soundtrack under her speech as she continues about the lack of planning in Mexican politics. Hadad mentions that the inspiration for this piece is La Diana Cazadora, the bronze monument of the naked huntress atop a fountain on Reforma Avenue in downtown Mexico City. Hadad explains humorously that what interests her about this monument is that she carries a bow but it has no string and no arrows. In this sense, according to Hadad, Diana Cazadora allegorizes Mexican politics: "No tiene planeación," Hadad says. She uses this moment, didactically telling her audience to read the papers and care about Mexican politics. She says, that way you'll be "pendejo, pero enterado."

In the previously noted piece Hadad takes Frida Kahlo, a *vaca sagrada*, who epitomizes Mexican culture, and by dressing up as the victimized deer in one of her most famous self-portraits, opens the discussion on the barrier between the people and standardized national culture.[14] To parallel the image she sings "El venadito," a song

[13] "Divinas Pecadoras" May 3rd 2008. Teatro Hidalgo. Mexico City.

[14] The Mexican public is accustomed to the commercialization of Kahlo's image (as well as other images that are representative of Mexican culture both within Mexico and abroad, like La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Catrina) as well as parodic renditions of her image that produce laughter (and hopefully) critique and analysis.

based on Kahlo's favorite poem written by Cavafis.[15] With the performance of this piece Hadad entertains her public with an elaborate costume, produces laughter from her oversized headdress and shocks them with her references to politics and use of profane language.[16] Hadad's performance of "El venadito" serves to illustrate her agenda as an artist.

In this chapter, I discuss Mexican artist Astrid Hadad and her performance of nation through the use of cabaret. Through analysis and critique, Hadad looks satirically at the very nation she represents, and as such, is concerned with performing nation parodically. As a genre, cabaret enables Hadad to incorporate the many aspects of her show in a way that is meaningful to her agenda. Hadad uses elements of Mexican culture, such as the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Soldadera of the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican flag, classic *ranchera* songs and the cactus as central to Mexico's landscape. She purposefully uses these references because they speak of the nation and about the nation. They have been imposed as national symbols by the state or by the people themselves. Hadad uses these elements and frames them differently and in a non-familiar way, making it easier for the audience to look at them critically. Hadad performs a Mexico that is in dire need of self-reflection and self-analysis. She advocates change consisting of Mexicans becoming conscious and active in their own identity.

Some useful terms for the discussions in this chapter are Irony, Parody, Cabaret, Nation and Region, all discussed in light of a live performance of Astrid Hadad's

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[15] Arturo Cruz Barcenas states this information in his article "De prevalecer el poder femenino nos hubiera ido mejor: Astrid Hadad" written in La Jornada.

[16] Deer horns can be read as power and patriarchy, being that stags are both the head of their herd and are yet uninvolved in raising their young. It is interesting that Hadad takes a victimized image of Kahlo as a wounded deer, but overdoes the size of the headdress and the deer's horns as if to invert the issue of power relations. Interestingly, the stag can also be a symbol of regeneration in Native American tradition because it renews its antlers. In this sense, we can interpret Hadad's use of this headdress as a possibility of change and regeneration in both gender relations and politics within contemporary Mexico.

"Divinas Pecadoras" I attended in Mexico City, and in light of her body of work.[17] On a larger scale, this chapter is also concerned with the connection between humor and Mexicanness, and the representation of a national Mexican identity.

## Career Chronology

Born in 1957 in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico, from Lebanese decent and Mayan ethnicity, Astrid Hadad sees herself as a mixture of these, with a strong Afro-Caribbean influence (specifically from Cuba) present in her pieces.[18] In Holy Terrors, Roselyn Constantino writes that Hadad is "a product of the heterogeneous, hybrid nature of Mexican culture" (187). She also considers the U.S. to have had an effect on her persona and on her work, primarily due to the tourism in the Southern Peninsula where she grew up, as well as the current effects of globalization and media. In her 1995 CD Ay, she thanks *la Virgencita* for performing the miracle of allowing her to create an album that shows her for who she is: Mexican, Maya, Lebanese and Caribbean. Hadad has a background in theater production from the Centro Universitario de Teatro (CUT) at UNAM in México City, where she began studying German cabaret, classic Greek and British theater. As time passed she became interested in Brecht's avant-garde participatory theater. She also studied two Mexican theatrical genres, *carpa* and *teatro de revista*, which, combined with Brecht's political satire, resulted in what would become her unique style. Although Hadad was satisfied with her learning experiences within the world of theater, she was unable to incorporate her talent as a singer into her theatrical formation. With time she combined all of the elements she had learned with her singing abilities. From 1990 to 2005 Mexican artist Jesusa Rodríguez and Argentine singer

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[17] "Divinas Pecadoras" May 3rd 2008. Teatro Hidalgo. Mexico City.

[18] Hadad considers herself Mayan because she was born in the southern state of Quintana Roo, which is home to some Mayan communities. She considers herself Lebanese because of her family upbringing and her parents, who migrated to Mexico from Lebanon. A parallel between the two (Mayan and Lebanese) can be drawn in that both identities are marginal and rejected within mainstream Mexico.

Liliana Felipe rented a cabaret together called El hábito, in which they performed many shows. Hadad began working in the cabaret acts of Jesusa Rodríguez and Liliana Felipe, where she debuted as an actress. Hadad is very much indebted to Rodríguez's style, which was and is firmly rooted in political cabaret.[19] After gaining enough experience, Hadad attempted Mexican soap operas and later had an appearance in a feature film called Solo con tu pareja, a successful 1990s film that discussed safe sex and HIV. Later she began her own show accompanied by her musicians, Los Tarzanes. She collaborated with other Mexico City artists in the theatrical scene like Regina Orozco, with whom she still collaborates today. Hadad's unique style came as a mixture of cabaret, *carpa*, *teatro de revista*, political satire, and finally the incorporation (and characterization) of Mexican religious and cultural iconography. Hadad brings to life characters of Mexican life: *la borracha, la india, la maltratada, la rumbera, la vírgen, la santa*, and *la pecadora*. "Lo que hago es sacar a todas estas mujeres que llevo dentro," Hadad states in an interview, "desde mi punto de vista, pues me tocó ser mujer, sufrir y gozar intensamente en este mundo."[20]

Hadad incorporates *ranchera* and *bolero* music into politically and socially committed satire in a 1930s cabaret style. Constantino argues that Hadad "critiques repressive systems of power by rejecting bureaucracy, elitism and inflexibility. She rejects institutions, such as the government, religion and family. She singles out the *vacas sagradas*, that is, politicians, the President, the Pope, the conservative upper classes, etc." (191). Hadad follows a line of Mexican female artists such as Rosario Castellanos, Sabina Berman, Laura Esquivel, Elena Garro and Jesusa Rodríguez, to name a few, whose work addresses the female condition within the frameworks of traditional Mexican

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[19] Currently Rodríguez has focused her work towards political activism. Elena Poniatowska discusses Rodríguez's envolvement in the 2006 presidential elections in her book Amanecer en el Zócalo.

[20] Orduña, Silverio. "Placer de cabaret" Círculo Universitario. II Agosto-Diciembre 2008 (21-26).

culture. Currently in Mexico City, feminist performance artists Katia Tirado and Emma Villanueva use the (naked) female body and sexuality as vehicles of expression, building on the work the previous women have done.[21] Both Tirado and Villanueva critique how the female body is portrayed within Mexican patriarchal culture. In "Wrestling the Phallus, Resisting Amnesia: The Body Politics of Chilanga Performance Artists," Antonio Prieto Stambaugh discusses the work of these two artists. In Tirado's performance piece "Las perras en celo," two seminude women wrestle over a large phallus, representing the power struggle between sexes. This performance piece was taken to open air markets and other numerous public locations in Mexico City, adding the reaction of the spectators as part of the show itself.

The type of femininity that is being promoted in Hadad's music is one that, firstly, becomes aware of present gender constructions; secondly, questions it; and, thirdly, suggests change. Hadad attacks (stereo) typical Mexican figures such as the macho man and the submissive woman; in this way, we can argue that she speaks to and of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Not being a mainstream artist, her work is not well known by all within Mexico, much less internationally. However, some intellectuals and artists (including the Gay and Lesbian community) in Mexico City, as well as in the American/European academic scene have given her work particular attention. These groups have studied her performances as unconventional in theory and in practice, making her difficult to locate or categorize in a specific genre. In response to those who question Hadad about doing performance art instead of theater, she responds: "El cabaret es más completo porque

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[21] Tirado was born in 1965. She is a performance artist, body piercing artist and actress. She bases her work in Mexico City. Villanueva was born in 1975. She is a Mexico City based visual and performance artist who studied literature at the UNAM. She often works collaboratively with her partner Eduardo Flores. Their collective name is "Edema".

incluye la actuación el canto, la danza, la plástica y la crítica política. El performance lo puede hacer cualquiera, un pintor o un teórico de la actuación con tan solo unas cosas en el escenario."[22] Hadad's use of cabaret is particularly found in her stand-up comedy style while she provides pre- or post-song commentary.

Like several performance artists on both sides of the Mexico/U.S. border, Hadad puts on a one-woman show as she has refused help or patronage from governmental institutions. During the early 1990s she was banned from performing in public spaces in Mexico like Jesusa Rodríguez, Liliana Felipe, Regina Orozco, forcing her to be creative in the choice of her performance venues, such as bars, *cantinas* and private theaters. Due to her opposition to the church as an institution, religion and politics, she has mentioned in her live shows and in her interviews that her work has not been well received by the church in Mexico City. Religious practitioners are opposed to frequent comments she makes in her shows like, "Cuando estaremos mi vida como los pies del señor, cruzaditos encima del otro y con un clavito entre los dos," which she includes in her album Ay. In "Divinas Pecadoras" Hadad mentions the disapproval of her work by the archbishop of Mexico City. To this effect she states, "Soy como iglesia para que todo mundo rece y se confiese bajo mis faldas." She adds that the bishop of Toluca finds her dangerous because "soy dadora de placer… pero no me los cojo ¿verdad?" Clearly, religion has influenced her work, evident from the title of the show "Divine Sinners," to Hadad's many costumes and iconography. She highlights the notion that pleasure and enjoyment are often considered sinful in the Christian and Catholic societies.

Hadad writes, produces, sings, acts, and not only achieves her purpose of creating critical analytical cultural production, but also entertains in a two-fold manner as suggested by Constantino. She creates an *espectáculo* that is both a show and a spectacle.

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[22] Orduña, Silverio. "Placer de cabaret" Círculo Universitario. II Agosto-Diciembre 2008 (21-26).

Alzate calls Hadad a "*mujer orquesta,*" referring to the man who typically appears in the Latin American circus:

> es la imagen que tenemos cuando la vemos aparecer en el escenario bailando música cubana con sus faldas recargadas de símbolos y una corona de medio metro de altura. Sobre el cuerpo de Astrid se desarrolla no solo la actividad de una orquesta de símbolos y voces, sino también un laberinto que exige que el espectador circule a lo largo de él para interpretar los diferentes elementos. Este laberinto es la ciudad de México, la geografía, el escenario donde se confrontan las diferentes culturas que viven y hacen parte del territorio multicultural y multiétnico de la República Mexicana. (46)

With regards to Hadad's image, her dramatic make-up and her exaggerated facial gestures have a two-fold effect. On one hand, her odd physical appearance comes off as grotesque; on the other, this same fact draws the spectator into her performance. She uses gender parody through excessive theatricality and same-sex masquerade to perform overstated renditions of women. Laura Gutiérrez (2001) has read her work as "camp" in that she exaggerates femininity and female bodily representation, which in many ways makes her appearance hypersexualized.[23] At the 2007 Festival Artístico de la XXIX Marcha del Orgullo LGBT in Mexico City, Hadad was named "Reina del Orgullo Gay." This was a particularly important pride parade as it was the first after the Mexican government passed the Ley de Sociedades de Convivencia and declared the Día de Lucha Contra la Homofobia, both in 2006.[24] Although there is no knowledge of Hadad "coming-out," or of even being a Lesbian, she is nonetheless seen by the Mexican gay community as an icon, perhaps because of her acceptance of sexual diversity and her active support of anti-AIDS campaigns, as well as her dramatic, flamboyant, on-stage gender personifications.

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[23] Contrary to the reading of Hadad as hypersexualized, is the idea that she looks like a man in drag, which was offered by several of the students in my Latina Performance class (taught in the spring of 2008). This is a convincing reason for Hadad being considered a role model for the Mexico City Gay and Lesbian community. This conscious or subconscious gender-bending playfulness also ties in to Hadad's play on plurality and/or liminality.

[24] See: www.dfinitivo.com/archivos/2007/07/02/gay-pride-mexico-2007/

Although Hadad argues that her work does not intend to be deliberately controversial, it inevitably is.[25] Most feminist body philosophers such as Susan Bordo (1989) or Janet Wolff (1997) would argue that the mere fact of using the female body as a medium of representation is, in fact, political. Hadad seems to explore the identity categories that she sees reflected in Mexico's patriarchal institutions, such as the church, the government, society, the family unit, etc. Hadad mentions that she tries to integrate into her work the women *que todas llevamos dentro*, such as the femme fatale, the submissive (or soft woman), and the Mexican mother.[26] She explores gender, sexuality and nation within all of these, always using humor and parody as her sidekick.

Hadad discusses these identity categories by confronting the spectator with images of popular culture that have a strong symbolic meaning such as: La Virgen de Guadalupe, the peasant woman embracing calla lilies as depicted in Diego Rivera's paintings, the *charra*, the crowned virgin nun, *la china poblana*, etc. Although there are differences in Hadad's performances, the constants that are present in her pieces seem to be exaggerated costuming and make-up, the use of parody and humor, social and political critique and singing and monologues.

In 2000, French film directors Aurélie Semichon and Pierre Favre released a documentary about Astrid Hadad called La tequilera. In the film, the spectator observes Hadad's daily life as she walks the city's markets looking for odd things she can incorporate into her costumes. She spends her day with her band, rehearsing songs, meeting with art consultants to discuss costumes, props, publicity, posters, etc., writing songs and/or monologues, researching historical data, or simply looking for inspiration for her next performance in books, music and/or film. Hadad searches through Mexican history for female artists who inspire her and give her hope for a new generation of

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[25] Roselyn Constantino Holy Terrors.

[26] Astrid Hadad "Divinas Pecadoras" May 9th, 2009. Teatro Hidalgo. Mexico City. Mexico.

Mexican female artists and individuals. Although some of her performances seem to echo her daily life and her concerns with religion, with being a woman in a religiously conservative family and country, and with the reality surrounding her (globalization, capitalism, imperialism, poverty, war, social injustice, human rights violations, etc.) some of her performed identities are also highly constructed and specifically designed for the purpose of communicating a message to the spectator –to shock, provoke, critique and entertain. In La tequilera, Hadad travels home to Quintana Roo and chats with her mother, a Lebanese woman who speaks Spanish with an accent. She says she supports her daughter but she does not approve of the way she approaches topics dealing with religion. While her mother is speaking, Hadad smirks in the background. As Lebanese Christians, Hadad's family migrated to Mexico, finding comfort in the country's firm faith in Catholicism. In "Christians from Lebanon and Jews from Syria in Mexico," Liz Hamui-Halabe states:

> The presence of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Mexico dates back to the Porfirio Díaz period (1876-1910). The large groups of immigrants arrived, however, during the second and third decades of this century. This generation of immigrants established the foundations for organizational and cultural models and determined the initial roles Syrian Jews and Lebanese Christians would play in various spheres of life in Mexico. (126)

Hamui-Halabe states that at the turn of the century these immigrants were not well received. They were commonly referred to as "Turks" and seen as "dirty beggars" (129), which did not reflect an image of Mexico that this nation-shaping period was hoping to create and portray. Their reason for migrating to Mexico, as posed by this author, was due to their rejection from the U.S. and/or receiving word from family who already lived there, forming a "kinship network" (130). Although initially a majority of single men migrated, it was the immigration of women that "played an important role in the permanence of (…) Catholic Lebanese in Mexico" (130), making it possible to raise a family and maintain native cultural values. Over time, second-generation Lebanese became assimilated into the Mexican culture particularly due to the similarity of their

religious practice and due to the fact that there were not many Lebanese private schools. Over time, Arabic was also forgotten and Spanish became the central language in the home.

The performance pieces shown in La tequilera, which reflect Hadad's career in the late 1990s, do not encompass global issues. Rather, she discusses the reality within Mexico and how the outer world affects the inner world in which she lives.[27] I argue that this inner focus changed after September 11th 2001 and will continue to change as migration radically continues throughout the world.

Hadad's *mise en scène* promotes audience interaction. Her incorporation of traditional popular forms, such as *carpa*, review-theater and cabaret, provide an accessible framework for the audience. Through the use of cabaret Hadad questions the audience as observers. Alzate states "su espectáculo interrumpe tanto a los espectadores masculinos como femeninos y los fuerza a darse cuenta de su complejidad dentro del sistema cultural al que pertenecen" (31). The songs she performs are traditional folk ballads and *rancheras*. Typically, she interprets these songs as traditionally written and inverts the meaning through her use of costuming or through her portrayal of the role. She is also known for adding, readjusting, or inverting the lyrics to fit her purpose of parody. Hadad calls herself a *descompositora* instead of a composer, because she deconstructs the songs and re-codifies them. Either way, through singing the lyrics, humming the melody, or by feeling identified with a certain context relevant to Mexican society, the audience becomes actively involved in her performance.

Currently, she continues to create socio-politically committed shows that use the female body as the vehicle of expression.

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[27] This is noted specifically in her references to the 1994 NAFTA trade agreement and comments like: "estamos tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de Estados Unidos," heard in La tequilera.

## En un cabaré

According to Lisa Apagnenesi's book under the same title, Cabaret was born out of the café-concert in 1881 as an intellectual and self-conscious artistic form, even though laughter and entertainment were at its core. Its founders were members of the intellectual and artistic society, among them writers, poets and artists who wanted to perform and share their work and exchange ideas. Apagnesi states "This together with their adoption of the popular satirical or protest song as a vehicle, were the ingredients that first went into the making of the cabaret" (5). *Chanson* (or song) was the main form of entertainment in French cafés and bistros in the latter half of the nineteenth century. "A love lyric or mood piece which entertained but could function as a reporting vehicle (…) the song could spoof or ridicule authority, target hypocritical sexual roles, and act as a rallying call (…) it came to serve as a democratic tool, a satirical weapon for criticism and protest" (1-2). Hadad incorporates this technique into her performances. Many times, however, it's not the lyric of the song that does this, but rather the performance itself or the script of her post-song stand-up sections. There is a disjointedness to her performances in the sense that what she sings does not match up with what her costume, her mannerisms or her performance of the piece says. Each piece creates irony and parody.

Apagnenesi finds it difficult to provide a generalization of what went on during a typical cabaret program because of its flexibility and "insistence on the contemporary" (6) contrary to classical theater, which highlights the reproduction of the classics.

> Apart from its satirical and avant-garde emphasis what remains more or less consistent in cabaret and allows it to be defined as a distinct form are its structural elements: a small stage and audience, and an ambience of talk and smoke, where the relationship between the performer and the spectator is one of both intimacy and hostility, the nodal points of participation and provocation. (6)

Although Astrid Hadad typically performs for small audiences at La Bodega del Bataclán, an exclusive bar where dinner is also served, the performance I attended was at

a large theater located in the Centro Histórico, across from the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Despite the large audience present, through song and stand-up, Hadad maintained both an intimate relationship with the audience, as well as a hostile one, which is why the audience responded with uncomfortable laughter. Apagnenesi argues: "The cabaret performer plays directly to his audience, breaking down the illusory fourth wall of traditional theater. There is never any pretence made of an identity between actor and role. Rather, as in Brechtian drama, the performer remains a performer, no matter what is enacted" (6). Clearly, Hadad has been influenced by Bertolt Brecht's style and theatrical methodology, particularly with regards to keeping her audience conscious of their role as spectators. Like Brecht, Hadad uses the stage as a forum for the discussion of political (read: controversial) ideas. Brecht believed that the role of art was to address social, political and economic issues and to attempt to improve them. He felt that a play should not provoke an emotional reaction from the audience because it blinds rational thought and critical ability. Brecht did not want his audience to be lured into the narrative presented on stage; on the contrary, he wanted them to be aware of its artificiality, and thus become more aware that the theater is a representation of reality and not reality itself. In a 2008 interview, Hadad talks about her style: "Entendí lo que era el cabaret alemán, lo mezclé con lo que fue la carpa y el teatro de revista en México e hice mis propias investigaciones. Cree mi propio mundo."[28] The style that emerges from integrating German and Mexican theater is visually, thematically and musically rich.

According to the somewhat chronological history of cabaret Apagnenesi provides, women didn't become actively involved in cabaret performance until it traveled throughout Europe.[29] "Wherever it went" she states, "it brought with itself that

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[28] Orduña, Silverio. "Placer de cabaret" Círculo Universitario. II Agosto-Diciembre 2008 (21-26)

[29] An interesting female figure to explore further is Josephine Baker, who is an example of how cabaret was used by woman performers at the beginning of the century. Known as the "Black Pearl," the "Bronze Venus," in the U.S. and as "La Baker" in Paris, she defied convention on stage as well as in her personal life.

contagious air of freedom and a daring disrespect for established structures whether political, artistic or institutional" (29). As a genre, cabaret encompasses both the elite (intellectual and artistic), known as high art, and the popular (street performers, bohemians), known as low art. These oppositions are constantly present; because of this, cabaret is a peripheral genre.

Political cabaret in Mexico, according to Gastón A. Alzate's very interesting work on contemporary Mexican cabaret artists, is born through *el teatro de revista* and through *la carpa*, two popular genres in the 1920s and 1930s. Alzate states that cabaret appears in Mexico City around the late 1930s when the population reached the one million mark, which highlights the beginning of an urban culture, and as such has certain demands for entertainment. He mentions the city's need for "espectáculos teatrales que pudieran representar popularmente al nuevo ciudadano y darle una identidad. En nuestros términos, brindarle los elementos necesarios para la construcción de un nuevo imaginario" (12). These distinct theater forms (*carpa*, *revista*, and, later, film) have, according to Alzate, enabled Mexicans from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds to come together under the same roof. "Si fuera posible hablar de un origen de la identidad urbana en el DF," he argues, "tendría que empezarse por aquí necesariamente" (18). Carlos Monsiváis finds additional spaces in contemporary Mexico that serve this purpose: soccer, concerts and the subway. Hadad's performance of "Divinas Pecadoras" at the Teatro Hidalgo enabled people of different social classes and conditions to come together for the same purpose of being entertained. Within the discussion of the circus, *la carpa* and other forms of expression related to popular culture, the grotesque, kitsch, and absurd come to mind. All are useful terms in describing the type of work that Hadad does in recreating popular genres which are generally used as adjectives for the strange, the fantastic, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant or bizarre.

According to Alzate, with *carpa* theater begins the model for the "imaginario de ciudad como espacio popular" (19). The example he uses to make his point is the circus

as a part of *carpa* theater. "El género (carpa) se ve invadido por personajes que buscan ser representados: pelados, jotos, tortilleras, borrachos, Marías, mariguanos, nacos, meros machos, mandilones, todos son caracteres de vecinario que se vuelven legendarios en ese espacio teatral" (19). Some of these characters are consciously chosen by Hadad and brought to life in her shows, giving voice to the marginalized within the city as spectacle. Alzate and Marín argue that "The main characteristic of Mexican cabaret, when compared to other theatrical genres, is its particular dedication to the immediate present."[30] This dedication to current themes allows cabaret to be political and addresses issues that people are concerned with presently, a matter that enables political activism and social critique. This location within the present also relates cabaret to performance art, which is ephemeral and cannot be reproduced.[31] When asked in an interview if she considered herself a performance artist, Hadad replied with a laugh stating that performance was a term created by Americans. She calls herself a "*cabaretera,*" because of her background in theater arts and her musical influences.[32] In his discussion of contemporary cabaret in Mexico, Alzate states that the genre is currently led by women and homosexuals, some of whom he studies in his book: Jesusa Rodríguez, Liliana Felipe, Astrid Hadad, Paquita la del Barrio, Tito Vasconcelos and Francis. "*Cabaretera*," as a term in Spanish, can be synonymous with fallen woman, in that traditionally women work (at home or in an office), tend to their children and their husband and to all other home-related chores. Only "fallen women" or "libertines" would dedicate their lives to nightly entertainment. These artists contest the very term in their shows. In Hadad's case,

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[30] "The First Wave of Contemporary Mexican Cabaret: Queering the Dramatic Text of the Culture." Paola Marín and Gastón A. Alzate.

[31] The argument is that even though a performance piece is presented more than once, it is unique every time because each presentation entails a different set of attributes such as location, audience members, psychology of performers, weather, etc.

[32] Orduña, Silverio. "Placer de cabaret" Círculo Universitario. II Agosto-Diciembre 2008 (21-26).

she incorporates the notion of double standards and oppositions into her pieces implicitly, playing with the corresponding duties of each gender role. Sometimes she inverts them, and sometimes she questions the audience on why these differences exist and are still respected.

In Rationale of a Dirty Joke, humorist and folklorist E. Legman argues that each person has his or her own style within joke telling. When a person tells numerous jokes about a recurring theme or subject, Legman finds that it allows "their own consciousness or unconscious problems a socially accepted avenue of expression and petcock of release" (14). He goes on to say that listeners are the same way. They tend to have specific topics and/or styles that make them laugh, and others where there is no response. Legman briefly mentions in his introduction that there are "national" styles of joke telling. How can Mexican joke telling be defined? What is the style employed? According to Legman, many aspects must be taken into account including the history, the gender of joke teller, the subject of the joke, the intention, the culture, the history of media and popular culture, and the influence of comedy within the country. With regards to Mexican humor Alzate finds that carpa is "la mejor escuela del doble sentido" (19). Within *carpa* as a school of thought, drama, comedy, *zarzuela*, humor, sketches and social critique are taught. Alzate argues, "en la carpa se prefiere el albur, lo escatológico, lo obsceno, las groserías," primarily because this is what the popular classes can relate to and can understand as a reflection of their own world. This theatrical genre is the historical background for contemporary humor as Mexico and Mexicans know it. It is the starting point for classic Mexican comedians like Cantinflas, Tin Tan, Capulina, La India María and Roberto Gómez Bolaños. Hadad's humor, not surprisingly, takes from this national background, particularly from "*doble sentido*" or *double entendre*, where the literal meaning can often be interpreted with a sexual connotation. Some examples of her humor, and her intimate, yet hostile approach to her audience will be discussed based on "Divinas Pecadoras." In her performance, Hadad uses (and abuses) reflexive pronouns

and the verb "*coger*," which in Mexican speech is only used with reference to intercourse, by saying to her audience: "Nos acojeremos unos a otros con intensidad." The audience, as practically any Mexican would, roars with laughter at the mere hint of the word "*coger*," which also signals sexual repression found in Mexico due to Catholicism and patriarchy. Hadad makes numerous jokes that address Mexican heterosexual relationships.[33] She discusses how difficult it is for women to climax and makes a point of stating that men do not welcome the challenge. She states "70% de las mujeres mexicanas piensan que el orgasmo es un dulce. El 68% de los hombres piensan que clitoris es una parte del carro." The laughter from the audience cannot be contained. She continues her discussion of sexuality with a monologue directed to the women in the audience. "¿Por qué son tan dejadas?" she asks them. There is a pause in the audience's reaction. Tension is felt, and then, laughter breaks out. Though Hadad agrees that currently finding a partner is difficult, it is no justification for having men treat women badly. Her solution to this problem is masturbation, which only serves to promote more laughter. Hadad explains that men have no difficulty is reaching climax, all they have to do is "jalar y ya." Female climax on the other hand, is much more complex: "El punto G es mental y no físico (…) mujeres: conozcan su cuerpo. Hombres: estúdienle un poquito." Hadad presents to the audience the model of a modern, independent, assertive woman. She uses humor and play to deal with difficult topics such as sexuality, religion and politics.

Performance of "Divinas Pecadoras"

> 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.[34]

[33] Interestingly, in her May 3rd performance of "Divinas Pecadoras" she did not make any references to homosexuality or queer relationships.

[34] Hadad's opening words as she emerged on stage.

Astrid Hadad's show "Divinas Pecadoras" was performed at the Teatro Hidalgo in Mexico City for a period of four consecutive weeks during the months of April and May 2008. The show I attended took place on the final weekend of the performance, Saturday, May 3rd at 7:00 p.m. Although I arrived an hour before the beginning of the show, and though I had purchased my tickets for a standard price of $120 pesos ahead of time, I barely had enough time to pick up my ticket at the box office and get inside. In front on the theater, two very long lines had formed: one for people purchasing or picking up tickets at the box office, and another for people with tickets waiting to enter the theater. In my case, I had to get in one line to get my ticket, only to stand in another one to enter the theater. A common expression regarding the Mexican way of life echoed in my mind "Para qué hacer las cosas fáciles cuando se pueden hacer difíciles," and I smiled. While in line I had the chance to observe people and overhear conversations. All types of people were in line. A group of middle-aged women stood in front of me. They were discussing and reviewing the recent theatrical events they had attended in Mexico City. They mentioned how excited they were to see Hadad's "*comedia musical*." This was the genre under which they placed her work. I noticed there were young couples, families, adolescents and elderly people of all different social classes. Though there might have been some domestic and international tourists, I did not encounter any. The majority of the people I saw seemed like *capitalinos*, Mexico City residents. Hadad's show finally began at around 7:20 p.m. when all of the people filled the auditorium. Because I was one of the last to enter, and because it was first-come-first serve, practically every seat was taken. I managed to find an empty spot in the upper right corner of the theater in between an older woman, who seemed like she could have been someone's grandmother, and a teenage boy.

Centrally located behind the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the Teatro Hidalgo houses numerous popular theater, comedy and musical events, and is big enough to house a large audience at an affordable price. It is a modest theater: stuffy, without air conditioning,

and with mildly comfortable, non-reclining seats, allowing for affordable ticket prices. In sharp contrast is the Palacio de Bellas Artes, located across from the Teatro Hidalgo, lighting up the streets of the downtown Historic Center with its splendor and the city itself as the cradle of culture. It is the most prestigious auditorium in the nation's capital and as such represents the elite, the desired, the preserved.

The stage held a large rectangular poster with an image of Adam to the left and an opposing poster with an image of Eve to the right. Both Adam and Eve were nude, with a fig leaf covering their private parts, and surrounded by bright flames, as if to play with the title idea, "Divinas Pecadoras." The lights were dim as Hadad's musicians emerged onto the stage one by one to set up their instruments.

The title of Hadad's show "Divinas Pecadoras" is ironic and at the same time revealing of the Virgin/Whore dichotomy embedded in the traditional imagery of the Mexican woman. All of the pieces performed in "Divinas pecadoras" suggest (and applaud) the notion that every woman is divine and, at the same time, every woman is a sinner. Each song Hadad performs is dedicated to a female figure (mythical, historical, fictitious) that she considers to be a goddess.[35] Even though each number/segment is based on a goddess, there is no particular, chronological, historical or thematic order to the arrangement of the show. There is, however, a pattern that is repeated throughout, which I have arranged in the following way: 1) Pre-song: Here the musicians play as Hadad leaves the stage for a costume change; 2) Song: Hadad makes a grand entrance onto the stage, reveals her costume, waits for an applause, and begins to sing; 3) Post-song: After the song ends, Hadad speaks to her audience in a relaxed stand-up comedy

[35] In Spanish, the term "*Diosas*" references many things. It can be used to mean "diva," "goddess," as well as the mother of God, la Virgen de Guadalupe. The title of this show relates to Hadad's previous show called "Oh Diosas" which is a play off the word "*odiosa*" in Spanish, meaning a hateful or hated woman.

style.[36] She then leaves the stage to change costumes and begin again. At most, the narrative employed revolves around the dramatic costuming Hadad uses. A common and recognizable aspect in the work of Hadad is the variety, playfulness and creativity of her costuming. It was the focal point of this show.[37]

The repertoire Hadad presented in "Divinas Pecadoras" is located in Appendix A. I have organized the songs in the chronological order in which they were performed, and grouped them in segments according to the goddess they are dedicated to and the costume(s) used.[38]

Hadad constantly entered and exited the stage, though her musicians remained onstage for the entire show. Toward the end of the show, after she performed "El punto G," Hadad thanked her audience for attending and exited the stage. Before waiting for them to request an encore she reappeared on stage less than five minutes later with a new outfit to perform her original hit single "El calcetín," stating matter-of-factly, "No se pueden ir hasta que no les cante 'El calcetín.'" She positioned herself stage center and dramatically fell to the floor in a sexy mermaid-like position. "Como si fuera un calcetín," she sang, "me pisas todo el día." Audience members slowly exited the auditorium to avoid the crowd at the end of the show.

From what I could perceive in my role as observer and critic, the reaction of the audience seemed to be one of expectation and curiosity to see what her next costume would be like. If her costume was simple, they awaited the climactic moment in which she would convert it into the main attraction of her performance.

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[36] There were numerous costume changes. Sometimes the changes took place on the stage itself. During these instances two or three male assistants dressed in black would appear onstage and remove, arrange and/or add to her costume.

[37] Pictures of Hadad's costumes are found in Appendix A.

[38] A promotional video of "Divinas Pecadoras" can be found on Hadad's MySpace page at www.myspace.com/astridhadadproductions

## Post-Performance Analysis

The post-performance analyses in this section revolve around two central points: 1) the explicit and implicit references to gender and sexuality, which I call "Performing Gender and Sexuality"; and 2) Hadad's presentation and representation of nation(s) through parody, which I call "Performing (Trans)nation(s)." My thoughts will be organized into these two groups.

The music plays on cue, and after a short musical introduction, Hadad emerges onto the stage singing: "¿por qué te hizo el destino pecadora?" as if speaking of the nature of all women. The audience cheers and she sings, "goza pecadora, qué sabrosa," as if she were replying to them. Hadad dances to the *cumbia* rhythm in a long black dress with a flame like headdress and boa. Dancing amidst a background of flames rolling on the screen behind her, she sings the lyrics devilishly, "pequen, pequen, pequen sin descansar…. Gocen conmigo." This juxtaposition of pleasure and sin set the tone for her show "Divinas Pecadoras."

### Performing Gender and Sexuality: "Amanecí otra vez"

In this section I focus on "Amanecí otra vez," a song Hadad performed in "Divinas Pecadoras" and dedicated to all of the Mexican women in the audience. "Amanecí otra vez" is a classic *ranchera* sung originally by José Alfredo Jiménez. Hadad uses parody to discuss women, gender roles and sexuality in contemporary Mexico. Because of the many layers of meaning in Hadad's work, I break down my analysis into the discussion of 1) the song itself; 2) the performance of the piece; 3) the costuming; and 4) the post-song commentary.

The lyrics of this song were written by Jiménez and have been performed by many contemporary artists, both male and female, though classically sung as a love song by a man to a woman. It is in the top-ten list of mariachi serenades.[39]

Amanecí otra vez
Entre tus brazos
Y desperté llorando
De alegría
Me cobijé la cara
Con tus manos
Para seguirte amando todavía

Despertaste tú
Casi dormida
Tú me querías decir
No sé qué cosa
Pero callé tu boca con mis besos
Y así pasaron muchas, muchas horas

Cuando llegó la noche
Y apareció la luna
Y entró por tu ventana
Qué cosa tan bonita
Cuando la luz del cielo
Illuminó tu cara

Yo me volví a amanecer
Entré tus brazos
Tú me querías decir
No sé qué cosa
Pero callé tu boca con mis besos
Y así pasaron muchas, muchas horas.

A tender love scene is described in the lyrics of this song. Typically, there is a feeling of vulnerability associated with falling in love with someone. In this case, even though Jiménez's song is a sincere declaration of love to his partner, it serves to reflect the culture of Mexican relationships. Although the singer spent many hours with his lover, he still manages to (repeatedly) quiet her with his kisses. A feminist reading of the

[39] The *ranchera* as a musical genre discusses love, patriotism and nature. Musically, the instruments are those pertaining to a mariachi band.

lyrics allows us to become aware of the gender roles being played here. What is highlighted is the man not allowing the woman to speak. From his perspective, lovemaking is more important than exchanging voices, vows, opinions or concerns. The lyrics "qué cosa tan bonita cuando la luz del cielo iluminó tu cara" reveal that physical beauty is favored over articulateness when speaking of women. This is also true when considering traditional gender roles within Mexico.

Hadad performs "Amanecí otra vez" non-ironically. She is an experienced singer, known for her interpretation of *boleros* and *rancheras*, and her performance goes as smoothly as a routine. The irony present in this piece is located in the tension or opposition between the performance of this song and the costuming she chooses to wear. Her costume, a mixture of Aztec and Hindu motif, is surrounded with many arms. The arms of the male Hindu god Shiva that surround Hadad's costume, as well as the title of Jiménez song "Amanecí otra vez entre tus brazos," reference the notion of the Mexican woman, and particularly the Mexican mother, as homemaker, giver and martyr. The costume Hadad chooses for this piece incorporates Aztec iconography, and more particularly, male Aztec symbols such as the sun. Not only is the sun, *el sol*, a male god in Pre-Colombian cultures, but it is also a male noun in the Spanish language as well. Hadad wears gold wristbands, a loincloth with a gold sun over it, and a large headdress, all of which are typically worn by men.[40] The large sun in the center of the loincloth she wears is surrounded by little suns, which, when placed over the female sexual organs and over the womb itself, can be read as an element of fertility. In this way she is referencing both male and female symbolism. Interestingly, however, on both sides of her head there is a profile image of her own head with an open mouth and a serpent-like tongue emerging from it. This brings us to a discussion of the feminine symbolism present in her

[40] Male Aztec costuming and imagery can be found in Mexican murals, in museums, in academic textbooks, and as an institutionalized part of Mexican culture represented in the Ballet Folklórico de México Pre-Colombian segment.

costume. The serpent itself (though in the Bible is seen as the devil) is typically associated with women, and to speech, sexuality and sensuality. The two heads on either side of Hadad's headdress can be interpreted as Eve, the tempted one, and as the (female) gossip, also called "*víbora*," or snake, in Spanish. These two "talking profiles" I interpret as Hadad, who personifies Jiménez's voiceless lover. In this sense, Hadad is standing in for female articulation. On another note, Hadad enacts a transgendered portrayal of the Hindu male god Shiva by making him into a female goddess that she chooses to honor in her show. This transgenderization is reflective of Hadad's gender-bending techniques within costuming, content and performance. The opposition of the heartfelt *ranchera* to the parody of her costuming (multiple protruding arms waving as she moves, and flapping as she turns) create the necessary comedic effect to distance oneself from what is being presented and question it. This is a Brechtian theatrical technique called "estrangement effect," which Brecht applied in the form of eliminating familiar and identifiable things from a particular event and creating a sense of curiosity or foreignness. This was done as a means to create distance between the audience and the stage so as to facilitate critical thought. Seen in this light, the question is "what is Hadad parodying in this piece?" Is it the silenced female role, the macho singer, cheesy love declarations, or love itself?

In Hadad's post-song commentary, she speaks to the women in the audience in a stand-up comedy style. She addresses physical appearance, sexuality, desires and hopes. She mentions that all women have a "*capacidad amatoria*," which is why she dedicated the song to Mexican women as a whole. Although Hadad does not define what she means by "*capacidad amatoria*," I interpret it as the willingness to give of oneself to others, common in the role of the Mexican mother who serves all before herself. The arms as a motif for this piece (from the lyrics of the song, to the performance, the costume, and Hadad's post-song commentary) reveal the way Hadad addresses the role of the Mexican woman and mother.

Generally speaking, Hadad's strategy as an artist is to put forth symbols, beliefs and cultural elements that are typically seen by Mexican people as second nature. She then uses comedy and absurdity to poke fun at them (implicitly and/or explicitly) so as to question, critique, or merely to take them off their pedestal. Doing this, however, must not be perceived as something negative, but, rather, as a positive degradation that humanizes these (previously idealized) figures. Gastón A. Alzate argues, "El objetivo fundamental de Hadad es repetir símbolos archiconocidos por los mexicanos, pero transformándolos en una suerte de pastiche, cargado de ironía, cuyo referente es la actual situación política en su patria. En este sentido, su vestuario, su hábito, es el hábito del país. Hadad se viste de los miles de Méxicos que su cuerpo representa" (51).

Hadad presents dichotomies in female sexuality in order to suggest a middle ground on which she believes Mexican women can stand. Alzate argues, "Hadad propone una alternative de mujer pública que se sitúa momentáneamente, es decir, durante el tiempo del espectáculo, fuera de la estructura social y que desde allí relativiza dicha estructura. (…) La artista no representa a México o a las mexicanas, sino que juega con los multiples discursos que circulan en la cultura sobre el país mismo o sobre la mujer mexicana" (57). Hadad actively critiques the role of women in Mexico. Through her critique, she proposes a new behavioral model for women. Alzate adds, "tal vez el esfuerzo de Hadad no esté encaminado a cambiar totalmente la distribución del poder, pero sí a establecer una negociación que se da en la risa del espectador" (57). In other words, there is feedback and political activeness within the laughter itself, not only as a strategy of disidentification, or estrangement, that Hadad learns from Brecht, but also as a form of political activeness and public participation. This is very much a characteristic of this type of avant-garde theater and of performance art (and practice) itself. Hadad uses the exotic and the absurd to achieve estrangement in this piece. The exotic is found in her incorporation of Shiva. The absurd is perceived in the incorporation of all of these elements in the same piece. Through estrangement, Hadad obtains the distance she needs

from her audience to become critical of themselves. The risk in this is that the audience stays in the absurdity and the comedic appeal (proven through laughter) instead of advancing to critical thought, reflection and action.

## Performing (Trans)Nation(s): "La milonga del mono"

In "La milonga del mono," Hadad addresses nation and transnation through parody. Like the previous segment, my analysis will be broken down into 1) the song itself; 2) the performance of the piece; 3) the costuming; and 4) the post-song commentary.[41]

"La milonga del mono" is a song written and composed by Argentine Alejandro Dolina. Born in 1954, he is Hadad's contemporary. Dolina is active in several fields of Argentine culture –music and creative writing (songwriting, playwriting and fiction writing)– but he is particularly well known for his radio and television broadcasting. His style is humorous and he reaches out to the popular social classes of Argentina. He wrote the song for Karina Beorlegui, an Argentine singer, actress and *tanguera*.

> Hay muchos de por aquí
> que andan diciendo que soy fea.
> Puede que tengan razón,
> eso es cuestión particular.
>
> Si hay que decir la verdad,
> yo soy un poco irregular:
> me sobra aquí,
> me falta allá,
> ¡qué voy a hacer,
> me armaron mal!
> Ningún galán por mí lloró,
> nadie un soneto me escribió,
> si alguno soñó conmigo,
> tal vez gritando se despertó.

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[41] In my post-performance analysis research I have found that Hadad uses a different costume in her song entitled "La multimamada," however, I am interested in her description of the goddess she created called "La multimamada" and her choice for linking this description to her piece and costume for "La milonga del mono."

Chispa casual de mi pasión,
promesa de fugacidad.
Yo siempre olvido volando,
me están dejando
y yo, ya me fui.

En cuestiones del amor,
yo nunca tuve preferencia.
Es un prejuicio burgués
el que uno tenga que elegir.

Para hombre de mi ilusión,
me gusta el último en llegar.
Cualquier zapata me va igual,
qué voy a hacer,
me armaron mal.

The *milonga* is a type of Argentine music, very popular in the 1870s, which preceded the tango. *Milonga* can also refer to the location where tango and *milonga* can be danced. It was associated with the working classes due to its African influence. In the 1960s and 70s, this music was banned by the military in Argentina. In the 1990s, both *milonga* and tango were brought back, sometimes fused with other rhythms.[42]

Hadad chooses to perform a song written by Alejandro Dolina because she admires his work, particularly his use of humor and his discussion of female subjectivity within an Argentine framework. A lover of tango, Dolina seems to have written this song in admiration of tango artists like Tita Merello and Libertad Lamarque, both prominent singers and actresses during a vast part of the twentieth century. One of Tita Merello's most celebrated songs was entitled "Se dice de mi," which was used as the soundtrack for the soap opera "Betty la fea" in Colombia. The song addresses all of the things people in town say about her: they gossip about her personality, her pointy nose, her weight and more. Merello also sang a song called "La milonga y yo," in which she sings that she is a part of the people: "vengo de un barrio sencillo y querendón (…) somos del mismo

[42] The information on *milonga* was found on Wikipedia, as well as from conversations with graduate colleague Marcus Palmer. Some contemporary artists that incorporate tango are Kevin Johansen and Gotan Project, based in Paris.

arrabal." Another song called "Arrabalera" adds to Merello's identification with the people by saying that the conditions in which she grew up are just like everyone else's. Karina Beorlegui performs "La milonga del mono" regularly as part of her 2009-10 show in Buenos Aires called "Demoliendo Tangos" with Los Primos Gabino, her musicians. Although Beorlegui's intention is to honor famous *tangueras* such as Merello, Lamarque, Mercedes Simone and Nelly Omar, she also incorporates humor into her shows. She was the protagonist in Dolina's play "Lo que me costó el amor de Laura" and appeared on Dolina's radio show "La venganza será terrible."[43]

In "La milonga del mono," Dolina seems to address these famous songs sung by *tangueras*.[44] He uses the notion of a "proud ugliness" as his theme. The poetic voice in Dolina's lyrics is aware that she was not made to fulfill the standards of society: "me armaron mal," she sings. In spite of this, she is content with the way she is and has a sense of humor about herself when she adds, "si alguno soñó conmigo, tal vez gritando se despertó." Furthermore, the singer is aware that her ugliness prevents her from choosing a lover, "yo nunca tuve preferencia, es un prejuicio burgués el que uno tenga que elegir," so she settles for whomever arrives by her side. She is resigned to accepting that "me armaron mal."

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[43] Several sources should be cited here: At Todotango.com: Libertad Lamarque's page www.todotango.com/spanish/creadores/llamarque.asp, Tita Merello's page www.todotango.com/spanish/creadores/tmerelo.asp. At YouTube.com: www.youtube.com/results?search_query=alejandro+dolina+tango&aq=9sx. Alejandro Dolina's personal webpage: www.alejandrodolina.com.ar and Karina Beorlegui's personal webpage: www.karinabeorlegui.com.ar/home.php, as well as informal conversations with graduate colleague Marcus Palmer.

[44] Though the meaning of the word *mono* in the title of the song is not explicitly addressed or explained, several possibilities come to mind. *Mono* in Spanish is translated as monkey, but as *milonga* was influenced by the African presence in Argentina, it is relevant to suggest *mono* as a pejorative term directed towards Africans. Another possibility is *Mono* as a diminutive for a first name like Antonio or Manuel, though this is highly unlikely as *mono* is not capitalized in the song's title, nor is the song addressed to a man in particular. The third is that the woman is so ugly that she resembles a monkey. In this context, the third interpretation is the most relevant, as the song discusses a sense of proud ugliness.

Hadad's version of "La milonga del mono" keeps the original lyrics by Dolina, but changes it musically. Her version is set to a Middle Eastern rhythm, allowing her to dance in an Egyptian style, using stereotypical hand gestures. To accompany this Middle Eastern motif, Hadad wears a long, shiny, strapless gold cloak covered by numerous breasts of different sizes, including one on top of her head. Throughout her performance she sensuously rubs the many nipples of her protruding breasts while winking at the male spectators in the front row.

In terms of the choice of using a Middle Eastern inspired motif for the rhythm of the song, and for the dancing and costume, Hadad is taking critical distance aided by her own ethnic identity as a daughter of Lebanese immigrants in Mexico.[45] This allows Hadad an external perspective on the matter she discusses. At the same time, however, she has internal insight as a resident of Mexico City for several decades. She then addresses the problem, literally standing in the roots of the nation. This piece also serves as an example of how Hadad incorporates Brechtian theatricality into her pieces.

In her post-song commentary, Hadad explains to the audience of the Teatro Hidalgo in downtown Mexico City that her performance in this segment is dedicated to a goddess of her creation called "La multimamada." The laughter that follows is the soundtrack under her stand-up commentary. "La multimamada" is a play onwords, which incorporates "multi," from "*multinacionales*," or international corporations, and "*mamada*" which, literally means "suckled one," but can be read in a variety of ways.[46] Hadad introduces "La multimamada" as the buried goddess, the oldest, the most loved and the most venerated. "La multimamada" feeds the earth with the milk of her many

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[45] With regards to the status of the "ethnic" in relation to the "Mexican." The "ethnic" within Mexico is represented by minorities (particularly by indigenous minorities, though there are others like Africans and Asians). The "Mexican" is seen as the *mestizo*, and in terms of culture, as all that has been proposed by the government, the Nation-State, the Secretary of Culture as such.

[46] Literally translated as "suckled one," though contextually said when something "sucks," to use contemporary American slang. It is also a play on Mexican slang for male oral sex: "mamada."

breasts. She uses this goddess as an allegory to speak of Mexico's depleting resources by saying, "A México la chupan y la chupan y sigue dando..." She refers to Mexicans as cockroaches because they put up with everything, which allows her to critique the giving nature and naiveté of Mexicans in general, specifically of Mexican women. Additionally, Hadad informs the audience of the goddess Mayaguel, who was also known for having many breasts. She calls her the goddess of tequila and of the maguey plant itself. This goddess must be read and discussed in light of maternity and female sexuality. Her many protruding breasts signal the importance of the mother figure to the Mexican nation. Her love is unconditional, she is always giving, and her milk is everlasting. This also parallels what countries like Mexico represent to the U.S. Underdeveloped countries are ever-giving, ever-lasting and never complaining. Hadad presents a female figure that seems to employ a perfect balance between roles: woman, mother, lover and goddess. Read in light of sexuality, Hadad adds a playful tone as she rubs her many nipples and pretends to reach orgasm. By doing this she puts the subject of female sexuality on the table. Furthermore, by using the female body, she is critiquing the image of the giving mother who becomes a martyr for the sake of her children.

Although we might see this number as light, funny and absurd, it is a profound critique of Mexican history and culture. Through comedy and parody, Hadad performs the Mexican nation. Hadad employs political critique through the use of satire and parody of the president, politicians and Mexico's political system. She uses indigenous culture as a motif to create costumes, characters, props and choreographies. By incorporating Mexico's multiple indigenous past she is acknowledging that these cultures coexist in the capital city, which gives her a starting point in attempting to rewrite present social, political and cultural models.

Artists like Shakira and Hadad have used their Lebanese descent to their advantage. In the case of Shakira, she has sold herself as exotic through her name, her belly dancing and the Middle Eastern rhythms heard in some of her songs. Shakira's

crossover song "Hips Don't Lie" was performed at the 2006 MTV awards, featuring Wyclef Jean. The song was released in both Spanish and English. In the MTV awards performance Shakira appears in a hot pink Middle Eastern belly dance costume with a veil, headdress and gold jewelry. She begins her MTV performance with two backup dancers doing a traditional interpretation of Middle Eastern dance. Wyclef Jean emerges onto the stage and she takes her position by his side, lifting and dropping her pelvis daringly. Shakira sells ethnicity by performing Middle Eastern dancing, singing with a Haitian rapper, and threading a Latino feeling into the song, all done with washed-out with blonde hair. The music video features what seems like a carnival scene, mixing all different cultural influences in an artificial, tribal setting. Wyclef Jean's collaboration with Shakira resonates with Hadad combining Middle Eastern and Afro Caribbean elements. In Shakira's video "La tortura," featuring Alejandro Sanz, Shakira covers herself with black oil, highlighting the economic importance of the Arabic oil industry. Bringing up blackface minstrelsy, Shakira performs Middle Eastern dance movements to a *reggeaton* influenced hit. In this piece, Shakira and Sanz are two artists of the Latin world coming together to produce a single that is marketable transnationally.

By taking hold of their heritage, what both Shakira and Hadad are doing is what Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser call "recreating ethnicity" in their book Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America. Although Hadad is already exotic simply by being born in Quintana Roo, Mexico, a southern state that is not nationally acknowledged, she adds more attention to herself by having a Lebanese name and heritage. During her career Hadad has focused on addressing topics that are relevant to Mexican nationalism, politics and culture. Although in the past Hadad occasionally incorporated foreign elements into her shows, I argue that currently, in a post 9/11 framework she has made a point to address these issues regularly by referencing particular influences, such as the Middle East and Asia. At the beginning of her career, Hadad was, and, still is, more well known abroad. Currently, within Mexico City she is making a strong effort to perform regularly

in public venues, other than La Bodega del Bataclán, where she can gain a larger city (and nation) based audience. The strategies of incorporating external audiences enable Hadad to keep both her domestic and foreign audiences interested, as well as satisfy her own desire to address transnational phenomena within her performances.

Hadad has identified with the work that Dolina has done in Argentina and borrowed it as something that she can represent on stage for her own, very different purposes. Hadad takes a song that represents contemporary Argentine national popular culture and places it over a Middle Eastern background with a completely absurd costume.[47] Hadad "recreates ethnicity" by addressing her Lebanese heritage through the music, by addressing the *tangueras* she admires through the song choice, by addressing themes of female subjectivity through the lyrics of the song, and by addressing popular music. She uses the estrangement technique (incorporating the absurd from avant-garde theater) to discuss something essential to Mexico: natural resources.

## Performance Afterthoughts

During Hadad's show many questions regarding audience reception came to mind: Is the audience aware of the strong social critique Hadad poses of Mexican gender roles? Why do they attend her shows? Is it because of her widely entertaining costumes and her uncensored sense of humor? Why does the audience always respond with laughter when Hadad makes clear and relevant social points?

In Holy Terrors, Roselyn Constantino writes that Hadad uses her humor to provoke social awareness and critique. She rightly argues that people laugh in response because they acknowledge its truth, and laughter is the least devastating way to react to their situation and social reality (205). Constantino adds that through the spectator's laughter, Hadad hopes to release the frustration that she believes Mexicans have with

[47] It should be addressed that the *milonga* did not reach the same elite "high art" status as the tango, which was exported to Europe. Thus, it is the music of the popular and/or working classes.

their own society. Constantino mentions that Hadad also hopes to promote awareness in the audience by speaking to them through the voice of their own culture (205).

After reflecting on the performance, I have mixed thoughts. Part of me loved it because of its political critique, its costuming and its witty/fun stand-up commentary. Part of me couldn't wait for it to be over because of its absurdity, its formulaic and repetitive nature, and its annoying vocals.

## Conclusion

Although Hadad explicitly tells her audience which goddess she dedicates each of her pieces to, she implicitly knocks them off the pedestals that held them high. She eliminates the distance between everyday women and traditional Mexican, Greek, Catholic, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, Asian, goddess figures. This allows the concept of goddess vs. non-goddess to be reexamined. To say that Hadad's intention is to emphasize that every woman is a goddess is too simplistic, although she is quoted in a Mexico-City-based journal as saying: "Para mi, las Panchas, Juanas, Marías son las diosas."[48] Constantino argues that "as a businesswoman and artist, Hadad promotes the increased visibility of women. As a Mexican woman who designs, produces, performs, and therefore owns her own show (her stage, her body), she provides an alternative model to women's traditional participation in cultural production, as well as an alternative model of the history of that participation" (193-4). With her display of characters, Hadad brings to the surface the virgin/whore dichotomy that exists in the Catholic patriarchal culture of Mexico and is so engrained in the Mexican mentality. By saying that every woman is a divine sinner, Hadad is uniting the two ends of the spectrum, thus (hopefully) creating a middle ground on which Mexican women can assert their identity.

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[48] Orduña, Silverio. "Placer de cabaret." Círculo Universitario II Agosto-Diciembre 2008 (21-26).

Hadad critiques Mexican mainstream thought and tells her Mexico City audience to think differently, to be progressive. Hadad's objective is that through her informative and comic tone her audience will respond with social critique and analysis. Hadad employs an uncensored stand-up comic tone with her audience as she uses comedy (and parody) as the medium for her message. She addresses "*Capitalinos*" from all social classes. Her vocabulary is full of Mexican slang and she is not concerned with adapting her speech for a wider public. For Hadad, costuming is central. It is ironic, playful, big, and full of symbolism and iconography. It is artistic and an essential, well-thought-out, well-planned part of each piece. Each costume adds another layer to the piece. There's a certain shock value present in her shows. She wants to impress the audience with her eccentric and absurd costumes and choice of topics to discuss.

Hadad poses social critique through laughter and humor. She challenges the Mexican audience to critique their culture by poking fun and parodying their most sacred beliefs. In this sense she is proposing new models of Mexican identity, particularly with regards to women and to female sexuality.

Hadad prioritizes her socio-political agenda over her music. She alters originals to evoke and provoke social consciousness. She uses irony as a theatrical tool to aid her in inverting the meaning of what she is singing about and creating a space for negotiating questions of gender and politics. This irony, however, is not a direct attack on her audience; rather, she filters it through other means such as humor and parody. This shows how well she knows the Mexican public she addresses. Any other way of approaching social critique within Mexico, like didacticism, for example, is disregarded. The risk, however, is that the humor, costuming, and overall entertainment factor overpower the message.

Hadad's performance of national identities suggests that Mexicans must become aware of the constructed nature of their society, from gender roles to politics to religion. She demands (through irony, laughter and shock value) that her audience take another

look at themselves and question and critique higher social powers. She implies that men, and especially women, possess the ability to change, and to alter the traditional, conservative roles that have been imposed onto them by a patriarchal hegemonic society. She brings to mind that national identities can question, change, negotiate and move forward, as they rightly should. Through parody, Hadad intends to participate as an agent in the creation of new *Mexicana* cultural production, in which women take on an active role in the construction of national culture(s) and performance.

# CHAPTER 2

# PERFORMING NATION THROUGH FOLK:

# LILA DOWNS

In a Red Carpet interview at the 51st Grammy awards in 2009, Downs explains her gown to the Entertainment Tonight reporter, Thea Andrews: "It's a traditional weave called a *rebozo*. The whole dress is made out of *rebozos*. It's the combination of the Spanish influence with the Native American traditions."[49] Amidst a flow of hip, urban, designer outfits, Downs explains that her gown is of her own design, made out of shawls, an iconic Mexican female garment.[50] In a post Red Carpet photo Downs stands proudly displaying the typical product of national culture with a new twist. This exemplifies Downs' work as a contemporary artist. She takes fragments of a constructed "authentic" Mexican culture (in this case the *rebozo*, which has a specific class and race connotation) and incorporates them into the creation of something new, like a Red Carpet gown.[51]

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[49] See the interview at: www.theinsider.com/videos/1651491_The_51st_Grammy_Awards_Lila_Downs_Red_Carpet_Interview.

[50] Interestingly her photo was on the "worst dressed" list in more than one place. Find photos at: www.examiner.com/x-1423-Baltimore-Celebrity-Examiner~y2009m2d9-51st-Annual-Grammy-Awards-lend-familiar-imagery-to-red-carpet-fashion-disasters&usg, as well as: img.photobucket.com/albums/v449/wendylady1/fashion%2520Police/Grammy%2520Awards/Grammys%25202009/LilaDowns01.

[51] Though the r*ebozo* is a national symbol that goes *beyond* social classes, it is important to mention that it has been an iconic accessory associated with the peasant, the working class, and the indigenous woman. For these women, the *rebozo* has more of a practical use as it guards their faces and necks from the hot sun, it warms their shoulders in the evening, it covers their heads during the Catholic mass (a sign of respect done by women), it carries their babies on their backs while they work, and it provides privacy when they nurse their children. For the women who belong to upper and elite social classes, the *rebozo* is used during mass, while praying, or to accessorize an outfit. The main difference besides the utility vs. accessory aspect I mention; is the material or fabric of which the *rebozo* is made. A traditional *rebozo* is made out of an affordable and thin textile that is dyed, and can then be embroidered. The fabrication of *rebozos* and other similar clothing is a common practice for peasant and indigenous women in their villages and/or in the big cities, as a way to earn a living from tourists. These women typically use dark and wide *rebozos*, which allow for its multiple uses, and little embellishment. The *rebozos* used by women of upper social classes are typically embroidered, multicolored and delicate, often not as wide. They are very similar to the *mantilla*, worn in Spain. The main difference between the two is the shape: while *mantillas* are triangular, *rebozos* are rectangular. Both have tassels on the end. My mention

Because of her cultural privilege, Downs is able to take this element of low folk culture to represent the folkloric. In this sense, Downs is participating as agent in the creation of new Latino or new Greater Mexico cultural production.

In this chapter I discuss Lila Downs' performance of regional, national, and ethnic identity through the use of folk. By recreating bits and pieces of folklore and national culture(s) Downs creates a new product for a mass market. I will argue that Downs performs nation as a transnation, constantly in movement, in connection with other lands, cultures, languages, overlooking the very boundaries set by folk, the genre she uses as her medium.

Some useful terms I will be exploring so as to delve into these questions are: folk, folklore, culture, ethnicity, *mestizaje*, all discussed in light of a live performance of Lila Downs I attended in Madison Wisconsin, and in light of her body of work.[52] On a larger scale, this chapter is also concerned with the connection between folklore and regional/national identity in a contemporary Mexico and Greater Mexico framework.

## Career Chronology

Lila Downs was born in 1968 in Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, to a Mixtec mother and a British-American father. She grew up in Oaxaca, though later moved to California, and then Minneapolis, where her father was a professor. She studied Voice and Anthropology at the University of Minnesota and later returned to Mexico where she slowly began her musical career, performing at local bars in Oaxaca. Her debut album, La Sandunga, was

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of the *rebozo* used by upper-class women in Mexico as similar to a *mantilla* also brings up the notion of class and race. In Mexico, typically the upper classes are read as being more Spanish, (read: lighter skinned), and the working classes are read as being more indigenous (read: darker skinned). Middle class is typically accepted as a combination of both (read: *mestizos*), though one can be more predominant than the other based on skin color and/or surnames (i.e. Márquez de Prado is a Spanish surname). Contrary to U.S. socioeconomic factor, which has a majority of middle class citizens (or easily allows for upward social mobility due to pre-approved credit) Mexico's middle class is lower in number, making the gap greater between the working class and the upper/elite social status.

[52] Downs, May 3rd, 2008. World Music Festival, University of Madison, WI.

released independently in 1997. The title of the album is the title of a classic folk song from the state of Oaxaca. It is a weeping ballad sung with a feeling of longing. The album contains other Oaxacan folk songs, *boleros*, and *rancheras* along with some of Downs' own compositions. She started performing locally in Oaxaca at bars like "Los tres patios," and later she performed in Philadelphia at jazz clubs with Paul Cohen, an American-born saxophone player who later became her musical director and life partner.[53] Downs' early stage as an artist is what I call her Pre-Frida stage, not only because she was not then associated with the film Frida, in which she made her international debut as an artist, but also because her artistic image was different. The album cover on La Sandunga shows an image of an eclectic Latina woman wearing a black woven top with bright red embroidery, typical of the state of Oaxaca, and commonly sold in street markets in central and southern Mexico. The fact that she is wearing this garment of indigenous heritage provides the consumer with an idea of the type of artist Downs is: alternative, independent (as opposed to mainstream) Mexican and/or pro indigenous. However, we can't read too much into her choice of wardrobe for the album's cover because, as I mentioned before, it is a garment that can be purchased commercially. In the nineties, wearing indigenous and typical woven clothing came back into Mexican pop culture as a cool (hippie and bohemian) way to dress, particularly for middle- and upper-class young adults who wanted to be perceived as liberal and alternative. This coincided with Mexican rock groups bringing back traditional elements of Mexican folk culture, such as Café Tacuba, Maná and Caifanes, to name a few.[54] In

[53] It is rumored that at the beginning of Downs' career she hoped to release a rock album and that she initially "rejected" her Mexican identity. I have found no supporting evidence for these claims. Her collaboration with contemporary artists like Café Tacuba and Enrique Bumbury, her admiration for groups like Calle Ocho, as well as her own personal sound (present in certain songs) reveal her inclination toward rock music.

54 Café Tacuba has been known to dress in *guayaberas,* a typical men's shirt from the southern part of Mexico, also worn in the Caribbean, optimum for warm climates. Their single "María" on their debut album is a *bolero* piece that calls upon multiple elements of Mexican culture (such as the reference to Mexican films from the beginning of the century and the name María, which relates to iconic Mexican film star La doña, María Félix, who is referenced in the music video). The films in which Félix appeared are

1997, for Downs to introduce herself to her listeners for the first time dressed in this way has a two-fold purpose: 1) to represent her allegiance to the indigenous community to which she identifies; and 2) to present herself as a cool, young, alternative artist. Interestingly, she achieves this by singing typical folk music from the state of Oaxaca. It is also important to contextualize the political and historical atmosphere surrounding the release of her album. In the mid to late nineties, el Subcomandante Marcos was a front-runner in the media and in the headlines. His iconic image as the face of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) became almost parallel to that of el Ché Guevara, both resembling hope, and most importantly, revolution as a means of causing social (and political) change. The atmosphere among intellectuals, artists and middle- to upper-class young adults, was to ally themselves with the rights of the indigenous peoples. Around the same time, Rigoberta Menchú came to be known in Mexico, and was widely covered by the media as well. Naturally these two incidences had an affect on Downs' ethnic identification and on the political agenda that she later attained and exercised as an artist.

After a series of successful albums released, an appearance in the film Frida, several Grammy nominations and awards in the "Contemporary World Music" category, Downs' career took flight. This stage of her career is what I call her Frida stage. In this stage, Downs consciously fabricated a multicultural identity that incorporated different styles of music and fragments of Mexican folk culture. Because of its multiplicity, critics were unable to categorize Downs' music under only one label or genre; thus, the terms "World Culture" and "World Music" were used and imposed by her critics. Downs has often been compared to Kahlo because of her manner of dress and her appearance in the

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those of the "Siglo de oro" (Golden Age) in Mexican film. Maná's leading album in the nineties, ¿Dónde jugarán los niños?, which incorporated a series of ballads with *bolero* influence: "Vivir sin aire," "Cachito" and "Te lloré un río." Musically, they incorporated Mexican and Caribbean rhythms to their rock sound, particularly in their early stage in the nineties. Caifanes incorporated Mexican rhythms as well (such as *banda*, indigenous flutes, drums and shells) into their rock music. Their lyrics, though esoteric and abstract, deal with foregrounding Mexican indigenous heritage, as heard in "Aquí no es así."

2002 film Frida.[55] In an interview on her participation in the film, Downs mentions the inspiration that the painter has been in her life.[56] Downs admits that she is aware that her own image reflects a specific ethnic identity, as Kahlo's did. Downs speaks of her musical performance during the dance scene between Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti. In this scene, Downs plays the role of Kahlo's friend who sings a Tango in the background. Interestingly, although Downs is dressed in an époque costume and is not playing herself in the film, she physically looks more like Kahlo than Salma Hayek does, who plays her in the film. In the interview, Downs talks about her initial discomfort performing without her typical braided hair and earrings, which give her a certain self confidence, but she says she was aware that she was acting and not performing herself. This is an interesting statement because it implies that she considers her performance and her artistic image to be herself, although we know it is consciously constructed and marketed toward her audience.

Even though Downs spent half of her life in Oaxaca and half of her life in Minnesota, the image she chooses to represent her as an artist in this stage of her career is that of a native indigenous woman. That is, she chooses to resemble through literal embodiment, an "authentic," "native" Mexico. Her wardrobe in this stage includes typical Oaxacan dresses, Mayan embroidered tops, Native American necklaces and beads, woven scarves and Mexican silver earrings from Oaxaca and central Mexico silver mines. Her hair is usually braided from top to bottom and interlaced with colorful ribbons that tie at the end, as the indigenous woman, and as Kahlo would wear.[57] It is not by

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[55] Cepeda, Esther. "Freedom From Frida" in the Huffington Post and Rodriguez Martorell, Carlos. "From Frida to Fierce: Lila Downs lets loose on New CD" in the New York Daily News.

[56] Interview found in the "Extras" label on Frida DVD. Dir. Julie Taymor. 2002.

[57] This is another example of how Downs takes an element of folk (and ethnic) culture and gives it a new and hip twist. She makes a point to exaggerate the use of ribbons; sometimes she makes them look like colorful hair extensions, other times she keeps them long, hanging down her legs.

chance that Downs uses a similar style to Kahlo in this stage of her career. In a post-revolutionary era, and in an artistic atmosphere of murals and *indigenismo*, Kahlo wanted to separate herself from the mainstream, but, at the same time, hold on to popular culture. She took the marginalized look that indigenous women wore to a refined level worthy of imitation and flattery. This style can also be read as her incorporation of the elite artistic aesthetic of *indigenismo*. As a member of the elite society of Mexico City, Kahlo lived in an atmosphere of social pressure to fit in; at the same time, belonging to an artistic and intellectual leftist society, as well as being disabled and rebellious, gave her an excuse to express herself eccentrically. This image later on proved to be admired, imitated and (currently) mass consumed. Downs took all of this into account with her own image and attempted to do the same at this stage in her career. She used her double status as outsider and insider to construct her image.[58] Another aspect that links these two artists is politics. Both Downs and Kahlo are left-wing activists with a clear political agenda that is visible in their artistic work.

Throughout her career, Downs has chosen to publicly identify with Native American, Mexican and Central American indigenous cultures. Her border image is strengthened by this allegiance to indigenous minorities. This allegiance is implicit in the way she dresses on-stage and in public as well. She has stood publicly beside Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú during political speeches, and she has sung in honor of mistreated indigenous women. She is actively involved in human rights issues, standing by the oppressed. She donates funds from her concerts to the Casa de la mujer organization in Oaxaca and makes women (indigenous, marginalized, immigrants and others) the characters of her songs. Her webpage advocates for the Comité Eureka, which is a coalition of Mexican mothers who are looking for their disappeared sons. They declare

58 She's an outsider because she was raised in the U.S., and belongs to the educated, middle social strata. Though at the same time it can be argued that she's an insider, being originally from Oaxaca, having a Mixtec mother, and speaking Mixtec allows her insight into this linguistic community.

557 disappeared people due to political involvement.[59] Recently, in 2008, Downs held a benefit concert in Mexico City with tickets priced at $100 to be donated to the indigenous communities of Southern Mexico.

Currently, Downs has a different, more provocative look, which I call her Post-Frida Stage. Critics say it started with the release of her newest album Shake Away, others say it began even before then, with her album La Cantina.[60] This new look became evident to me when I saw her on stage in Madison only when my husband pointed out to me how "hot" she was. From then on my analysis of her in this light began.

In "From Frida to Fierce: Lila Downs Lets Loose on New CD," journalist Carlos Rodríguez Martorell describes Downs' sexiness as part of her new look. "If you remember Lila Downs as the gloomy Frida Kahlo look-alike singing "La Llorona" in Salma Hayek's biopic of the famed single-eyebrow Mexican painter, you might want to take another look. Coinciding with the release of her new album, Shake Away, she's revealing a glowing, sexier look."[61] Rodríguez Martorell explains that after Downs found out she was unable to have children; she took on a youthful attitude and a sexier approach on life. In this new look, Downs is attempting to be more accessible to a young, mainstream audience. She is still doing this in an alternative way, through using her indigenous heritage, through her internal embodiment of cultural "authenticity" and through exoticism.[62] A second article that exploits the link between Downs' sexiness and her infertility is written by Agustín Gurza, who lists all of Downs' accomplishments, followed by this statement at the end of his first paragraph: "What she doesn't have is a

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[59] www.liladowns.com.

[60] See Figures B1, B2 and B3 in Appendix B: Lila Downs.

[61] "From Frida to Fierce: Lila Downs Lets Loose on New CD."

[62] Downs could be perceived as exotic to an audience foreign to Mexican and Latino cultures. I argue that she takes this in consideration in the presentation of her image.

child." Gurza increases the drama as he continues: "depressed and drinking, the together performer fell apart. 'What … am I doing in this life if I can't have children?' she asked herself. 'That's the whole point of living as a woman.'"[63] Without quoting the source of his interview with Downs, the reader is left to wonder if the statements in quotes are truly Downs', or Gurza's impersonation of her role as a victim. Both Martorell and Gurza's articles take advantage of Downs' open admittance of her infertility. Moreover, their conclusions are untrue, according to the following source: In a CNN *en español* broadcast given about Downs, reporter Alberto Tabira states that the album La Cantina was written and released after Downs found out about her infertility. Tabira states, "La tristeza fue la fuerza motora en la creación de este disco."[64] This report breaks down the conclusions made by the two previous journalists, who argue that her new album Shake Away, (which reveals this sexy look [and sound]) is linked to her infertility. Downs' infertility is yet another aspect that links her to Frida Kahlo's image. Kahlo was deeply affected by her infertility, caused by an accident as an adolescent. This emotional distress is evident in her work, which references her pain and her inner and outer wounds. Her infertility is often represented by a self-portrait of the artist embracing a baby with Diego Rivera's face. Downs seems to cope with her infertility through her writing and performing. As Kepecs quotes Downs, she uses the image of the snake's changing and shedding skin as a motif for this album.[65] In other words, Shake Away represents shaking off the old skin and slipping into a new one.

Downs' performance of race informs her performance of sexuality and gender. Her hypersexualized image in the Shake Away promotional photos may be tinged with

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[63] Agustín Gurza "Lila Downs Celebrates a New Outlook" found in the L.A. Times.

[64] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8to-yDIIc4. "Lila Downs no puede tener hijos".

[65] In her post-Madison performance interview with Kepecs posted online.

hostile comments regarding her age and her inability to have children, but her image is even more informed by her Whiteness. Reminiscent of Pocahontas, Downs seems to be performing the role of the "Indian princess" in these photos. She poses as the exotic/erotic indigenous "other," who references the fantasies that White men have about the sexual availability and subservience of indigenous or native women. This notion is framed within current U.S. consumer images of women's sexuality as power. This is especially true for women of a certain age like Madonna or Kim Cattrall (the sex fiend in "Sex in the City"), though this doesn't apply to women who are too old or physically out of shape. The performance of sexuality and race that takes place in these photos is constructed by Downs' team of costumers, make-up artists, photographers and personal trainers, who enable her to enact an image of sexual vulnerability and seductiveness countered by her being inaccessible to the aroused male viewer because she is really a powerful rich White woman, not an Indian woman who can be read as la Chingada.[66] These exoticized images of Downs used as propaganda for her new album are disturbing as they reference the sexually powerless Indian woman (which otherwise seems to be the image Downs is advocating) faced with physical and cultural rape by (White) Spanish men during the conquest and colonization of the Americas, for financial gain.[67]

A common aspect in Downs' discography and live repertoire is the incorporation of linguistic multiplicity, specifically by speaking and singing in Spanish, Mixtec and English. This linguistic performance is tied to identity and nation in that it solidifies her image and credibility as being culturally "authentic," which is what adds to her appeal. In her repertoire, Downs includes many musical genres (that within Mexico are sometimes

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[66] The discussion of these photos in light of ethnicity was brought to my attention by Prof. Denise Filios in an email written on February 20th, 2010. These photos were also discussed in a meeting with Prof. Claire Fox and Prof. Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez on February 12th, 2010 where terms like "Indian Princess" and "Pocahontas" were provided.

[67] These photos are reminiscent of Chicano calendar art, something that Alma López takes into account, as featured in the next chapter.

seen as regional genres) in an alternative manner; in other words, she plays with what is commonly heard as an "authentic" musical regional/national genre and makes it contemporary, popular and potentially untraceable. She alters these songs by adding different instruments that wouldn't commonly be heard in that region, by adding a particularly different/unique voice inflection foreign to that genre, or in her use of costuming and/or dance during her performances. On the subject of Popular Music, Richard Middleton argues that "Folk songs are commonly seen as songs that express something about a way of life that exists now or existed in the past or about to disappear (or in some cases, to be preserved or somehow revived)" (127). In the context of Downs' work, she uses folk songs as a means to preserve, revive and more importantly, modernize, with the purpose of contributing to the creation of new Greater Mexico cultural production.

Though arguable, popular music is born from folk music. Folk songs (*canciones folklóricas*) are songs that emerge from oral tradition and are closely related to ritual and customs. Popular (read: traditional) songs (*canciones populares*) are songs that are written with a specific intent, on a certain topic. *Rancheras*, *corridos* and *boleros* are subgenres of popular music, often referencing or stemming from folk music. Although they are commercially active genres to this day, there are classic *rancheras*, *corridos*, and *boleros* that remain over the years, and are reproduced by contemporary artists generation after generation. By currently singing folk songs, Downs is (in her own way) referencing the past (with all that it encompasses) in a contemporary framework. By holding on to these classic songs, present generations of Mexicans are reconnecting with a feeling of nationalism and community. Artists like Downs are reproducing classics in a hip, new packaging, making them ready for international distribution.

In a review written in Madison's "Daily Page" after Down's May 3rd performance, journalist Susan Kepecs refers to a phone interview she held with the artist upon her arrival in Madison. Kepecs paraphrases Downs' process of electing a repertoire

that is appropriate and adaptable to each location in which she and her band perform. According to Kepecs, Downs mentioned that they perform more songs in English when there is an Anglo audience. This wasn't the case in her Madison show, where she only performed three songs in English. This could be read as Downs seeing Madison (along with certain parts of the Midwest) as being part of Greater Mexico. Kepecs quotes Downs: "As musicians, it's our job to entertain, but I always try to include a message."[68] After observing Downs' performance, this message came across in her pieces in English that referenced border politics (musically and visually) through the images that played on the screen. Interestingly, with her songs in English, she seemed to take on the role of defender or advocate for the displaced, the dislocated, the illegal crossers, and the marginalized. Her role is, then, not only to be a cultural mediator for Anglos, but also to defend these peoples against mainstream discrimination, in this case, against the United States (an identity to which she also ascribes). Her ethnic identification and belonging to the U.S. gives her the insight and the position to fight against it as an insider.

## Folklori ¿qué? Discussing Folk and Folklore

Mexican folklore reveals its awareness of the country's cultural and ethnic diversity. In Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico, Claudio Lomnitz argues that "Mexico has always been occupied by diverse human groups that speak different languages and have significant variations in belief and customs. Mexican nationality is not a historically transcendent entity. On the contrary, it is the historical product of the peoples who have inhabited those lands" (35). Folklore, understood as a means to preserve national cultures and share it with others, serves the purpose of heightening this diversity. In Kate Ramsey's interesting study on vodou, religion and dance in Haiti, she defines folklore as "…a space not merely for political self-definition but also, crucially for the restoration of national self-determination and cultural dignity" (357). Folklore, then, enables the

[68] Kepecs, Susan. "Lila Downs Snake Charmer" found in the Daily Page.

identification process on an individual level, as well as on a national and communal plain. Within Mexico, the Secretary of Culture has long made mandatory the teaching of folkloric ballet in public elementary, middle and high schools.[69] Because of this, each state has its own Folkloric Ballet Company as a way to preserve this aspect of folklore. These dance companies are primarily associated with the public universities of the state capitals. For example, Guadalajara, the second largest city in Mexico, has the Ballet Folklórico de la Universidad de Guadalajara, which performs every Sunday morning at the Teatro Degollado in the historical district of downtown Guadalajara. Downs' work takes into consideration the cultural diversity within Mexico. Her costumes, her music, her dance moves and her songs reflect her awareness of these regional specificities. In her Madison performance, Downs made a point of acknowledging these specificities verbally and didactically. So, if the *marimba* playing in the background was not enough to reference the state of Veracruz, she mentions how this instrument traveled from Africa during the colonial period to find its home on the eastern coasts of Mexico.[70] The Ballet Folklórico de México de Amalia Hernández is seen by other dance companies in Mexico as the highest expression of folklore and culture, which each company aspires to emulate. Touring internationally, this company embodies the nation it represents. Each movement, each costume and each dance, symbolizes an "authentic" aspect of folklore as the backbone of Mexico. The Ballet Folklórico de México toured the Midwest in October of 2001, drawing a huge audience at the Iowa City Hancher Auditorium. Similarly, Downs made a sold-out appearance at Hancher in 2004 as part of her tour through the Midwest.

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[69] In Mexico 'public' schools are 'state' schools. That is, they are funded by the state.

[70] This was something she actually did in Madison. In another song she recited the translation of a Zapotec poem into English, and then continued to inform the audience that there are 64 native languages spoken in Mexico.

Folklore, as defined by Paulo de Carvalho-Neto, is "a branch of cultural anthropology." It is, he argues, "the scientific study of the cultural acts of any people. These acts are characterized by being anonymous. (…) The objective of folklore is to discover the rules governing the formation, organization and metamorphosis of these cultural acts for the benefit of mankind" (15). He is proposing folklore as the study of culture and people within it, with the intended purpose of benefiting future generations. William Bascom signals four functions of folklore: "1) as projective systems; 2) as a means of validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them; 3) as a pedagogical devise; 4) as a means of applying social pressure and exercising social control; and these four functions can further be grouped together under the single function of maintaining the stability of culture."[71] Viewed in this manner, folklore operates within a society insuring that the mainstream conforms to the accepted cultural values, and continues on from generation to generation, through education and culture. In other words, folklore is an important mechanism in "maintaining the stability of culture" (175). Because folklore mirrors culture, Bascom argues that it must always be understood in relation to the culture of origin. As a student of voice and anthropology in the University of Minneapolis, Downs understands the function of folklore as a branch of cultural anthropology deeply tied to land. She uses this as a basis for her work and as a point of departure.

Typically, according to Américo Paredes, what motivates the study of folklore in Mexico is a feeling of romantic nationalism, bringing up its intrinsic relationship to a particular land and culture, as well as the origins of the word itself.[72] The scholarly study of folklore began in Germany in the nineteenth century, and was tied to currents of

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[71] As quoted in Danandjaja, James. "A Javanese Cinderella Tale and Its Pedagogical Value" in Alan Dundes ed. Cinderella: A Casebook. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1988. p. 175.

[72] This notion is suggested by Américo Paredes who writes the foreword of Paulo de Carvalho-Neto's The Concept of Folklore.

romanticism and nationalism. According to Alan Dundes, those interested in the study of folklore were individuals who felt a sense of nostalgia for the past and the need to document a national awareness or identity.[73] At the end of the century national folklore societies were formed throughout Europe and the United States; many still operate today.

In Folk Culture in World Technology, Hermann Bausinger understands "folk" as an indication of "the real world of the lower classes, the 'simple folk'" (2). Alan Dundes argues that:

> …the folk were understood to be a group of people who constituted the lower stratum, the so-called *vulgus in popolo* – in contrast with the upper stratum or elite of that society. The folk were contrasted on the one hand with 'civilization' – they were the uncivilized element in a civilized society – but on the other hand, they were also contrasted with the so-called savage or primitive society, which was considered even lower on the evolutionary ladder. (2)

Read in this light, the folk can be seen as the middle ground between the elite and the primitive. Although the term is generally equated to peasants, the illiterate and the rural (as opposed to: high society, the educated or the privileged and urban), currently folklorists have broadened the term to study the practices of indigenous and aboriginal peoples as well. With this in mind, Dundes defines the folk as: "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" –the factor itself can be anything: a common language, religion, occupation– "but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own" (7). This definition is inclusive enough that it can be applied to an entire nation or to a sole family, though it is not limited to just these two.

Folklore represents a constructed notion of folk culture that elevates it (through observation, categorization and standardization), enabling it to become elite or "high art." What Downs is doing in her performances is incorporating folk as a genre and referencing Mexican folklore so as to become more appealing to an elite, educated,

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[73] Alan Dundes Interpreting Folk p. 1.

World market. In Downs' Madison performance, there were several, somewhat didactic, references to folk culture, as defined broadly by Dundes. Generally speaking, these didactic moments were tied to the understanding and preservation of indigenous and ethnic cultures of the Americas.

Downs consciously chooses folk as a genre because it enables her to reference the people, not only as a means to give them a voice, but also to gain "authenticity" within the market of World Music, in which folk holds a privileged position. Similarly, in New Latina Narrative, Ellen McCracken has written about Sandra Cisneros, arguing that "in order to reach a wide audience, she is dependent on a mainstream publishing outlet bent on selling her as a minority commodity" (15). To feature this, Cisneros presents herself wearing *rebozos*, folk garments and even colorful cowboy boots with the Virgen de Guadalupe on the front. McCracken notes this as a way of framing "commodified ethnicity" (17). The elements of folk culture Downs integrates are visible (found in her use of garments and iconography that reference a particular group), musical (evident in the chosen instruments and rhythms that originate in different regions and/or nations) linguistic (heard in the languages she incorporates) and narrative (found in the storytelling techniques, the incorporation of myth and in the lyrics of her songs). Downs sells herself within a musical genre, which, similarly to Cisneros' experience in publishing, prioritizes minority cultures. Downs' physical presentation must match her music, and thus there must be a cohesive package selling this message, which reflects this "commodified ethnicity."[74]

Downs has chosen to integrate these elements of folk culture into her work because through her ethnic and biracial appearance she has access to representing them in a way that is credible to her audience. Downs uses folk as a groundwork on which she

[74] The objective is to slowly become mainstream. This is seen in her recent album Shake Away, through the incorporation of bands like Café Tacuba, Enrique Bunbury and Mari de Chambao. In the same way she incorporates artists like Mercedes Sosa, staying true to her folk-oriented public.

builds a new product with the objective of rearticulating and reinterpreting culture. The final creation is a product that references folk culture(s) but goes beyond the geographic boundaries that locate it. Downs' version of "La bamba" is a clear example of this, as it is a folk song from the state of Veracruz played on the *marimba*, harp and guitar.[75] Downs' version respects the original song but is played over an electronic, ethereal base. The result is an updated version of a folksong, which plays with the idea that folk culture is dead and only serves the purpose of preserving nationalism and a sense of belonging. Downs' hybrid version of "La bamba" implies that folk culture is alive, malleable and coercible, and that the artist, as an agent of culture, has access to its reshaping. She is reacting to constructions of "authentic" or "mummified" Mexico/Latin America and working through them by adding her own voice.[76] Downs' finalized product performs Greater Mexico as a cultural imaginary that grows continuously, overlooking borders not only on geographic terrains but also with regards to aesthetic genres (music, narrative, audiovisual), to language and to clothing as markers of identity as well. Downs' construction of Greater Mexico is inclusive and broad in order to include all Latino cultures and the countries that have influenced their culture as well.[77] She does this intentionally in order to make herself marketable within the category of World Music and to appeal to a wide range of consumers.

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[75] Though "La bamba" is a folk song from the state of Veracruz, it was made widely commercial by Richie Valens in the 1950s. In the 1990s, Los Lobos made a rock version of the song that was very popular, influencing subsequent bands like Los Lonely Boys.

[76] The term "mummified Mexico" was brought to my attention by my dissertation co-director, Prof. Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, in a thesis meeting on February 12th, 2010.

[77] Downs goes beyond the construct of Greater Mexico that Américo Paredes suggests (as the U.S./Mexico borderlands) and Lynn Stephen furthers (as extending to cities throughout the U.S. with large populations of Spanish speaking people of Mexican heritage).

## Self-Performing Ethnicity

In Lotería Cantada, Downs and her band are featured on a tour bus in Oaxaca, headed toward a small indigenous town to perform.[78] The video documentary focuses on the faces of the indigenous boys and girls who await the shiny tour bus and musical performance. As Downs descends from the bus, dressed in Oaxacan folk garments, the kids appear to be alienated or estranged. The performance that follows, which takes place in the courtyard of the junior high school, reveals cultural differences and identification displacement. In this example, Downs is capitalizing on the marginal, exotic and other, represented by the people in this town. By touring indigenous schools in Mexico, she is revealing a nationalist project, attempting to pass as *indígena*, but instead her whiteness takes center stage.

Lila Downs can be compared to Barack Obama with reference to her ethnicized self-representation and parentage. Both Downs' and Obama's stories undo colonial narratives of African-American and Mexican origins. In Obama's case, instead of a slave woman raped by her White master, his White mother had a mutually consensual relationship with his African father. Downs' parentage can be discussed in terms of miscegenation narratives of Mexican origin. Although her mother was indigenous, she wasn't considered La Chingada. Because of her mutually consensual relationship with her White European husband, she can be read more as Doña Marina than as La Chingada. Both Obama and Downs had a privileged upbringing. Obama was raised by his White maternal grandparents in Hawaii, while his professional mother worked. Although he identifies as African American, his skin color and his name align him with a highly stigmatized racial group within the United States. His biracial identity, however, allows him to play down race to a certain extent and to avoid having to "account for himself" and his race, although he was faced with having to do so occasionally during his

[78] The video I am referencing here is located in the "additional footage" label in the DVD's main menu.

campaign and now as President.[79] Obama is an educated, successful politician who happens to be black. His race is only part of his complex identity. Downs was raised by her biracial parents in the United States, a country that was not native to either of them. As a result, Downs has a biracial identity, which due to the color of her skin facilitates her self-performance as Mexican. Although Downs may not willingly want to identify as Mexican, her performance as indigenous falls through because she is perceived as White, which became evident in the video documentary discussed above. She is, therefore, able to draw on social mechanisms that protect White privilege. Contrary to Obama, when in the limelight, Downs constantly accounts for herself and her "people." In this sense she plays the same role her mother plays of Doña Marina, an interpreter and cultural mediator for Anglos.[80]

The term *mestizaje* has been studied from many perspectives. The most common, perhaps, is from a racial viewpoint as a term that references the mixing of races, particularly the mixing of the Indian and the Spaniard, resulting in a *mestizo*. In the fields of Border and Cultural Studies, Gloria Anzaldúa opened the discussion around the term *mestizaje*, and goes beyond saying that it is a binary concept of race. For her, the *mestizo* is a hybrid subject, who, precisely for this reason, has an identity that is multiple. Anzaldúa values the fusion of *all* elements, instead of choosing *one* as a result. This ideology is very useful with regards to the contemporary debate of transnational identity. Anzaldúa's term "new *mestiza* consciousness" impacted both the disciplines of Feminism and Cultural Studies. It proposes that the Chicana/Tejana/Mexicana woman be aware of

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[79] This use of "giving account" is posed by Judith Butler in Giving an Account of Oneself, in which individuals who are labeled "different/abnormal" are frequently and violently called upon to explain or "account for" themselves by an interrogator who labels him/herself as "normal." The purpose is designed to humiliate and expose the queer or "abnormal" individual.

[80] The idea of comparing Downs to Obama in light of ethnicity was brought to my attention and developed as an argument by my advisor and dissertation co-director Prof. Denise Filios in an email written on February 20th, 2010. I fused her argument into my own words and adapted it to fit the context of my dissertation.

her multiculturalism, and that she use that to take action. She examines the relationship between race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Anzaldúa poses that *mestizaje* is not just a starting point, but rather, a place of arrival, an already negotiated identity. In Communication, Culture and Hegemony, Latin American cultural critic Jesús Martín Barbero elaborates that:

> Mestizaje is not simply a racial fact, but the explanation of our existence, the web of times and places, memories and imagination...(...) Once we take as the starting point of observation and analysis not the linear process of upward social progress but mestizaje, that is, mestizaje in the sense of continuities in discontinuity and reconciliations between rhythms of life that are mutually exclusive, then we can begin to understand the complex cultural forms and meanings that are coming into existence in Latin America: the mixture of the indigenous Indian in the rural peasant culture, the rural in the urban, the folk culture in the popular cultures and the popular in mass culture. (188)

Martín Barbero defines the term *mestizaje* as "the process of cultural hybridization and the re-elaboration of various cultural sources in a new synthesis" (159). This term can be easily applied in light of what Lila Downs does with her music, which I call "musical mestizaje." Martín Barbero continues by arguing that mestizaje "is an approach that destroys the myth of cultural purity and has no repugnance in using modern instruments in the rendition of traditional indigenous music or in broadcasting such music over the radio. It is a study of the transition from the folkloric to the popular" [81] (159). By arguing that Downs' work is "musical mestizaje," then any attempt to claim so-called cultural authenticity or purity is overpowered by the mixture that comes as a result. This mixture also neutralizes any class and race connotations that might have been associated with particular elements of folk and national cultures. Downs performs nation by reacting to an "authentic Mexico" that is constructed and created by the media. The position from which she reacts to this is through folk and folklore, which presents national culture as dead, marginalized and standardized, enabling her to suggest that it is just the opposite.

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[81] Martín Barbero is talking about Romero (1982 "Las ideologías de la cultura nacional" p. 67) who bases his work on Arguedas (1977 "Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana" p. 124-5).

Performance/Concert

The concert was held on a Friday night at the Wisconsin Union Theater in Madison, in the heart of the University of Wisconsin. I arrived just a few minutes before the start of Downs' performance to see that there was a steady flow of people entering the Theater. Downs was to perform at 8:00 p.m. as part of the second World Music Festival, or so it stated in the program I was given as I entered the theater. On the way in, I ran into some University of Iowa professors and graduate students I knew who were in town for a SLA conference. They mentioned they were excited that their conference coincided with Downs' concert. We were seated on the main floor, toward the back, allowing for a full, panoramic view of the stage and audience. The stage was set up in the shape of a horseshoe with the musicians surrounding Downs, leaving enough space for her to dance and move freely.[82] There was a backdrop with a large white screen and a projector. The space was comfortable to the eye, and allowed for a feeling of intimacy with the artist due to its medium size. The Union Theater holds 1,300 people, though not all of the seats were taken. The price of tickets was $20 and $18 for students. I purchased my ticket online in advance. Across from the stage and in the walkway to the main floor were the sound equipment and production assistants who controlled the lighting, sound and images that were projected onto the large backdrop screen. I was excited for the performance to begin. As I looked down at the program in my lap, and at the image of Downs in a playful pose embracing her guitar with a smile I reminded myself not to enjoy her performance *too much*.[83] In other words, I wanted to be clear of my role as critical observer and not sing-along audience member. As I looked around me, I noticed that the

[82] See Figure B4 found in Appendix B: Lila Downs.

[83] See Figure B5, which features the concert program.

audience seemed to be varied, composed of both an in-group and an out-group.[84] I overheard some people speaking (Mexican) Spanish and others speaking Spanglish. I saw others who seemed to be college students, and elderly couples who seemed to be retired yet active in the preservation of the elite theater-going community of Madison.[85] Studying the audience as a whole is a difficult task to accomplish accurately. Trying to organize them into in-group and out-group becomes complicated as well because some audience members might pertain to both. For example, a Mexican-American college student who physically looks Mexican but doesn't speak Spanish and does not feel identified with (and/or does not enjoy) Mexican folk music belongs to both the in-group and the out-group audience. My husband and I would be a similar case, physically we look Caucasian, yet culturally and linguistically we are part of the in-group as well. Another way of understanding these groups would be to call them "Anglo gaze" and "Mexican gaze." Those pertaining to the "Anglo gaze" are all of those who, regardless of ethnic and/or national origin, are culturally and linguistically Anglo.[86] Those audience members pertaining to the "Mexican gaze" are all of those who, regardless of ethnic and/or national origin, are able to understand the cultural and linguistic codes present in Downs' performance. Both sets of terms, in/out group and Anglo/Mexican gaze, are based on an exclusion and inclusion framework. I find the Anglo/Mexican gaze terminology more useful for my analysis because it makes the audience an active participant through the use of the gaze, which is an essential part of performance (a space, a person watching and a person crossing that space). The term gaze also

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[84] Within social science, the term "in group" typically refers to those belonging to the same cultural and/or linguistic code, forming a community of similar insight. "Out group" refers to those who do not belong/fit into the same group as the "in group" for whatever reason.

[85] Some had pads and pencils, which led me to believe they had been sent to the concert as a requisite for a class.

[86] With this term I'm referring to the American way of life and to the culture of the United States, as varied as that is and as ambiguous as it sounds.

contributes to the active participation of the audience in that as a spectator gazes at a performance, he/she transfers all of his/her cultural awareness into reading a particular event. So, the first step as a spectator would be to gaze, the second would be to read what is being gazed upon and process it. Ideally, following with this set of terms, a third group should be created, the "Bi/Transnational gaze," which would encompass an awareness and an understanding of both gazes and worlds. The audience members pertaining to this group would be Downs' ideal audience. I find that ultimately this transcultural awareness is what Downs hopes her music will help achieve.

The concert lasted two hours and ten minutes in total. It began punctually at 8:00 p.m. and ended at 10:10 p.m. The beginning segment lasted around thirty minutes. The middle segment lasted eighty minutes. The end lasted close to twenty minutes. The concert narrative was arranged in the following manner: verbal framing before each song; performance of song; performance recuperation. Her concert was clearly choreographed, and designed to be repeated, rehearsed and performed by professionals (vocalists and musicians, production assistants and technicians).[87]

During her Madison performance, Downs addressed the audience in English between songs, showing she was American, as well as Mexican, and also showing she was aware of the "official" language spoken in the Midwest. The question of language choice is deeply tied to the identity of the performer, the audience, and the construction of identity for consumption by both parties. In this case, Downs' moving with ease through both English and Spanish provided a window into her dual identity. In her framing phase of each piece she performed the role of mediator for the public (both in-group and out-group) to comprehend the cultural context of each piece. The comments framed the piece she was about to sing. They placed it in a particular context in which she

[87] A list of songs performed by Downs and her band in Madison can be found in Appendix B: Lila Downs.

wanted it to be understood be it cultural and/or personal. For this, the visual images on the screen in the background also added to the totality of her intended message.[88]

At the beginning of the show, Downs' first sound as she appeared on stage was a traditional Mexican *grito*, or cry. This sound gave her cultural agency over the Mexican identity she claims. The majority of the (what seemed to be Mexican/Chicano/Latino) audience cheered. Her outfit –a short black, cocktail-style dress covered in Oaxacan colorful embroidery, long ribbons in her hair, and a white *rebozo*– was the first oscillation between the regional and the national cultural planes I found.[89] Throughout her Madison show, Downs recreated various cultural and geographic spaces onstage. She figuratively moved through nation, region and border with ease.

The arrangement of Downs' show was formulaic, though it was not done in an obvious manner. The chosen formula was: 1) Framing: Each song was framed by Downs incorporating an epigraph or a fragment of a poem, telling a myth, or orally contextualizing a piece. This framing was also done visually by rolling images projected onto a backdrop screen that contextualized the piece culturally.[90] 2) Song: The performance of the piece itself, including a lot of Downs' dance moments, and specific instances in which she sings *a capella*, or in which there are instrumental solos. 3) Recuperation: After the song Downs' usually ends with a cordial: "muchas gracias" and a closing comment about the song. This sequence is repeated throughout the show with sporadic musical interludes, though neither Downs nor the musicians left the stage. They were on stage performing from beginning to end. They came back on stage for their

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[88] I have found this same framing in her live concerts found on YouTube and in her compilation of videos, such as her 2006 DVD, Lotería cantada.

[89] See Figure B6.

[90] This is done from the cultural perspective of Downs' creative and artistic team.

encore, entering slowly, one by one, beginning with the drummer. The rest of the band would each enter and join in, adding to the richness of the music. Finally Downs entered to dance to the band's music and to introduce them individually.

## Post-Performance Analysis

The post-performance analyses in this section revolve around the ways in which Downs incorporated folk culture into her show as a means of performing nation. I will be looking at two examples in particular: 1) Using *jarana* music to perform cultural mimesis in her song entitled "La iguana" and 2) Rewriting women into the *corrido* as a genre of popular music in her song called "Tacha la teibolera." My thoughts in this section will be organized around these two themes.

### *Jarana* as cultural mimesis: "La iguana"

For this segment I break down my analysis into the discussion of 1) epigraph; 2) the song itself; 3) the performance of the piece; and 4) the projected images on the backdrop.

Before the performance of this piece took place, Downs addressed the audience, telling them that "La iguana" is a piece that references the coastal regions of Veracruz, featuring the marimba as the main instrument. She then took advantage of the moment for didactic purposes and informed the audience of the origins of this instrument and its arrival to this region of Mexico. This epigraph is a recurring narrative strategy that Downs uses, so as to locate each piece within a desired context. It also enables her to perform the role of intercultural mediator, which she so desires to fulfill.

"La iguana" is a song arranged by Lila Downs and Paul Cohen. As there is no trace of a lyricist or composer for this song, it is reasonable to assume it pertains to the oral tradition of the region it features. The song is included in Downs' album Yutu Tata: Tree of Life, released in 2000. The title and lyrics feature an iguana that is headed to

Soledad de Doblado, a small town in Veracruz, located a short distance away from the port city of Veracruz.

Una iguana se cayó de arriba de una escalera
Del porrazo que llevó se lastimó las caderas
Iguana mía para donde vas
Que voy para el pueblo de Soledad
Si será mentira será verdad
En ese pueblo no hay novedad
Que si lo hubiera es casualidad

Si serás tan fea
Tan fea fea
Que se sube a un palo
Y luego se apea
Pone su huevito
Luego Caraquea
Se mete al hoyito
Pa' que no la vean
Se mira en el espejo
Porque está muy fea
Haga usted lo mismo
Para que lo crea
A la jea jea, a la jea jea
Una iguana se cayó de arriba de una escalera

Una iguana se cayó de la rama de un amate
Del porrazo que llevó se reventó los tomates
Iguana mía para donde vas
Que voy para el pueblo de Soledad
Si será mentira será verdad
Que en ese pueblo no hay novedad
Que si lo hubiera es casualidad

Si serás tan fea
Tan fea
Que se sube a un palo
Y luego se apea
Pone su huevito
Luego caraquea
Se mete al hoyito
Pa' que no la vean
Sube la patita
Como que patea
Saca la colita

Como que colea
Saca las uñitas
Como que uñea
Sube la cabeza
Como cabecea
Sube los ojitos
Como que ojea
Sube la orejita
Como que orejea
A la jea jea, a la jea jea
Una igua se cayó de arriba de un amate
Eso

As an animal totem, the iguana symbolizes adaptation. As cold-blooded animals, their body temperature changes according to the temperature of their surroundings, allowing them to easily adapt to different environments. By featuring a reptile located in Veracruz, Downs is referencing the Caribbean from which this animal originates, from the Taino word "*iwana*."

The song is presumably written from the perspective of coastal townspeople who are accustomed to seeing iguanas often, as the animal is presented by a third party without novelty. On the one hand, the narrative within the lyrics of the song focuses on the adventures of an iguana that falls off a ladder and falls off a tree, but each time gets back up. In this case, perhaps the moral of the story is standing up to adversity. On the other hand, it is a simple depiction of a caricaturized animal in small town life in the coastal region of the Gulf of Mexico. Both of these reveal a sense of humor, also evident in folk culture. By describing how ugly the iguana is and that her hips hurt her when she falls, she gives the iguana feminine characteristics often revealed through folk storytelling. The lyrics of the song narrate a popular tale or story borrowed from oral tradition. The song also narrates the region and the nation that Downs is representing. By discussing the iguana as an animal for this piece she is capturing coastal life in the Gulf of Mexico. The geographical location of this area reveals different experiences. Due to its ports, it imports and exports national products, and has a strong coastal identity, as well as a presence of African, Asian and indigenous peoples. The folkloric dance of Veracruz

reflects its influence from Spain and its influence from Moorish and African backgrounds.

In the performance of this piece, Downs performs physical and vocal mimesis. On stage she physically personifies the iguana she sings about, moving like an iguana would, particularly as she sings "saca la colita, como que colea (…) saca la patita, como que patea." She also performs the standardized choreography of the state of Veracruz, which consists of the Spanish influenced *zapateado*. Vocally, Downs is mimicking the popular voices of townspeople. Downs performs mimesis on many levels in her work: musically, visually and ethnically. An example of musical mimesis is through her voice inflection, which changes register according to the genre she sings, in order to mimic a local character of Mexican society and culture. In "Yunu Yucu Ninu," a song from the same album Tree of Life, she sings in Mixteca and in Spanish with the voice inflection of a townswoman who could be found singing loudly (and out of tune) in the back of a local Oaxacan church. Another example of Downs' mimicry is in terms of costuming. Because she is racially and ethnically *mestiza*, she does not resort to such theatrical techniques as blackface (or brownface) minstrelsy literally. She does, however, use this technique implicitly through the appropriation of ethnic garments as costumes, which speak of a particular cultural, regional and national landscape.[91] Her intention is to use this costuming not as a means of irony or critique, but rather as a way of performing *mestizaje*. Within this performance of *mestizaje* however, there is an element of exploitation in using the image of the indigenous woman for personal and financial gain.

In "La iguana," Downs incorporates both folk and folklore in different ways. By singing a song that originates from oral tradition, she is referencing folk culture, read as "low art." By setting it to the music and dance steps of the state of Veracruz, which have

[91] This is true particularly in her Frida stage, to which this album pertains.

been approved and standardized by Mexico's Secretary of Culture, she is incorporating folklore, read as "high art" or elite.

In an article on *La sardana*, a traditional style of Catalan dance, Stanley Brandes writes that it is a key symbol for Catalonia because through its performance the people of this land have asserted their unique ethnic –and some would argue national– identity. "The Sardana represents qualities that the Catalans hold dear, such as harmony, democracy, brotherhood, and national identity as an achieved rather than ascribed status" (24). For Catalans this circle dance would represent their country, whereas for other Spaniards it might not have the same effect. Within the folkloric dances of Mexico, regionalism is essential. Members of different states within Mexico are able to distinguish between the dances of their state and those that are not. For Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S., however, somehow this distinction does not become as essential as it would for someone living in Mexico. In Downs' performance in Madison, Spanish-speaking audience members who cheered and asked for songs showed (what I interpreted as) national pride, despite the region she embodied/performed. Perhaps Chicanos, Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the audience felt honored simply because their culture (or something reminiscent of their culture) was placed on stage for mainstream cultural approval and consumption. On this topic, recent scholarship proposes that José Martí's concept of "Nuestra América" comes alive within the U.S. because of the contact of various Latino cultures.[92] Interestingly, Martí's concept of unity throughout the Americas does not come alive within national grounds, but rather occurs within the United States of America. So, this "Nuestra América" can be read symbolically as Latinos claiming their culture within (the United States of) America.

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[92] "Nuestra América en Estados Unidos." First Latino Studies Conference in University of Kansas. February 8-9 2008. Keynote speakers were Marta Caminero-Santengelo, Roberto Suro, Emma Pérez.

"Nuestra América" becomes *one* community (idealistic perhaps) where commonality of experience takes center stage and regional/national differences are overseen and, furthermore, accepted by other cultural communities.

Each verse is sung by Downs and then repeated or echoed by her band, providing a feeling of communal participation. This can be understood as a "call and response" performance, in which the audience's part is scripted by the song. The audience replies to what the singer states, creating a community of voices. Many known folksongs, as well as *rancheras*, have this feature. Cultural insiders know that they must echo what the singer says because they perform as part of an in-group and participate in the formation of community through the live performance.

The projected images on the backdrop featured close-ups of iguana body parts: tails, feet and head. The tail in particular reveals an interesting aspect regarding symbolizing adaptation. When an iguana or lizards' tail is cut off, it naturally grows another one. During her performance, Downs featured a distinct set of images as a backdrop for many of her pieces. In both "Little Man," and later "American Way," the images reflected in the background referenced Latinos in the U.S. through specific iconography like beans, maps, laborers earning low wages, migrant crossers, undocumented workers, etc. There was a clear political message in both songs, reflecting current U.S. affairs. Radcliffe and Westwood quote Bowman in Remaking the Nation, stating that "Subjects can thereby abstract certain images from their own lives which then 'stand in' for the nation: 'images are then projected onto the generalizing screen of the "national imaginary" as fetishes of the nation which stand in for the thing itself'" (11). In this case, the images on the backdrop stand in for particular things. For example, the many photos of beans stand in for Mexico, as the primary legume consumed there. A pop culture reading of this image would be that it stands in for Mexican Americans, also called "Beaners" pejoratively. In the case of "La iguana," the close-up images featured were not only of the iguana but also of the instruments being played: the harp, *el cajón*,

the *marimba*, the guitar, shells, etc. The close-up was of the musicians' hands and of Downs' feet as she performed the *zapateado*, emphasizing the importance of the human body as a key element in the performance of culture.

## Rewriting Women into the *corrido*: "Tacha la teibolera"

For this segment I break down my analysis into the discussion of 1) dedication; 2) the song itself; and 3) the performance of the piece.

Performed as the last number of her encore segment, Downs and her band played "El corrido de Tacha" and dedicated it to her audience, who she called *paisanos*, or countrymen. The song begins with the protagonist (Tacha) getting on a bus and telling the bus driver where she's headed ("Pa' México"), though in this case Mexico is referring to Mexico City, stated at the beginning of the stage performance of the song. It also serves as a dedication for the people of Mexico present in the audience.

"El corrido de Tacha (la teibolera)" is a *corrido* written by Lila Downs, which features the story of a woman escaping from an arranged marriage on her way to Mexico City in search of a job.[93]

(Pa' México)

Llegó en la flecha roja esa muchacha
con sus tacones negros de charol
vidita mía Ay ay ay de mi morena
cosa más buena como Tacha no he visto yo

Catorce años tenía la Tacha en ese entonces
cuando su madre la casaba con un señor
como por chiquitita se la llevaban
en una noche a oscuras Tacha escapó

[93] "El teibol dance" is a place visited often by men in Mexico. Though the female employees (can and often do) dance on top of the tables, it is a term used loosely to mean "strip club" or "topless bar." These Table Dance bars can be found in numerous locations, particularly close to main highways and Interstates on the outskirts of the city.

Cántame Tacha una rancherita
porque el recuerdo me va a matar
cántame Tacha de esas bonitas
de esas que a un hombre lo hacen llorar

(Pa' México)
Porque la noche es triste y Tacha era sola
tuvo que hacer su lucha de bar en bar
con su boquita pintada de teibolera
en la cantina en una mesa subió a cantar

Esos ojitos y esos labios son mi desvelo
por más que quiero olvidar no puedo más
por unas copas y esas canciones tristes
la teibo, teibo, teibolera Tacha me fue a embrujar

Cántame Tacha una rancherita
porque el recuerdo me va a matar
cántame Tacha de esas bonitas
de esas que a un hombre lo hacen llorar

The lyrics of this piece, written by Downs, narrate the story of a young girl who is faced with becoming a topless dancer in order to survive in the metropolis. The poetic voice in the lyrics is that of a man, which is reminiscent of the male voice within the traditional *corrido*. This male voice describes Tacha, the protagonist as, "*morena*" and "*buena*," meaning she is physically fit and sexy. In the chorus the man asks Tacha to sing to him, signaling that he is sitting in the Table Dance bar, watching her and listening to her sing. He calls out to her, "cántame una rancherita," because he wants to hear something heartfelt to make him forget, and to make him cry. Tacha has bewitched him not only with her physical attributes (evident in "Tacha me fue a embrujar" and "esos ojitos son mi desvelo) but also with her ability to sing a *ranchera* that enables the strong man (possessing the male gaze) to feel, to cry, to move on and to release the past through his tears. It could be argued that the reason the man is bewitched by her is because her performance purges him physically and emotionally. With regards to the protagonist, it is by becoming a topless performer that she obtains her freedom from an arranged marriage and can sustain herself financially in the Mexican metropolis.

In light of transnationalism and globalization, the *corrido* can be seen as a form of travel writing that dates back to the 19th century U.S./Mexico border. It is a genre that has witnessed cross-border migration and that still represents these people today. In Los Tigres del Norte's song "Tres veces mojado," they narrate the journey of a man from El Salvador who migrates to the U.S. having to cross three borders along the way. The purpose of the *corrido* is to narrate a story, acting in this way as a collective memory, documenting the lives and stories of a nation, much like the function of folk and folklore as mentioned in the initial part of this chapter. In terms of the work Los Tigres del Norte have done, as immigrants themselves, their songs document transnational stories like the one discussed in "Tres veces mojado." Because they reside in the U.S., they incorporate topics that concern Latinos living in the U.S., like bilingualism, drug trafficking, identity negotiation, etc.

*Norteño* music, as an umbrella genre for the *corrido*, reflects a particular region.[94] In the mid 1990s Alicia Villareal and her debut group Límite, performed *norteño* music with traditional instruments heard in the northern region of Mexico, such as the accordion. Límite did this in an alternative way, by using a (sexy, young, blonde) singer in a commonly masculine genre. Her sexy look took this genre to a commercial mass appeal, reminiscent of Selena, and Ana Bárbara's *ranchera* albums. Villareal separates herself from these women by singing original pieces written for Límite (and not a majority of classic *rancheras*) with bleached blonde hair, standing in full *norteño* attire (cowboy boots, hat, shiny belt buckle and button-down silk shirt), surrounded by her male band, all dressed alike. Her tough and sexy attitude sells, and has allowed her to become a solo artist. The *corrido,* a subgenre of *norteño* music, is commonly male-oriented, though Límite, Selena, Ana Bárbara, Astrid Hadad and Lila Downs perform this subgenre. In her book The Mexican Corrido, Herrera-Sobek finds the Mexican *corrido* to

[94] The arguments I make may vary when this music is heard outside of the Mexican nation state.

be generally authored by males. "These male authors have incorporated mostly masculine-oriented themes and a strongly patriarchal ideology. Nevertheless, there is nothing inherently male in the *corrido* or its structure, which can and does feature female protagonists" (xviii). Herrera-Sobek categorizes the *corrido* as a male-dominated genre and goes on to mention that the female protagonists that take part in this subgenre are typically represented from a patriarchal perspective. Her book, edited in 1990, predicts that "in the future women will appropriate the genre and dominate it with female-oriented themes" (xviii). "El corrido de Tacha (la teibolera)" seems to be a start in this prediction.

Although these *norteño* rhythms evoke the northern part of the country and Downs comes from the southern region, she dedicates this song to all of her countrymen. In other words, she uses *norteño* music as a rhythm that represents something the entire nation (placed and/or displaced) identifies with. This is an interesting mechanism. The regional, of course, is still part of the national, but its details are respected and always geographically located. I assume the in-group Madison audience knew this, as they happily accepted the dedication. How would this song be received if it were performed in Mexico City? Most likely this same performance would take place: Downs would dedicate it "a todos los paisanos pues," and the audience would cheer, cry out, and accept this as being dedicated to them, as role-playing norteño Mexicans, *íñor,* and/or as *paisanos* of the same country.[95] To continue with regional and national distinctions, most Mexicans know, for example, that the contemporary song "El sinaloense," played by Banda el Recodo, is a *corrido* from the northern state of Sinaloa and that the sound of the *marimba* and the *zapateado* in "La bamba" are from the state of Veracruz. Interestingly enough, the cultural practices that perform Mexico's national identity are known (within Mexico) as regional cultural practices. For example cultural practices from the state of Jalisco such as mariachi and tequila perform Jalisco's identity. The Mexican folkloric

[95] Short for "sí señor," a stereotypical term used to represent the *norteños* and their manner of speech. This is also done with a hand gesture that suggests the tilting of a cowboy hat.

ballet pieces "El son de la negra" and "El jarabe tapatío," (better known in the U.S. as the "Mexican Hat Dance") are cultural elements that locally represent the state of Jalisco.[96] It is important to highlight this distinction of audience reception between the in-group in Mexico and the outside (a mixture of in-group and out-group) and what occurs with national identity. This mechanism differs when the audience is within its country of origin and abroad. Elaborating on the complex dialogue between region(s) and nation, Jesús Martín Barbero argues:

> It was impossible to conceive of national unity without strengthening the 'centre,' that is, organizing the administration of the country around a central point of decision making. (...) In other countries, where a public administration already existed, centralism meant not simply unification but introducing a homogenizing uniformity of rhythms of life, gestures and ways of speaking. (...) Where there have been significant, unavoidable regional cultural differences, this local originality and uniqueness was projected upon the whole nation. Where the differences were not sufficiently great to constitute a national tradition, these were transformed into folklore and offered to foreigners as a curiosity. (154-5)

In light of Mexico, the case of Jalisco is particularly relevant, as the regional elements of Jalisco (mainly mariachi and tequila) are seen as those that constitute the entire nation locally and abroad. To Martín Barbero's statement, I would add that these traditions, or rituals, are performed not only for foreigners, but also, and more importantly, in order to participate in the performance of nation, in the sense of being from a particular nation. Folkloric ballet is a clear example in the case of Mexico, as mentioned above. In his discussion of Latin American national and regional identities, Martín Barbero argues:

> If no other Latin American country has as strong a sense of nationalism as Mexico, the reason for this must be sought in the fact that other countries have not had the kind of revolution which conferred on the Mexican state a popular representativeness that is not just formal. The absence of a revolution in other Latin

[96] Both pieces are traditional folkloric dances from the state of Jalisco. This region's style of dance is the *zapateado*. The traditional costume for the woman consists of a long skirt with ribbons and braided hair; for the man: a *charro* costume with a large *sombrero*.

> American countries, even those with a strong state, explains why the national culture continues to be so disconnected from the read culture and why the concern of the state for cultural identity continues to sound like empty rhetoric. (156)

On this topic, Octavio Paz argues in Laberinto de la soledad that the birth of Mexican identity is linked to the revolution. Interestingly both Downs and Hadad, as well as many female Mexican performers, have taken the image and symbol of the *soldadera* as inspiration in their work.[97]

Within Downs' mixture of elements, or musical *mestizaje*, she does not discriminate between genres within the selection and incorporation process. She does not attribute a "high" or "low" artistic value to the different musical (and popular) genres of Mexico. She sings all genres ecumenically and proudly. Not many artists (within Mexico) can get away with this and still be marketed for mass consumption. Abroad, on the other hand, this social prejudice is not applied. What is seen, and heard, is Downs as a World Artist. From the perspective of an in-group audience living abroad, this prejudice is not applied either, as it references a nation and a region, which is heard with nostalgia, as it recreates a space of intimacy and home. In their anthology on home, Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi describe home as "where people have gone to feel comfortable, to be with people like themselves, to be rejuvenated, to see a reflection of themselves in those around them" (97). In this case, the folk music Downs sings resembles the original and the authentic, which recreate this space. Within the last two decades or so Mexican popular musical artists such as Caifanes (now Jaguares) Café Tacuba, and Maná, to mention a few, have payed tribute to Mexican folklore by incorporating a hybridization of popular rhythms and lyrics, by singing folk classics and by referencing ethnic cultures in their manner of dress. It has recently been *cool* for contemporary rock bands to pay tribute to classic singers like José Alfredo Jiménez and José José, among others. In

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[97] Recurring images, symbolism and iconography in Downs' and Hadad's work will be discussed at greater length in the conclusion of this dissertation.

addition, within Mexico, Downs' alternative approach is also being applied somewhat by mainstream popular artists. This approach proves that even original folk songs that fuse other rhythms and cultures to become something new can still hold on to that feeling of home as they –only are applied to a contemporary framework.

By using the *corrido* as a genre for "El corrido de Tacha," Downs is referencing migrant workers who cross the border looking to make a better living. In the same way, Tacha, the protagonist, is crossing state borders into the capital city of Mexico in search of a better life. The genre is fitting for the storytelling approach to her song. Vocally, Downs imitates the voice of a typical *corrido* singer, but musically she takes liberty to fuse multiple rhythms like electronic and techno beats, lacing the genre with the contemporary and reflecting the future of music and culture as hybrid and multiple. Downs uses the *corrido* to include and feature the female story. By doing this from the perspective of the male gaze, she takes on the phallic power needed to rewrite the genre. "El corrido de Tacha (la teibolera)" enables Downs to narrate the experiences of Latina women as well as creating a space for them within a male-dominated genre like the *corrido.* She uses the privileged position of folk culture and folklore from which to articulate this, to ensure that it will be well received.

## Performance Afterthoughts

My reaction to Downs' Madison show was of annoyance and discomfort with regards to Downs' singing in English and her continuous translating. The majority of the songs she chose to perform were traditional Mexican songs that clearly represented Mexican and Latino culture, incorporating Hispanic rhythms and iconography. Therefore, as an audience member with a dual role (critical observer and in-group), it was annoying to have her constantly mediate her work. My reception of her performance of nation and identity was that she was more Mexican than American and perhaps more indigenous than either of the two. Her indigenous philosophy seemed to tinge both her spoken

English and her Spanish, but then that is what she hopes her constructed performed identity will represent. When she spoke Spanish she seemed to smile and instinctively feel the audience. When she spoke English her tone was generally didactic and she focused on translation, so as to keep the Anglo audience informed. This is not something that I had experienced while listening to her records at home. I have always found that musically and vocally Downs has a chameleon effect: she can sing a jazz song in English, an American folk song, a song with Mixteca lyrics, a Mexican *bolero*, a José Alfredo Jiménez mariachi classic or a flamenco influenced song, and you would never know it was the same artist. In this sense she truly embodies the notion of being a transnational artist.[98] However, in my reception of her live performance I was greatly annoyed by these multiple personae. Perhaps it is due to my own nostalgia of home that I wanted her to represent the *one* identity with which I also identify, and that represents the country I so dearly miss. Perhaps it is my own (subconscious) internalization of the fixedness of mainstream social categorization that made me desperately need her to represent *one* identity: Mexican (understood as indigenous and Spanish) and not oscillate. I must admit I was frustrated when she performed an Anglo identity. I did not buy Downs' attempt of passing as Anglo. Perhaps this was because I had already read about her and accepted her as having a Mexican identity. I must also acknowledge that I am not a typical audience member, and that Downs was not really performing for me, as much as my in-group role wanted her to. She was performing for a different audience, primarily an out-group audience who saw her as a World Artist playing with a wide array of musical and cultural influences. In this sense her musical *mestizaje* allows her to open up a space in the dialogue of identity (and identities) as a form of mutual enrichment.

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98 "The transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents"(5). See Minor Transnationalisms Lionnet and Shih.

Downs is a social agent who is in control of the conception, portrayal, performance, packaging, marketing and reception of her image. It is different when she states her identity than when she has agency over her identities, because she is controlling them. In her performance her agency is getting in the way of letting me project my desires as spectator. She controls her audience by saying she has more than *one* identity, and that she is actually multifaceted. Her work implicitly articulates that each identity is multiple within itself. That is, indigenous identity is comprised of multiple identities; Mexican identity is comprised of many identities; and American identity is multiple as well. By incorporating distinctive elements and fragments of these locations and cultures, she creates a liminal space, which takes shape in her music. For me personally it takes place while listening to her music and not through her visual image as an artist or performer.

## Conclusion

In a review of Downs' Madison performance, Susan Kepecs calls Downs a "Snake Charmer."[99] The snake has been a symbol that inspires Downs and functions as a motif in her work, which is evident in her new album "Shake Away." Although this phrase contains negative overtones that imply and/or question Downs' cultural "authenticity" as a Mexican singer, most likely Kepecs is using the term to say that Downs has her audience hypnotized, "charmed" by her music and her talent.[100]

Downs takes bits of culture and incorporates them into a whole image. She is imitating what is constructed as "authentic" Mexico/Latino, but also presenting

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99 Kepecs, Susan "Lila Downs Snake Charmer."

100 "Snake charmer" is a term associated with African and Middle Eastern street performers who *pretend* to work magic on the snake as a passive and "dumb animal." Within the notion of hypnosis we can read passivity and dumbness (read: ignorance) from the audience. These two adjectives question Downs' portrayal of a supposed cultural authenticity. That is, we could argue that Kepecs implies that Downs tricks the audience (through the use of hypnosis) into believing she is an authentic Mexican folk singer. According to Kepecs, Downs does this with a new twist, as she labels Downs an "alternative *ranchera* singer" in her article.

something that reveals her artistry or artistic point of view. Culture is being broken down into elements recomposed into a different space (whether it be a concert or screen) to create something new, rather than to reproduce the original. Bits of culture are translated into a new space. Downs deconstructs traditional culture and in the process something new is articulated. She makes original interpretations of traditional music and dress by mixing/juxtaposing authentic bits with non-authentic bits. She performs them on (a global) stage to consciously say that certain things in her performances are not authentic (or part of a specific cultural tradition) and others are authentic (or unique). She's intentionally classifying what is authentic and what is not by changing it. This toying with cultural elements and oscillating between regional/national spaces defines her as an artist.

In conclusion, Lila Downs performs nation and national identities as mobile and not fixed. Downs takes fragments of original folk culture combined with contemporary rhythms, which result in a piece that contributes to the construction of new Mexicana/Latina culture. Her intention is to package her music in a "culture-ish" wrapping for an international World market. Her priority as an artist is her music. Downs' performance alludes to a transnational, broader context of cultures that travel, traverse and are transient within the musical genres she fuses. Her performance of national identities creates homage to plurality and diversity as both cultural and economic wealth. Her objective is to invite her audience to inclusively and consciously overlook (geographic) borders. She opens a space of performance with the objective of reaching greater cultural (transnational) understanding. In this sense, Downs performs nation as a transnation in which culture(s) breathes, travels and constantly takes new shape(s).

# CHAPTER 3

# PERFORMING CHICANA IN CYBERSPACE:

# ALMA LÓPEZ

Los Angeles based artist Alma López publically identifies herself as a Chicana and a lesbian. In her digital short Boi Hair López records a gathering of Los Angeles multicultural, multiethnic Lesbian friends who discuss how having their hair cut short has affected both the way they present themselves to society and the way they are read. In Boi Hair, López serves the double function of artistic director and featured interviewee. How does López use video as a medium in her portrayal of female identity, body and sexuality? How does she use video art as a genre in the live space of the Internet to circulate her desired message? With the topic of Chicana lesbianism on the table, both in theoretical and practical terms, López's group of friends are not only holding an intellectual discussion, but also inviting the spectator to partake in the discussion. In this sense, using her personal website as a home base for this video (as opposed to using YouTube, for example) contextualizes the message. By using cyberspace, and not limiting her video to a classroom screening or a documentary film festival, López is enabling her work and thoughts to be viewed by a wider audience. Through the creation of an Internet site where López can post her prints, her video short and her daily thoughts, her audience becomes broad enough to include anyone who enters her site, by accident, or with intent.[101] Contact with her occurs from typing her name on Google.com or finding a link to her site online.

In this chapter, I focus on Alma López as an agent of culture who performs her identity using both art and technology. She uses the Internet as a place and space of artistic distribution and consumption. The performance I attended in this chapter is the experience of surfing through López's website, from how I arrived to her page to the

[101] www.almalopez.com.

links that lead me elsewhere. I explore her webpage, read her daily blogs and critically analyze two of her digital pieces: "Our Lady" and "Lupe and Sirena in Love." I argue that López uses Cyberspace and the Chicana body to articulate a metaphorical space for the Chicana lesbian in contemporary American society.

## Career Chronology

"I am a Mexican-born Chicana artist, activist and visual storyteller" writes López in the biography section of her webpage.[102] Born in Sinaloa, Mexico, and raised in Los Angeles, she has been called "the original digital diva," as she incorporates photography, digital images and collage with computer technology. Her pieces range from small, intimately sized pieces to full-blown murals and billboards. She studied in California and obtained an MFA in art. She has received grants in 1997 from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and in 1998 from the City of Los Angeles. She shows her work frequently in art exhibitions, in urban murals, and has more recently designed book covers and posters for conferences and events in the L.A. Latino community.

López displays her art in numerous locations: museums, in Chicana's tattoos, on book covers, in the murals of the L.A. streets and in cyberspace. Her medium is the digital image, which centers on the notion of re-conceptualizing the female image. In her own words, López states, "I am dedicated to issues of representation and social justice, taking as my subject the daily lives, mythologies and dreams of people of color. Through my visual scholarship, I deconstruct and re-figure cultural icons, including La Vírgen de Guadalupe, allowing them to exist in radically new ways." López uses the computer and the Internet as tools in several phases of her artistic work. She describes her own work as painting rather than photography because her intent is to narrate a story rather than capture an instant of reality. López's digital work superimposes various artistic techniques like photographs, prints and serigraphy, as well as the juxtaposition of

[102] No date of birth is found online. I would argue that López is in her forties.

syncretic values. Because of her constant reference to the symbolic images of Mexican, Aztec and Chicana popular culture her ideal audience would have to pertain to one of these ethnic backgrounds, or to a general Hispanic/Latino/a background to be able to read into her work. The fact that her work is housed in public spaces such as the Internet, as well as on book covers, posters, murals and tattoos makes her work more attainable.

López chooses to collaborate with other artists and activists often, as it is her preferred method of working artistically and becoming involved in the community. What made her widely known was her piece "Our Lady" and the controversy surrounding its exhibition. López summarizes it in her biography:

> My 'claim to fame' is a controversy in New Mexico over my interpretation of "Our Lady," which caused a stir in the patriarchal Catholic community that wanted my piece censored from an exhibition of cyber art at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe. My arts activism lives at the critical intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, love (as an oppositional methodology) and resistance.

Currently she is working with Alicia Gaspar de Alba on editing a book entitled "Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition," an anthology of essays that deal with her piece "Our Lady of Controversy." With regards to her future artistic production, she articulates in her online blog that she intends to continue exploring the use of technology for artistic ends, as well as "investigating the role of the artist in a digital age."[103] On her blog López also discusses very personal information such as her recent marriage to Alicia Gaspar de Alba, in which she states: "I decided to legally change my name. My new legal name is Alma López Gaspar de Alba. Of course, I carefully considered this important decision."[104] While reflecting upon her wedding ceremony on August 16th, 2008, she writes: "Alicia and I are very happy together. How can our happiness and our marriage affect heterosexual marriages negatively? I don't see

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[103] http://almalopezblog.blogspot.com/

[104] This blog is dated October 20th, 2008.

how. But, you can help save our happy marriage. Please vote NO on California's Proposition 8 in November." She uses this moment to reach out to her readers and urge them to take action. López and Gaspar de Alba's wedding photos are also featured in the Spanish propaganda video made in Los Angeles for the organization called Courage Campaign/Igualdad, also focused on promoting and defending the rights of gay couples to marry.

Chicana y de mucha honra: Chicana/o History

As part of Alma López's collection entitled "1848: Chicanos in the U.S. Landscape after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," her piece called "La línea" (1998) illustrates what it means to be a Chicana today.[105] The piece is a digital print that overlaps several images. In the forefront there is a Chicana girl playing hopscotch over a painted red line that represents the U.S./Mexico border. In the lower background there is a map of where the two countries meet. In the upper background there is a photograph of downtown L.A. with skyscrapers and clear blue skies. In the lower righthand corner, and over the photograph of what seems to represent a Chicano barrio with graffiti-covered streets, is the image of the Vírgen de Guadalupe. Over it are the words "Manifest Destiny" and "1848," the date Northern Mexico became the American Southwest. In her poem "Between two worlds," Gina Valdés writes of the border-crossing experience that she lived while frequently traveling between L.A. and Ensenada:

> I played hopscotch at the border
> Back and forth I crossed…
> I played hopscotch at the border
> Men in green smile their green smiles
> Never ask me for papers, my skin is light
> I crossed the border at least two hundred times
> Border línea abstract barrier
> Between my two concrete worlds. (16)

[105] See Figure C1 located in Appendix C: Alma López.

What does it mean to be a Chicana today and where does the term come from? The term "Chicano" has evolved from its 1960s origin, adapting to each new generation. The birth of this term is typically associated with the Chicano Movement, even though the word itself was known prior to this event, and even though it held a negative connotation. The origin is, of course, debatable, but one convincing explanation is that it comes from the word "Mexicano." The letter "x" was pronounced as a "sh" or as a "ch" according to the speaker's regional origin; thus becoming "Meshicano" or "Mechicano" and eventually "Shicano" or "Chicano."[106] In Rewriting North American Borders, Monika Kaup argues that the term Chicana is now widely used to refer to a community of writers, artists and scholars, though at its birth it was linked to the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in 1965. At that time it was associated with a radical national politics and rejection of mainstream cultural assimilation, and defined itself through its ties to Mexican culture and indigenous ancestry. Deena González has argued that the term Chicano is dated and can be problematic when not referring to the subject of the twentieth century. She agrees with the notion that the term evolves through time and currently understands it as a term that includes all Spanish-speaking people with Mexican ancestry that live in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa agrees with Kaup in that the Chicano people are born with the Chicano Movement because it was at that time that they saw each other as a community of people. Anzaldúa mentions specifics like César Chávez's work in the Farm Workers Union (UFW) in California, Rodolfo "Corky" González's poem manifesto in Colorado called "Yo soy Joaquín," and La Raza Unida Political Party in Texas. Crucial to this list are also Reies Tijerina's fight for land in New Mexico and the foundation of the Teatro Campesino in California. These events make evident that this movement did not take place in one single location but rather came about little by little until in united into a coalition of voices and strengths.

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[106] This was the case particularly if the speaker's heritage was indigenous.

The term Chicano/a has been controversial. Some people proudly ally themselves with the term, while others reject it or take offense. The latter is usually the case for middle-class citizens who prefer to identify themselves as Mexican Americans, and who associate the term Chicano with the working class. In the eighties, the U.S. government proposed the term Hispanic to refer to all Spanish-speaking peoples in the country. This caused the term Chicano to be more widely used for several reasons, one being that it was a name given by its own people, and the second being that it was a noun and not an adjective.

Different critics have defined the term in different ways according to their experiences with migration, their upbringing, and their location within the U.S. Bruce Novoa has defined being Chicano as the act of living in the dash between the term Mexican-American. Richard Rodríguez in Hunger of Memory has written about the term "Pocho" as someone who forgets about native culture in the process of becoming assimilated into the dominant culture. In other words he does not find that there is an act of fusion between two cultures, but rather the dominant always consumes the marginal. In Borderlands/La frontera, Anzaldúa uses the term mestiza/o to integrate races instead of separating them. Anzaldúa's vision of the terms Chicana/o and Mestiza/o have been known (and challenged) for her broad inclusion.

In Laberinto de la soledad, Octavio Paz writes about his 1950s confrontations with the odd character of Mexican descent living in the U.S., which he calles "Pachuco." Paz criticizes these people as he considers them to be inassimilable to the dominant culture. He sees them pejoratively, as most Mexicans do, without a culture or a language but making a spectacle of themselves through their use of clothing. Paz was of course referring to the "Pachucho" or "Zoot Suiter" of the 30s and 40s in Los Angeles. Though these figures have been highly criticized over the years and were considered dangerous people at the time, they are now seen differently as they take part in the backbone of

Chicano iconography and imaginary.[107] The term "Pocho" is now being used positively by U.S. artists like Lalo López Alcaraz, who finds that the Pocho belongs to what he calls "Generation Mex," a generation of Chicanos who were too young to participate directly in the Chicano Movement, but who grew up knowing about it. He defines this Post-Movement generation as "Pochos." They are not Mexican-Americans, nor a hybrid product, but rather a final result, a fusion.

In the nineties both Luis Valdéz and Edward James Olmos opted for the inclusive term Americanos to refer to Chicanos. Olmos edited a book under the same title, which explains the importance of the work Chicanos have done over the decades within the U.S. In other words Chicanos are just as American as any other U.S. immigrant, which is a notion held by most scholars. In Chicano Art Alicia Gaspar de Alba mentions that she entered the academy at a time in which Chicana/o Studies was not well received due to a repression of anything multicultural. Currently this is not so. Since then, Chicana/o Studies, as well as other ethnic based academic fields, have been successful and are continuously growing.

## Chicana Feminism

In López's mural entitled "Las Four," a 9' x 9' digital mural on vinyl located in East L.A., four Chicana women sit on the porch of a blue house with the front door behind them.[108] Two of these women sit together holding a baby boy in their arms; the other two embrace, as if they are a couple. Above the four women and in the background there are four famous women in Latina history: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (the nun and writer); Adelita (the revolutionary); Rigoberta Menchú (the indigenous woman and

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[107] The term "Pocho" is commonly used in Mexico to refer to Mexican Americans who have assimilated to the dominant culture and forgotten about their heritage, roots and language. They are stigmatized and seen as traitors for choosing to live abroad. Pocho as well as Chicano were both pejorative terms.

[108] See Figure C2 in Appendix C: Alma López.

human rights activist); and Graciela Olivarez (the activist educator).[109] Above these historical women is an image of the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui, daughter of Coatlicue, who represents the moon in Aztec mythology. "Las four" can be interpreted as López's proposal for the new Chicana home and family. These four women have the experience of their ancestors, the spiritual strength of their female deities, and in that light they move forward, as women, mothers, homemakers and partners. In that context, their raise their daughters, and especially their sons, ensuring that current conditions as a result of patriarchy will not continue.

The compilation of essays in This Bridge Called My Back by Gloria Analdúa and Cherríe Moraga allowed for the voices of female minorities in the U.S. to emerge in unison. This helped to materialize the concept of the coming together as a group of women fighting for the same objective. This text had a tremendous impact in the fields of art, literature, ethnic and women's studies. During the beginning of the seventies, women revisited the events of the Movement and began to see it as misogynistic, patriarchal, nationalistic and militaristic. They resented that they were not acknowledged for their efforts. Even though they felt proud of the civil rights for which they had fought, they realized that when they returned to their own homes alongside their husbands or fathers, there were still rights that they didn't have and needed to obtain. They had concentrated on the fight for citizenship, for respect, racism, equality, but the fight for equality in terms of gender had not taken place yet. Though the Women's Movement took place in the sixties, the majority of the women involved were middle-class Caucasian women. The Women's Movement for African-American women, Latinas, Asians and other minorities living in the United States took place much later, since they first fought the civil-rights battle. Chicana women thought about their roles within the movement and had to write

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[109] Graciela Olivarez was one of the premier defenders of the Mexican-American people of the Southwest in the 1960s and 1970s. The mural is located in Estrada Courts Community Center in the Estrada Courts Housing, East Los Angeles, 1997.

themselves into the term. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian has written about the disappointment felt when a woman who would literally die for the cause of the Chicano Movement was not taken into consideration or ignored. Chabram-Dernersesian decodes the term Chicanos as "Chica-nos" and reads it as an invitation to all women to form a part of the definition. Many Chicanas have written about their interpretation, or rather reinterpretation of the term. Ana Castillo, for example, suggests the term Xicana or Xicanisma, which she finds unites the terms Chicana, Mexicana and Feminismo. Rosa Linda Fregoso uses the letter "x" in her term MeXicana. She states that the "x" unites the two cultures that are in the process of negotiating their identity. In Latina Performance, Alicia Arrizón argues:

> For Chicanas, the performative consists of the materialization of 'acts' which transgress normative epistemologies that affirm and deny cultural and subcultural affiliations of the collective self. In the larger context of the Chicano theater movement, Chicana performativity must be located in the realms of negotiations which transforms silence into sound, invisibility into presence, and objecthood into subjecthood. This transformation must begin with the female body, giving voice to a sense of self that will at last secure entry into the social and discursive economy. (74)

Similar to Arrizón's view, Moraga argues that the Chicana woman is born through her own mouth, in other words, "Chicana," as an identity category, comes out of oral expression and freedom. The Chicana woman takes strength in her own voice. Alma López gives voice to the Chicana lesbian through the incorporation of her own body, or other Chicana bodies, in her digital art. One example of this is her piece "December 12" (1999) which is a self-portrait digital print. López stands in the center of the frame dressed in black, with her head bowed and her arms open, imitating a position in which Our Lady has been depicted.[110] Overlapping her chest and stomach is another image of the Virgen de Guadalupe embracing La Sirena; this is her piece entitled "Lupe and Sirena in Love." The print can be read as López both paying homage to Our Lady of Guadalupe,

[110] See Figure C3.

as well as a strategy of leveling the plain between the Goddess/Mother and everyday women, implying that all women are holy, regardless of their sexual preference.

According to Gaspar de Alba, Chicano Culture is an "alter-Native" culture within the U.S. With her use of the term "Mi casa (no) es su casa," she argues that: "while Chicanas/os are cultural citizens of the United States, neither the mainstream art world nor the dominant popular culture is a hospitable place for Chicano/a cultural production" (xvi). This quote brings up the question of location. If not in those places, then where is Chicano/a cultural production to live? In Audiotopias, Josh Kun poses that through music and lyrics, listeners can visualize space and place "as a geography of belonging and identification" (188). By using the Internet as a home for Alma López's art, and more specifically, by using her own webpage, López is contextualizing her work, making it more approachable for the consumer. More importantly, this physical location (López's website) is a virtual space that materializes geographical belonging. What better location could Chicana artists want in which to house their work?[111]

## Gay, Lesbiana ¿Y qué?: Chicana/o Sexuality

Monika Kaup has noted that lesbian Chicanas have gone the farthest in exploring notions of Chicana identity. With this she is of course referring to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, among others. Alicia Gaspar de Alba is Alma López's partner and thus her current work enters significantly into the analysis of López's art. A recent book they are collaborating on is a compilation of essays related to the reception of López's controversial piece "Our Lady," which contributes to the reception and interpretation of the Vírgen de Guadalupe as an icon for Chicana artists and scholars.[112]

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[111] Seattle-based Mexican-American artist Amanda Murray also displays her work on her personal webpage. She does this as a project of personal satisfaction, for financial gain and as a means of extending her artistic work to others. www.amandamurray.com.

[112] This project is discussed in detail further ahead.

In her essay, "Feminism on The Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics," Sonia Saldívar Hull describes Anzaldúa's work as a foundational text that describes the exilic position of queer Chicanas/os along the U.S./Mexican Border:

> Anzaldúa's project problematizes further still the traditions of Chicanismo, when, as a lesbian Chicana, she forces the homophobes of the Chicano community to see their prejudice. If the heterosexual Chicana is ostracized from her culture for transgressing its rules of behaviour, for the Chicana lesbian "the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behaviour." (19) (…) She makes the "choice to be queer" and as a result feels the ultimate exile from her homeland, cultural as well as geographic. (214)

This is what Anzaldúa means when she says that Lesbian Chicanas are homeless. In her work Cherríe Moraga proposes to redefine the concept of *la familia chicana* in a way that would provide a space for Chicana Lesbians, which is something found in López's work as well. According to Moraga, "Queer Aztlán" is a mythic community, or an "imagined community" which embraces *all* its people, including heterosexuals. "Queer Aztlán" is a cultural metaphor that redefines the Chicano movement in the nineties. Moraga argues:

> Since lesbians and gay men have often been forced out of our blood families, and since our love and sexual desire are not housed within the traditional family, we are in a critical position to address those areas within our cultural family that need to change. Further, in order to understand and defend our lovers and our same-sex loving, lesbians and gay men must come to terms with how homophobia, gender roles, and sexuality are learned and expressed in Chicano culture. (159)

This notion liberates *el movimiento* from the sexism and homophobia that have long affected its unity. The Chicano nation that Moraga envisions unites all; it has no separate coalitions. "Chicana lesbians and gay men do not merely seek inclusion in the Chicano nation," argues Moraga, "we seek a nation strong enough to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities and expressions of gender" (164). She proposes a queer politics within the Chicano community. Moraga and Anzaldúa, among others, have fought to create the same space of articulation for homosexual Chicanos, however, they

use the written word as their medium. The disadvantage here is that they limit themselves to the educated and elite sectors of society. Alma López, on the other hand, uses art to do this and distributes her pieces online. These factors make her work more accessible. In addition, by using the visual image to convey her message, she is not limiting it to one particular socio-economic group. In my analysis of two of López's prints, I argue that by referencing specific Mexican and indigenous iconography she is in fact responding to what Moraga poses above: To redefine the Chicano society or family to inscribe Chicana (lesbian) subjectivity.

## Where is Cyberspace?

In Critical Cyber-Culture Studies, David Silver argues that the field of Cyber Culture is still under construction, without a set of theories and methodologies, but rather an interdisciplinary outlook, reaching out to numerous fields of study. With this in mind we must look broadly to borrow ideas from several sources.

López's visual art not only inhabits cyberspace, but also materializes in murals, fliers, book and journal covers and on Chicana *lesbian* bodies. "Lupe and Sirena in Love," for example, can be seen as a tattoo on a Chicana's back in her 1999 piece called "Tattoo" with Jill Aguilar posing as the woman being tattooed and Rubén Aguilar as the tattoo artist. López's appropriation of space and the implications it has for her as artist, and her spectators, fits into a wider arena of performance art. The interaction between López and her public occurs in un-witnessed time and space, such as people walking alongside streets with buildings exhibiting her murals and/or the world wide web. These spaces become contested public spaces outside of the dominant museum spheres. López manipulates Mexican cultural icons in order to rearticulate their patriarchal undertones. Cyberspace becomes an interactive universe where an infinite amount of spectators can witness López's art outside of a more traditional museum setting, which gives voice to women of color in a new technological age.

Although some of López's work (murals and digital prints) can be appreciated in the physical world (museums, exhibitions, book covers), she has also created a (cyber)space where her work can be appreciated by a vast number of spectators. She created her website as a result of the few spaces Chicana/o artists have to showcase their work regularly. She is continuously looking for opportunities to feature her work. López performs her identity on the world wide web and maneuvers through this space, continuously participating in self exploration. Like the Internet, gender is not a thing, but rather the performative effect of multiple actions. López de-constructs or dis-identifies with her identities through the images she creates in her digital art. Her goal is to reveal the complexities of identity itself.

In her book Bodies that Matter, Judith Butler argues that disidentification is the more naturally subversive component of identity-making. This is because to disidentify, a person says neither "I am this" nor "I am not that," but rather, "I believed myself to be this, and now I no longer believe." In other words, disidentification incessantly breaks up binary thought patterns. Alma López is consistently challenging binary or dualistic patterns found in Catholicism and in the patriarchal heternormative space within the Chicano and American community.

Cyberspace must be read as a physical space that does not sleep; it waits, lurks and devours its users as one link seductively leads to another, and yet another. In "There is a There There," J. Fernback discusses cyberspace as being located wherever a cyber community is constructed and found.[113] Though this might have once been considered an abstract idea, it doesn't seem that way currently with existing networks like Facebook or MySpace. In other words, Facebook could be studied as a cyber community; its location would then be the actual site. However, we could argue that the location is also global, as its users are spread out in different countries of the world. Lynn Stephen in her

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[113] Jones, Steve. Ed. Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage: 1999.

work on the U.S./Mexico border, currently researches what she calls "Transborder communities," which are labor communities in Mexico that travel back and forth regularly to the U.S. as farmworkers.[114] This sense of continuous movement from one location to another is useful in terms of thinking of identity, time and space. Rafael Pérez-Torres argues that "Chicano culture locates itself within a complex third space neither Mexican nor American but in a transnational space of both potential and constraint" (323). He finds the borderlands to be the space between home and not home, reflecting contemporary times of migration and tourism.

Just as the Borderlands have been studied by Anzaldúa as a metaphorical and physical space from which to assert Chicana/o identity, Cyberspace, I argue, is the present and absent location from which López attempts to inscribe queer Chicana/o subjectivity. For Anzaldúa the landscape was the (geographic, aesthetic and racial) crossroads from which her work stems; for López, the starting point is new media. Cyberspace, like the Borderlands, is a liminal ground, one that is tangible and intangible at the same time.

## Performance/ Web Surfing

Alma López's personal website is the location for this performance analysis, which consists of surfing www.almalopez.net. Before arriving to the artists' home site I began my surfing experience by looking up Alma López on www.google.com. The results I received were divided in two: Images and Web. 1) There were six images: three photographs and three prints. Out of the three photos, two were actual photos of López and the third was of a college professor with the same name. Out of the three prints, two were López's most notable pieces "Our Lady" and "Encuentro," both incorporating the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The third piece was entitled "Goddess," by artist Alfred J. Quiroz, who also discusses the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a

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[114] Lynn Stephen, Transborder Communities.

controversial manner. 2) the web search contained several links, but I will mention only the first four chronologically:

"Los Angeles Chicana Artist Alma López," which is a direct link to her webpage www.almalopez.net and how I accessed it for this performance experience.

"Alma López, Our Lady, Digital Art" is a link to the "news" segment on López's home page, which contains approximately 50 articles on the discussion of López's "Our Lady" print. The particular article revealed in this link briefly compares "offensive" works to "traditional" images.

"Alma López Artwork," which is a site dedicated to stopping censorship of Chicana artists. This website discusses López' piece "Our Lady of Controversy" and contains a long selection of letters written between the conservative Catholics who protested the 2001 exhibition of Cyber Arte in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Alma López explaining her work. The heading invites viewers to write letters supporting López' work: "Can you please try to find the time now or in the next few days to write a quick letter in support of L.A.-based Chicana artist Alma López?"[115]

"Censoring Our Ladies: Alma speaks about her art" is a link to an article written by Alma López for Las culturas.com that contextualizes her piece "Our Lady."

López's home page contains two icons on the upper righthand corner titled "blog" and "email." The first leads to López's blog, which containins both personal and professional information. The second icon leads to the artist's email address and contact information. The home page also contains a heading with the following subdivisions: Art, Public Art, Video, Projects, Biography and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Each one leads to a detailed index provided as an appendix.

The home page contains a large image directly beneath the heading, which is a piece she designed for the cover of Alicia Gaspar de Alba's new book "Calligraphy of the

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[115] www.chicanas.com/alma.html.

Witch." An advertisement for the book trailer is beneath the image. Other information found by scrolling down the home page are "Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparitions," an upcoming book edited by López and Gaspar de Alba and "El vals de las mariposas," a 2008 print discussing Quinceañeras.[116] The final two boxes are short blurbs on López's most notable pieces: "Boi Hair," her video documentary and, "Our Lady," her controversial print. Both contain review comments enticing the viewer to read or see more.

Her blog is long and provides detailed information, such as her daily thoughts, advertisements for new work or participation in projects, photos or videos. You can even find her wedding photos and a very personal post about how she met her spouse, Alicia Gaspar de Alba.

## Post-Performance Analysis

My comments in this section will focus on two of López's pieces that reference gender and sexuality. The first, 1) "Our Lady," focuses on building Chicana pride and feminism through the reappropriation of a religious icon: the Virgin of Guadalupe. The second, 2) "Lupe and Sirena in Love," uses two popular female icons that are polar opposites and poses a middle ground through the suggestion of Lesbianism.

### Building Feminism From Religious Iconography: "Our Lady"

"Our Lady" is a digital photograph of a woman wearing a 1940s-style bikini made out of roses, posing as la Virgen de Guadalupe.[117] Her cape is digitally worked with fragments of Aztec images.[118] These images reference the Aztec goddess and earth mother Coatlicue, used frequently in López's work as a spiritual and racial element. "Our

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[116] To be published in the fall of 2010 by University of Texas Press.

[117] Raquel Salinas as Our Lady and Raquel Gutiérrez as the topless angel.

[118] See Figure C4.

Lady" stands on a black moon, carried by a topless butch angel with viterbo butterfly wings. The image, according to López, is based on Sandra Cisneros' essay "Guadalupe and the Sex Goddess," in which she intends to portray Our Lady as a "strong indígena / Chicana / Latina / Mexicana, and not just as the young passive (head bowed with clasped hands) image that I grew up seeing in my home and in my community."[119] In Cisnero's very personal essay, she writes about her experiences as a young Latina growing up with shame and ignorance of her own body and sexuality. Cisneros explains: "this is why I was angry for so many years every time I saw la Virgen de Guadalupe, my culture's role model for brown women like me. She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus? I never saw any evidence of it. They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them and pointed us women toward our destiny - marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was *puta*hood." (48) Cisneros finds a way to make peace with this image of la Virgen through discovering her own sexuality, which she compares to writing. "When I look at the Virgen de Guadalupe now (…) She is Guadalupe the sex goddess, a goddess who makes me feel good about my sexual power, my sexual energy, who reminds me I must (…) speak and write from my *panocha*." (49) These aspects come through in López's visual depiction, taking the partially naked female body to express this sense of pride and feminism.

"Our Lady" was displayed as part of an exhibit called Cyber Arte in the International Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe in 2001. The exhibit featured computer-inspired work by contemporary Latina artists such as Elena Baca, Marion Martínez, Teresa Archuleta Sagel and Alma López. In this exhibit the artists combined elements of folk with current computer technology with the objective of creating a new aesthetic. López' display of "Our Lady" at Cyber Arte received immediate attention and critical

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[119] http://www.almalopez.net/ORemail/em031701b.html

response, so much so that López has a blog on her website specifically designated to receiving these comments. The conservative religious Mexican-American community of New Mexico was so adamantly opposed to her work that they wrote letters in offense. López integrated these comments onto her website along with her correspondence with a New Mexico bishop, so as to incorporate them into the array of her artistic work. So, the piece itself no longer becomes the site of performance, but rather, the discussion that is created from it. In this incorporation of the web as physical space of performance, cyberspace becomes a non-geographic site of Chicana articulation.

The interactive element of the website allows us to see the performative elements of protest and identity dis-identification between López and her spectators. As opposed to a real-life argument, the debates featured on this webpage are in text form, for others to read. People who visit the webpage can read the posted responses and are given the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing dialogue. It becomes a communal space where individuals continually interact and where a trace of their emotions remains through the written word. As opposed to the ephemeral aspects of performance art or happenings, where there is no trace left but in memory, the space created by the web page returns to a more theatrical aspect of performance where a text is constantly being manipulated and acted upon.

In López's online link to the controversy, she incorporates José Villegas' initial letter written on March 17th, 2001, which furthers the controversy.[120] I include a brief statement here: "One thing you don't do in Northern New Mexico is become 'playful' over a sacred image that will create irrepable harm to its people and culture. In this case, you violated the sacred boundaries of our Indio-Chicano-Mexicano community. Ya!

[120] José L. Villegas is a Chicano activist, who along with Deacon Anthony Trujillo and Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan, organized protests to remove "Our Lady" from the museum exhibition.

Basta! You started a firestorm in New Mexico and we are going to put it out..."[121] Alma López discusses her side of the story:

> At first I tried to explain myself and my work against Villegas' attacks because I felt that it was just a misunderstanding. But now, I am really getting upset. I feel that he is not respecting me. I have not done anything wrong in my portrayal of "Our Lady" and as a Latina/Chicana, raised in Los Angeles born in Mexico and baptized Catholic, I have a right to relate to her in my own way. After all, doesn't she belong to everyone? Isn't everyone's relationship with their creator/god/virgen, a personal relationship?"[122]

López's "Our Lady" is of course, not the only attempt at rereading the image of La Virgen. Several Chicana artists such as Yolanda López and Ester Hernández, from the eighties and nineties onward have done this. So what was the big deal? Yolanda López has a series of paintings that take everyday women and place a halo around them so as to say that womanhood, regardless of profession, social class, race, is holy. In "Madre Mestiza" Yolanda López takes a photograph of an indigenous woman nursing her child and paints over it the blue *manta* the Virgen de Guadalupe wears, as well as a bright halo framing her body. This image also brings the discussion of race to the forefront. Just as the Virgen de Guadalupe has been depicted as an Indian goddess, this indigenous woman is seen as holy, like all women. Ester Hernández's "La Virgen de Guadalupe defendiendo los derechos de los chicanos" is a sketch of la Virgen in karate clothing doing a side kick and stepping out of her halo in attack mode. In "Our Lady" Alma López uses a photograph of Raquel Salinas, a Chicana woman with long black hair, standing proud of her nudity and her sexual appeal. Fake flowers cover her genital organs, (as a montage over the photograph), and a cape is placed over her shoulders made out of Aztec stone. Raquel Gutiérrez, a short-haired Chicana, poses as a topless angel with butterfly wings who holds up the moon Our Lady stands on. The angel stares into the camera's eye

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[121] http://www.almalopez.net/ORemail/em031701.html

[122] http://www.chicanas.com/alma.html

without shame. Underneath the print housed in López website, the artist contextualizes the piece explaining her artistic choices:

> The reason I chose to use the Viceroy butterfly was because I wanted to allude to more than the Monarch's migration pattern and its genetic memory. I thought it was interesting that the Viceroy butterfly mimics the Monarch for survival purposes. The Monarch butterfly is poisonous to predators; the Viceroy is not. The Viceroy pretends to be something it is not, just to be able to exist. For me, the Viceroy mirrors parallel and intersecting histories of being different or "other" even within our own communities. Racist attitudes see us Latinos as criminals and an economic burden, and homophobic attitudes even within our own communities and families may see us as perverted or deviant. So from outside and inside our communities, we are perceived as something we are not. When in essence, we are vulnerable Viceroy butterflies, just trying to live and survive.[123]

This justification relates to Anzaldúa's notion of gays and lesbians being homeless and rejected by their own communities and families. López reinforces the idea of the fight for identity within society; she uses a very sacred image to do this and a very political body –that of the female woman– to do so. López uses the image of the butterfly in many of her prints. She adds,

> The Monarch is famous for its migration pattern between the United States and Mexico. On the return to its parents' point of origin, the next generation travels on genetic memory. For me, the Monarch is a symbol of Latina/o Mexican migration and immigration. The Viceroy looks just like the Monarch except for a line crossing horizontally on its secondary wings. For me, the Viceroy is a symbol of gender difference and queerness.[124]

One piece in particular that has been used on book covers in the field of Chicano Studies is entitled "Santa Niña de Mochis."[125] It features a little girl wearing a pretty white dress and large butterfly wings. Like the Virgen de Guadalupe, she is surrounded by a halo made of light and stands atop a moon and angel. In the background is a

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[123] www.almalopez.net.

[124] http://www.almalopez.net/print/print.html

[125] See Figure C5.

photograph of the U.S./Mexico border, implying that she has crossed the border, originally from Los Mochis, Sinaloa. She is sacred because she represents the journey taken by (legal or illegal) immigrants. The journey itself becomes a *manda*, in other words, it is offered up to the saint or deity of choice as a promise on their part, if they make it to the other side safely. In this case, the little girl can be seen as López herself, who was born in Sinaloa and raised in East Los Angeles.

The images of Coatclicue and Aztec iconography on the cape worn by "Our Lady" incorporates the belief Chicanas have in this deity as found in Cisnero's essay:

> To me la Virgen de Guadalupe is also Coatlicue, the creative/destructive goddess. When I think of the Coatlicue statue in the National Museum in Mexico City, so terrible it was unearthed and then reburied because it was too frightening to look at, I think of a woman enraged, a woman as tempest, a woman *bien berrinchuda*, and I like that. *La Lupe es cabrona*. Not silent and passive, but silently gathering force. (50)

This idea of The Virgen de Guadalupe as parallel to Coatlicue is not new to Cisneros or to López; for Chicanas dating back to the 60s this idea emerges when revisiting (female) indigenous iconography, to emerge with their own voice. Seventies artist Yolanda López has a piece entitled "Coatlicue" which features the goddess wearing the blue cape or *manta* known to the Virgen de Guadalupe, and surrounded by a halo. Cisneros adds:

> Coatlicue, Tlazolteotl, Tonantzin, la Virgen de Guadalupe. They are each telescoped into one another, into who I am. And this is where la Lupe intrigues me – not the Lupe of 1553 who appeared to Juan Diego, but the one of the 1990's who has shaped who we are as Chicanas/mexicanas today…(…) My virgen de Guadalupe is not the mother of God. She is God. She is a face for a god without a face, an indígena for a god without ethnicity, a female deity for a god who is genderless… (50)

López's audience seems to be comprised of Chicanos who understand the icons and images she incorporates into her work, as well as artists and scholars who are interested in the subject matter she discusses. What seems to be offensive to the viewers of this piece is the nudity, which they interpret as a lack of respect to a sacred deity.

Another element of offense is the name that López has given the piece. "Our Lady" suggests that this version of the Virgen de Guadalupe is supported by Chicanas. It seems to me that any interpretation of the Virgen de Guadalupe other than the traditional one would be considered to some, as offensive, particularly because people feel that religion should be left untouched. Whether it is fear or shame that viewers feel, it becomes a problem when this perspective of religion relates to gender, self confidence, assertiveness and sexuality, as both Cisneros and López have argued here.

When web users visit López's website they enter a digital space where they can view images that break social taboos and that challenge spectators to question their own beliefs about race, gender, sexuality, nation and even, in this case, religion. Within this vast space López utilizes her digital art to embody what is inherently not "real" in real life. All of López's identities (queer, Chicana, woman) do not have an intrinsically biological foundation but are social constructions. She dis-identifies from all of these social constructions by bringing into (digital) view the apparent *falseness* of a fixed or essentilized identity. Some women, who describe themselves as feminist, critique López's art because according to them the sacred should be left untouched. But what López tries to point out in her digital image is the repressive nature of these images and how they are used to keep women in a subservient position in society. The fact that most of her digital art incorporates images of the Virgin of Guadalupe makes evident that she does it with utmost respect and is looking for the same respect for herself as a queer Chicana artist.

"Our Lady" contains numerous symbols, which read into the very nature of liminality: The butterfly as a migrating insect which emerges from a liminal state; collage, as an aesthetic technique that superimposes images; the Chicana female as a result of the contact between two cultures; the Virgin of Guadalupe, as earthly and heavenly mother, etc. The metaphorical space that is being articulated in this print is that of the Lesbian Chicana faced with religion, sexuality, gender roles and migration in

contemporary society. López's "Our Lady" re-imagines la Virgen de Guadalupe as the contemporary role model that she should be for Mexicanas and Chicanas: A brown beauty who is proud of her own body, aware of her sexuality and in control of her sex appeal. Little could be more offensive to close-minded, conservative, Catholic patrons of Mexican descent.

## Breaking Down the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy:

## "Lupe and La Sirena in Love"

Rafael Pérez-Torres discusses Chicana art in Minor Transnationalisms when he mentions Esther Hernández's painting "La ofrenda" as a piece that interconnects religious iconography and Chicana lesbian desire. This piece features a tattoo of the Virgen de Guadalupe on a butch Chicana's back. Another woman is offering an open rose to the image of the Virgin. In other words, the rose is being given to both the Chicana woman, as well as to the sacred image on her back, signifying that both carry equal value. Pérrez-Torres argues that this piece "undoes the assumption of heterosexuality and patriarchal roles as norms within a Chicano/a context. The images of the poster question the socially constituted notions of masculinity and femininity and the gender roles ascribed to sexual bodies"[126] (332). Alma López's "Lupe and Sirena in Love" can be read similarly. This piece, like "Our Lady" has evoked a strong response from her viewers. It showcases a traditional image of La Virgen de Guadalupe in the middle of the frame, but this particular Virgin is embracing La Sirena, Mexican loteria's bare-breasted, sensual mermaid. La Virgen, symbol of chastity and purity, is seducing La Sirena, symbol of sensuality.[127]

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[126] López features a reproduction of Hernández's piece called "Tattoo" (1999). The difference is that López's version uses digital photography and a man is the tattoo artist. Additionally the background setting is the L.A. cityscape. See Figure C6.

[127] See Figure C7.

"Lupe and Sirena in Love" can be read in several different ways. The first is in the context of the Mexican female roles of gender, which are two: La Virgen or *La puta*. Given this, we can interpret that López intends to void this dichotomy through the incorporation of the Lesbian subtext. The second deals with the notion that the female gender is passive and the masculine is active with regards to sexual encounters. Read under this light we can interpret that López gives the passive and pure Virgen de Guadalupe agency to accept her own sexuality and act on her own desires. This continues along the same line of "Our Lady" as López's version of a contemporary role model for Chicanas. In other words, the Virgin takes on an aspect of masculinity while acting on her sexual impulse to embrace the sensuous Sirena. However, read in either of these lights, the notion of sexual impossibility still remains because both figures are (or must be) asexual. La Sirena, half fish, half woman, has no human sex, impeding her to satisfy herself sexually; and La Virgen, as her name states, is a virgin, always chaste and untouched. There is no discussion of sex or sexuality when referencing her name. Cisneros elaborates on the Virgen de Guadalupe's sexuality in her essay "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess": "When I see la Virgen de Guadalupe I want to lift her dress as I did my dolls' and look to see if she comes with *chones*, and does her *panocha* look like mine, and does she have dark nipples too? Yes, I am certain she does. She is not neuter like Barbie. She gave birth. She has a womb. Blessed art thou and blessed is the fruit of thy womb… Blessed art thou, Lupe, and, therefore, blessed am I" (51). This earthly and womanly perspective is not evident in the traditional depiction of the Virgin, and her opposition to La Sirena only makes this more evident. Because her art work relies greatly on dominant binarisms, and the Catholic religion itself plays into these oppositions, it is clear that the Virgin represents the holy and chaste woman, and that the Sirena, as her polar opposite, represents the carnal and desired woman. The siren is a mythical figure that lures men in with her beauty and her calling. In mythology men would fantasize about coming in contact with mermaids. Similarly, the Virgin is a figure whose devotees

want her to appear to them. In the medieval Castilian text "Milagros de Nuestra Señora," stories of these appearances are narrated in detail. Some of these stories even reflect the Virgin Mary as a temptress who is jealous of her married male devotees. Though neither of these female icons live fully satisfied, López suggests that they can achieve this through their sexual unity, through Lesbianism. The image of two women who desire each other stands in opposition to the heteronormative image of a man and woman in love. The sacred image of La Virgen de Guadalupe and the popular lotería image of the Sirena illustrate López's own desires for a love that transcends normative images and that breaks away from the good/evil dichotomy present in Catholicism. "Good" being a woman who represses her sexual desires, and "evil" being the opposite, a man who actively engages in them. In López's piece a sacred image of her sexuality is transmitted, which also states that queer identity cannot be separated from an ethnic, national or cultural identity.[128] For this reason the border, another binary, is the appropriate background for this piece. In her website López discusses how the piece took shape:

> While I was creating images for the series entitled 1848: Latinos in the US Landscape after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, friends asked me to design a party flyer for a lesbian/bisexual women of color event. The image of two recognizable cultural female figures appeared to me: the Sirena/Mermaid from the popular lotería bingo game and the Virgin de Guadalupe, the post-conquest Catholic mother of Jesus. In *Lupe & Sirena in Love* they embrace, surrounded by angels in the LA cityscape and the US/Mexico border as their landscape. Guadalupe and Sirena stand on a half moon held by a Viceroy butterfly instead of the traditional angel.[129]

By using this background as a landscape for her print, López is implicitly articulating her influence from Anzaldúa, but she is also addressing or identifying who her audience is. Through this image she states that this is the land, the ideology and the

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[128] The thoughts in this paragraph emerged from a conversation with Óscar Reynaga in Feb. 2008.

[129] www.almalopez.net

cultural imagery in which she is trying to make an impact of change with regards to female gender roles and Chicana sexuality.

In this piece López integrates lesbian desire along with religious and popular cultural icons in order to deconstruct her religious, sexual and ethnic identity. Through queer pride she is not only leveling the Virgin/Whore dichotomy of female gender roles but she is also suggesting that for her, as artist, this leveling, this sexual satisfaction and identity takes place through being a lesbian Chicana.

## Conclusion

Rafael Pérez-Torres argues that it is the "betweenness of Chicano culture" that allows it to draw from different artistic genres to produce its own voice. "Chicano art participates in the formation of a cultural and personal consciousness that engages with the transnational: Chicano/a art, culture, identity, and politics become transnational practices breaking down fixed notions of a bounded nation and opening a vista that situates Chicano/a subjectivity within a broader context" (318). During the 1930s Mexican muralists Orozco, Siqueiros and Rivera were invited to California to give art workshops to Chicanos. Initially the images that were painted were nostalgic of Mexican heritage, but over the decades, once the Chicano voice was found and understood, Chicano art took shape reflecting low riders, *cholos, pachucos*, and much more.

Unlike Moraga and Anzaldúa, who as writers direct themselves to the scholar, the academic and the intellectual, López uses visual art to disseminate her message, by the use of a medium that reaches a much broader audience. Its image lies before the viewers' eyes, immediately causing a reaction, feeling or sensation. Through her wide array of digital art López incorporates the folkloric elements of traditional Mexican popular culture such as La Lotería, La Virgen de Guadalupe, Ixtaccihuatl and Coatlicue. By reworking, or rather, re-contextualizing these icons, she creates a space of articulation for the contemporary Lesbian Chicana.

Alma López's digital art is performed in cyberspace(s). These virtual happenings that occur between her art and her spectators are not linked by material bodies, but are manipulated through the use of technology and infinite space. In her work, we also see various performative elements of protest against a male-centered world that uses religion as a way to repress female desires. López reconfigures these iconic images (both religious and popular) to dis-identify with concrete notions of identity. Her identity is not one, but many identities that are in constant negotiation with each other. These clashes give her the inspiration she needs to create her work, with multiple layers of spirituality, that mark the community spaces (both real and virtual) that she and her art inhabit in infinite space and time.

López's artwork seems to feature binaries, dualities and dichotomies. Be it good and evil, Catholicism and Indigenous belief, male and female, virgin and whore, long-haired beauty and short-haired butch, gay and straight. One of the binaries that is featured repeatedly is the dark and beautiful long-haired woman with red lips. "Our Lady" showcases this type of Latina woman, as well as other pieces mentioned here like "Ixta" and "Tattoo." Why would López feature these women when her work seems to go so much against promoting stereotypes and exploiting Latina beauty for shallow purposes? It seems that she is highlighting the images commonly found in popular culture. Two polar icons seen across Mexican public transportation (often side by side) are the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe as patron and companion of the driver, as well as the image of the sexy woman found on mud flaps, also known as "Sexy Jill." These dual images are part of the Mexican and Chicano cultural imaginary so present in López's work. Just as she features the Virgen de Guadalupe, she represents the Latina beauty, the butch, the fat, children and men. By referencing specific Mexican and indigenous iconography, López is responding to the need for modernizing, updating and redefining the Chicano society or family so that it inscribes Chicana subjectivity, holding a place for the contemporary Queer Chicano/a.

# CONCLUSION

Throughout the past chapters a (geographic and cultural) journey has taken place, beginning in Mexico, moving through the Borderlands and arriving in the Chicana/o United States. This dissertation hopes to provide and promote a space of intercultural communication between nations, genres, and identities.

How do Hadad, Downs and López perform nation? I argue that they do it through the use of iconography. They specifically focus on the artistic iconography of the Post-Mexican Revolution, which I will explain below. The iconography they use in their costuming, their work and performances is representative of the Greater Mexico cultural imaginary. They each make a conscious choice about the images they include and exclude. Their use of iconography addresses the effect that visual culture has on the cultural imaginary of a nation. Downs intends to use this iconography to build her credibility as an artist; in other words, she uses it for audience reception. Both Hadad and López use this iconography as a starting point. Hadad uses it to comment critically, while López makes a commentary but uses it to reference her belonging and to reference the audience she is hoping to approach.

Some of the recurring symbols they reference are La Malinche, La Llorona, La Muerte, La Catrina, La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Adelita, La Soldadera, Coatlicue, Tonantzin, Ixtaccihuatl, etc. Though I will not touch on all of these individually here, they are all mythical, historical or fictional women who live within culture through a sense of collective memory.[130]

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[130] It must be clarified that while the mold for *mexicanidad* was perfected in the post-revolutionary context, *mexicanidad* was (and is) still being created discursively (in literature and in visual culture) prior to the revolution, specifically during the period of Porfirio Díaz. For example, the image of La Sirena in the game of Lotería comes from the 19th C. La Lotería and the imagery created around it was specifically used to teach good values and morality to the citizenry. La Sirena, for example, represented female sexuality and the ways in which men had to be careful and not fall victim to the chant of the siren. La china poblana, the epitome of Mexican national femininity in the post-revolutionary context, was constructed in the 19th C as well in lithographs.

## Astrid Hadad

Within the works of all three artists there is a sense of nostalgia for the period of the Mexican Revolution and for Post-Revolution iconography. This is most evident in the work of Astrid Hadad. I argue that this is because the female artists that she admires and seeks to "imitate parodically," as suggested by Hutcheson, were actresses who enacted nostalgia for this time period, such as Lucha Reyes. La Soldadera becomes a way for Hadad to return to the ideals of the revolution, to the romanticized strength of the female role. It also enables her to address the images that Mexican muralists have engrained in the popular sphere. Her piece "Soy virgencita" clearly addresses this. Her costume consists of the clothing a Soldadera woman might have worn: a peasant blouse and skirt with bullets crossed over her chest. On her back she carries an open fan of calla lilies, referencing the paintings of Diego Rivera. She addresses gender roles in Mexico by performing two parts in this piece. When she enacts the male role she places a mustache over her mouth and when she plays the female role she raises her voice and waters the calla lilies behind her while singing "Soy virgencita riego las flores…" This "parodic imitation" references (through a sense of nostalgia) the cultural imaginary that Mexico holds so dear. By framing it in a ridiculous and absurd way Hadad hopes that the audience, through laughter, will question the very notion of culture. What is it? What makes one thing untouchable and sacred, and something else plain?

Hadad is a cabaret artist who wants to create social critique and awareness. She is aware that her marketability as an artist is not necessarily due to her singing ability, but rather, to the construction of cultural and social messages she produces through all of the elements she combines in her shows: costuming, performance and critique. Hadad prioritizes her socio-political agenda over her music. She takes original songs and provokes social consciousness by altering the performance and staging of the piece. She uses parody as a theatrical tool to aid her in inverting the meaning of what she is singing by creating a space for negotiating questions of gender and politics. The risk, however, is

that the humor, costuming, and overall entertainment quality of her performance overpower the message. Hadad's performance of nation suggests that Mexicans must become aware of the constructed nature of their society, from gender roles to politics to religion. She demands (through irony, laughter and shock value) that her audience take a new look at themselves, question and critique. She implies that men, but especially women, possess the ability to change, to reconstruct the roles that have been imposed onto them by a patriarchal hegemonic society. She brings to mind that national identities can question, change, negotiate and move forward, as they rightly should.

Hadad's objective is to look within Mexico and its capital city to create an ironic commentary of it. Hadad performs nation for the nation. Her message is to look back, question and deconstruct central Mexican cultural elements, only to reconstruct them and recontextualize them. She invites her public to take part in this construction.

## Lila Downs

Chicana/o authors like María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Américo Paredes and Jovita González from the beginning of the twentieth century onward have looked to storytelling and oral traditions as a base for their creative works. Similarly, Downs looks at the myth of La Llorona to arrange her song under the same title. Downs sang this song in Madison, and before doing so, she explained the legend to the audience: an Indian woman who drowned her own two children to be with the man she loved, who in turn left her for a Spanish woman. She killed herself as well and roams the earth weeping for her lost children "*ay mis hijos*..." Downs sees La Llorona as all Latin Americans who are weeping for themselves. In her rendition of "La llorona" she added a flamenco inflection to her voice. She also added sudden dramatic footwork that resembled *zapateado flamenco*, playing with what is and is not culturally "authentic." Flamenco, as Folkloric Ballet in Mexico, is seen as the national dance of Spain, the "mother culture" of the Americas. Flamenco has greatly influenced Latin-American folklore (music, dance and

dress). Flamenco is also seen, both in the U.S. and within Mexico, as an elite cultural practice, even though it is born from multiple ethnic groups (Arabic, Andalusian, Sephardic and Gypsy) living in Spain prior to and after the *Reconquista* period. Downs' incorporation of this element is not coincidental. It is consciously done to reference the motherland, to add a mainstream elite element that she knows her audience will recognize and accept, as well as to add another layer of musical hybridity.[131] Her storytelling is another way for her to communicate with her audience, especially when she is aware that the song she is performing is in a language that the majority of her audience does not speak, or that the myth is not fitting for those Non-Mexican/Latino audience members. In this way, she serves as cultural mediator.

Downs' objective is to perform Greater Mexico for a world market. Incorporating flamenco to the piece is not used as a strategy of estrangement as in Hadad's case, but rather as a means to suggest transnationalism and cross-cultural approaches. Downs takes fragments of original folk culture (displaying an aura of cultural "authenticity") and by fusing it with a different "foreign" element alludes to a transnational, broader context of cultures that travel, traverse and are transient. Her performance of nation creates homage to plurality and diversity. Her objective is to invite her audience to overlook (geographic) borders. She opens a space of performance with the objective of reaching greater cultural (transnational) understanding.

## Alma López

In her digital print "Ixta," López references indigenous iconography and Chicano art with the objective of articulating a space for the Lesbian Chicana. Rafael Pérez-Torres discusses how land takes shape in Chicano/a art and how it is a marker of hegemony and

[131] I use the term motherland or "madre patria" as a reference to Spain, whose cultural influence, in combination with local, regional culture, created Mexican folkloric dance.

politics.[132] "Chicano/a culture," he argues, "conceptualizes geography differently (and differentially) as it articulates images of identity and place that often strive toward an oppositional stance" (317). This perception becomes useful when looking at the work of López. In "Ixta," she inverts the classic Chicano art piece of the Aztec prince Popocatépetl looking over the dead princess Ixtaccihuatl with the two volcanoes in the background. This piece has been re-appropriated, imitated, referenced and reworked by Chicana and Mexicana artists. Astrid Hadad, for example, recreates this piece in her music video "Corazón sangrante," directed by Ximena Cuevas, in which the mountainous background fades into the curves of her recumbent body. In López' rendition the characters are two women, one looking down on the other with romantic longing. López is performing a queer nation by contributing to the rearticulation of traditional iconography in a contemporary setting.

## Post-Mexican-Revolution Iconography

The iconography dated after the Mexican Revolution was very nostalgic of this era in its beginnings. Within Mexico, muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros worked as part of a genre called *indigenismo* or *regionalismo*, in which it was important to bring back the roots of the nation. In their works they highlighted different periods important to Mexico's history. Through their imaginations and their research, they made visual (and permanent) the events that took place such as the Spanish Conquest, slavery and colonization, the battles for Mexico's Independence in 1810, the Mexican Revolution, nationalism, the flag and the people. Mainly these murals feature men throughout history, with a few exceptions. This work was the backbone for Chicano artists who were trained by muralists in the 1930s as part of a Mexicanization project throughout the Southwest. Initially these Chicano artists reproduced the work

[132] See his essay in Minor Transnationalisms.

done by their teachers; over the decades, however, and as the notion of Chicano as an identity emerged, the creative works reflected what it meant to be Chicano/a. *Pachucos*, *Cholos* and low-riders are featured along with images of the Virgen de Guadalupe and Aztec iconography. Chicana artists made a point to return to the female images present in Mexico's culture, to revive them and to reconceptualize them mythically as well as visually. These are the images that Hadad, Downs and López reference in their work. La Virgen de Guadalupe y La Llorona, for example, are figures that have been present over centuries. Their visual reconfiguration, however, is something that has been brought back within the last couple of decades. Chicana artists like Esther Hernández and Yolanda López in the 1980s began contesting the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe. This became very popular among Chicanas in the 1990s, like Sanda Cisneros and Alma López, as well as among Mexicanas like Jesusa Rodríguez and Astrid Hadad. It makes sense that Chicanas would be the ones to reconceptualize this sacred image and other Mexican images. Though for some people, living in diaspora enables them to reaffirm the culture of their homeland, for others it enables critical distance. The latter of these two possibilities is what seems to take place in the work of the artists mentioned above. That critical distance allows them to rework these images and ideas that revolve around the female sphere. Doing this, however, marks them as disrespectful, etc. The work that Hadad and López do with regards to the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe is quite different. Hadad and López both create "parodic imitation," but they achieve it in different ways. Hadad takes the image exactly the way it is traditionally presented and places it on the fabric of her skirt. This is representative of what she does as an artist. She takes original songs and rearranges them in the fashion of a "descompositora," as she calls herself. López (after reading Cisneros' "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess") uses the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe and makes her a sensuous woman who is proud of her sexuality. Even though both artists did this in the 1990s, the way in which they did this reveals cultural differences. Living in the U.S., feeling a sense of belonging to the term

Chicana, and having grown up within a religious Mexican family, López had the critical distance needed to reinterpret this image. She has been able to understand both cultural spheres and set a middle (or liminal) ground, which results in her image of "Our Lady." Hadad, on the other hand, performing and living in Mexico, and identifying herself as Mexican, does not reinterpret this image per se, as much as play with it. Though as an artist she delves into risky topics in Mexico like sex, the female orgasm, the Pope, Christ, Mary Magdalene, etc., she does not alter these images visually. Why? She needs her audience to understand the reference so that they will still recognize the image in spite of her deconstruction.[133]

What I propose here is that the notion of Greater Mexico is circular, like the Aztec serpent that bites its own tail –a symbol of eternity. Though the iconography I discuss has been taken from the Mexican culture and travels beyond the Borderlands, its reconceptualization travels back to Mexico in a circular motion only to create dialogue and continuous growth.

Another example is the reworking of La Malinche, a figure that can also be used with regards to the artists in question. La Malinche was studied by Octavio Paz in the 1950s as La Chingada, the whore/mother of the *mestizo* people. Though the conception of Malinche as traitor already existed long before Paz's study, he did not do much to change this negative image of her. Chicanos, and more specifically, Chicanas were the ones who revisited this figure, proposing that she was the willing mother of the *mestizo* and Hernán Cortés was the father. She was also praised for her linguistic abilities to interpret, and as such was proposed as an intercultural mediator, a label which many Chicanos felt identified them. La Malinche, Malintzin or Doña Marina, is an interesting figure to study

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[133] Interestingly, in terms of indigenous iconography, Hadad often references Coatlicue, mother of all things in Aztec mythology, and though López does as well, the image most commonly found in her work is Coyolxauhqui, the daughter of Coatlicue, revealing how she identifies herself: daughter of Mexican parents, Chicana.

when paired with the artists in question and ideas of cultural mimesis and "parodic imitation." Like La Malinche, Hadad is biracial, or of mixed ethnicity, evident in her (personal and professional) name, but Lebanese is not perceived as White, as Spanish is within Latin America, for example. López is Mexican but, as a Lesbian and Chicana, adopts more of a confrontational identity position, by (prestigiously) aligning herself to Chicana figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. Similarly to Malinche, because of their multiracial and/or multiethnic backgrounds, and due to individual conditions, they become cultural mediators. As such, they are held "accountable" in Butler's terms, by themselves and by the cultures with which they identify. Because of their distinct situations and artistic agendas, they are each held accountable in a different way. Down's role as cultural mediator positions her between the Anglo and Mexican cultures. But since this is a role she eagerly adopts and performs, it also enables her to flaunt her self-identification as Mexican and indigenous. Hadad, on the other hand, has not publicly accounted for her "queer" sexual identity, an identity which López makes central to her work.

## Concluding Thoughts

In current times of transatlantic as well as intercontinental migration, and transnationalism, it becomes relevant to study the new identities that are born, and the artistic products that result from these exchanges. As Arrizón has rightly argued, "identity, like culture, is never static. It's a phenomenon always in transition" (xxi). The fields of Cultural Studies, Border Studies and Latino Popular Culture are enriched by the exploration of these contemporary artistic manifestations, which enable the performer to become an agent in the production of culture.

It is timely to reconsider/examine current use of identificatory categories (gender, race, sexuality, religion) that we have accepted into our imaginary and into our daily discourses in the U.S. In this century the question of identity politics and belonging

should no longer be problematic, but rather should take strength in the multiple. We need to restructure the definitions of our social categories to embrace plurality.

Through their incorporation of iconography in their work, Hadad, Downs and López contribute to the rearticulation or reconfiguration of the Greater Mexico cultural sphere. The contemporary panorama of national identity within Greater Mexico performance is wide open to looking at themselves, laughing at themselves, digging deep into the roots of what once defined them as a community, questioning, redefining and embracing themselves and discovering their strength in their diversity.

# APPENDIX A.

## ASTRID HADAD "DIVINAS PECADORAS"

Goddess: Eva la pecadora, madre de todas.

Costume 1[134]


Musical interlude (band performance)

"Pecadora" (Hadad enters the stage wearing a black dress, a large headdress, boa and accessories that play with the motif of fire, and allude to her as being amidst flames, as a sinner would be in hell.)

A second song was performed in this set, which I cannot recall. Hadad removed the headdress and danced sensuously playing with her fire red boa.

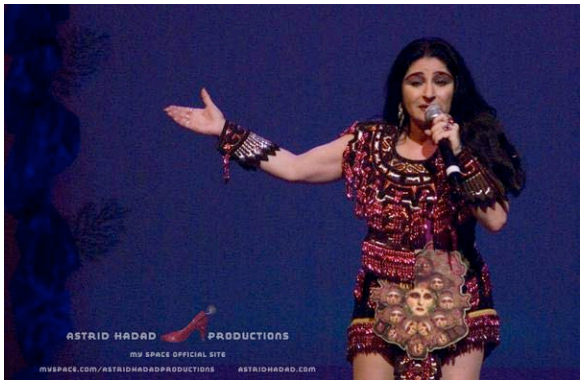
Goddess: Shiva

Costume 2

[134] All of Hadad's photos in Appendix A. are borrowed from www.myspace.com/astridhadadproductions.

"Amanecí otra vez entre tus brazos" (Hadad performs the José Alfredo Jiménez classic song in an Aztec/Middle Eastern inspired costume with a large headdress and multiple protruding arms surrounding her like the halo of a Goddess.) This number is dedicated to all of the mothers in the audience, to the ability to love that all mothers have, which Hadad calls "capacidad amatoria."

"Puñal y mortaja" (Hadad removes her headdress and halo, and performs this indigenous inspired song with black shorts, a tank top, black pumps and Aztec accessories like wristbands and shells around her ankles. She dances around the stage doing a combination of *conchero* and *zapateado* dance moves.)




Goddess: "La multimamada"

Costume 3

"La milonga del mono" (Hadad wears a gold cloak with numerous protruding breasts of different sizes and shapes. She dedicates this number to the goddess of her creation, "la Multimamada." She dances to the Middle Eastern beat in a similarly inspired form).

Costume 4


"La multimamada" (Hadad wears an Aztec inspired bustié top and long, wide skirt, wearing a tall, phallic headdress).

Goddess: Unclear

Costume 5


"Sobre una tumba una rumba" (Hadad wears a gold and shiny strapless dress with a slit up the front. She wears an Aztec penacho headdress with the face of death on the front. She is surrounded by colorful floating butterflies, attached to protruding wires).

"Si la vieran" (In this song Hadad removes her headdress and attachments to perform with her gold dress and dance amongst the musicians. Images of her video "se murió mi pájaro" roll on the backdrop).[135]

Goddess: El nacimiento de Venus

Costume 6

[135] In this video Hadad is on the rooftop of a Mexico City apartment dancing and singing amongst the clotheslines with an empty birdcage on her head as she hangs white linens and dollar bills out to dry.

"El chorrito" (Hadad appears with what seems to be a Scarlett O'hara style dress with a big hat and an umbrella. She sings the classic children's song "allá en la fuente había un chorrito, se hacía grandote, se hacía chiquito…")

"Se acabó el jabón" (Two male assistants appear onstage and adapt Hadad's costume. They lower the waist part of Hadad's skirt into petals and her costume becomes an open flower with a square base around her legs as if to represent the vase surrounding the flower. In the middle of the skirt (in the crotch area) there is an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Here she references the birth of Venus as parallel to the Virgen of Guadalupe.)

"Cantando en el baño" (The same costume is adapted onstage. The vase that Hadad was standing in becomes a bathtub. The male assistants run onto the stage and provide Hadad with a showerhead and a silvery headdress. Backdrop images of Hadad singing the same song in a shower appear on the screen.)

Goddess: Unclear

Costume 7

"Yo me voy a Uruguay" (Hadad appears on stage with a naval outfit. She wears a large boat on top of her head.)

Goddess: Frida Kahlo

Costume 8

"El venadito" Hadad appears with a white cloak that opens out to reveal the face of Frida Kahlo –this number is dedicated to Kahlo and Diana Cazadora. Hadad states that the song she sings has been adapted from Kahlo's favorite poem "El venadito").

Goddess: Salomé

Costume 9


"Salomé" (Hadad appears with a sapphire blue sexy outfit with a feathery boa included and a silver crown-like headdress. For this piece she invites a male audience member on stage who she whips).

Goddess: La muerte

Costume 10

"Viene la muerte" (Hadad dedicates this number to La Muerte. She is dressed in black with skeletons hanging from a large hat and surrounding her costume.)

"Los agachados" (The previous costume is adapted into a colorful Carmen Miranda style outfit. Her black skirt opens out and is pinned on the sides to reveal bright orange, yellow and green fruit, ribbons and shiny fabrics. The previous black hat is

removed and a new one is placed on her head –using a ladder. The new hat incorporates a pineapple, mangos, bananas, etc.)

Goddess: Virgen/Whore

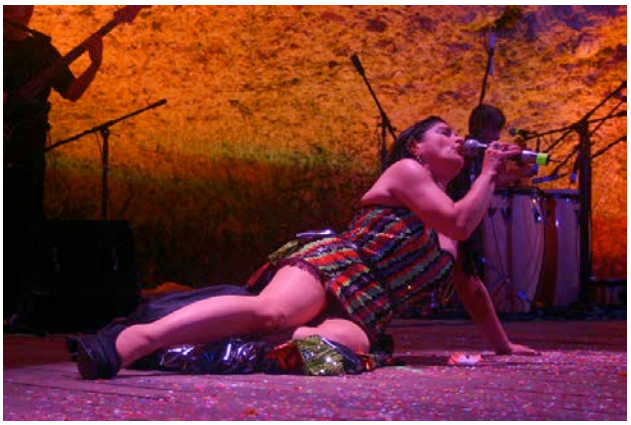
Costume 11

"Virgen de media noche" (This costume is similar to a Quinceñera dress. In her performance the dress was black with a bright pink underlay and lace veil.)

"El punto G" (Hadad's male assistants appear onto the stage removing the fabric over her skirt to reveal a wire caged-made pink skirt that moves nicely with Hadad's dancing. They also place a disco ball headdress on Hadad's head.)

Goddess: Astrid Hadad: Todas la mujeres

Costume 11



Musical interlude (encore)

"El calcetín" (Hadad appears in what looks like a black bathing suit with a long open colorful skirt/tail. She lays on the floor and weeps the lyrics. The performance ends

with Hadad throwing confetti up into the air and streamers are released from the top of the theater onto the audience).

# APPENDIX B.

## LILA DOWNS - WORLD MUSIC CONCERT

BEGINNING

Musical introduction (band performance)

"La vida no vale nada" Downs comes on stage (playing with her *rebozo*)

"Paloma negra" (costume change: mariachi jacket, she adjusts *rebozo*)

"Entre copa y copa" (dedicates this to "a todos los paisanos")

MIDDLE

"La llorona" Epigraph on the Latin American myth of La llorona

"La iguana" Epigraph on the *marimba* and coastal region of Veracruz (playing with *rebozo*)

(dancing atop a wooden box – Veracruz style *zapateado*) (images projected onto screen)

"La culebra" sung with a flamenco voice inflection (dancing with rebozo using flamenco style arm movements) (images projected onto screen)

"Threads of gold" Epigraph on the number of indigenous languages (dances with shells on feet)

"Little Man" (images projected onto screen)

"Cumbia del mole" (images projected onto screen)

"American Way" (images projected onto screen)

END

"La viborita" – (band performance with Downs introducing each band member to the audience)

exit off stage

"La sandunga" (encore) solo performance (dances with *rebozo* flowing softly)

"El corrido de Tacha (la teibolera)" (encore) band performance (she invites the audience to get up and dance. Some do).

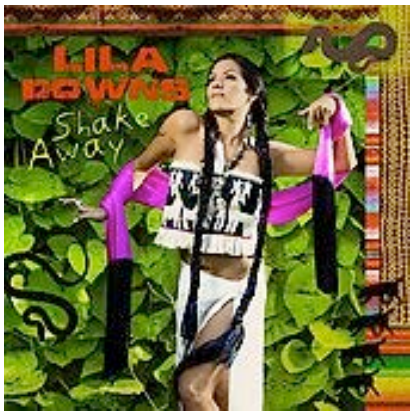



Figure B1. Cover of Shake Away (2009).[136]

Figure B2. Shake Away (2009).

[136] The images in Shake Away were borrowed from www.liladowns.com.

Figure B3. Shake Away (2009).

Figure B4. Wisconsin Union Theater stage.[137]

[137] All Madison concert photos found in Appendix B were taken with my personal camera on May 3rd, 2008.

Figure B5. Cover of the concert program.[138]

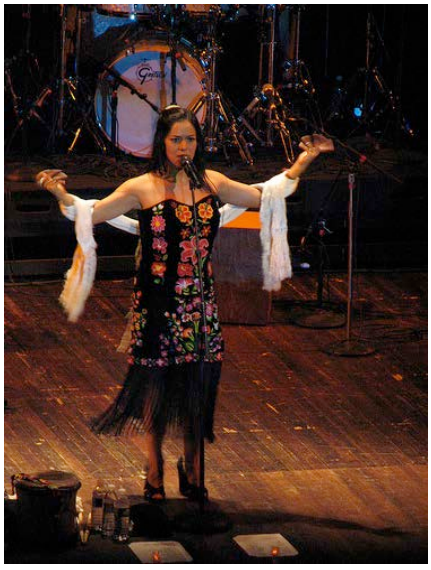


Figure B6. Downs' outfit for the Madison performance.

[138] This photo was borrowed from www.liladowns.com.

# APPENDIX C.

## ALMA LÓPEZ

1) ART:

Digital Prints:

"Lupe and Sirena in Love" 1999

"Encuentro" 1999

"Tattoo" 1999

"Diego" 1999

"December 12" 1999

"Retablo" 1999

"Pix" 1999

"Heaven" 1999

"Ixta" 1999

"Our Lady" 1999

"California Fashion Slaves" 1997

"Juan Soldado" 1997

"Santa Niña de Mochis" 1999

"La línea" 1998

"187" 1998

Serigraphs:

"El vals de las mariposas" 2008 (with commentary)

"La llorona" 2003

"Chuparrosa" 2002 (with commentary)

Paintings:

"Luchadoras" 2006-7

"Corazón/Virgen" 2004-7

"Lady/Virgen" 2001-3

"Magdalena/Coyolxauhqui" 2004-5

Installations:

"Nepantla 35" Día de muertos 2008

"La llorona" Día de muertos 2003

"La luna y el corazón" Día de muertos 1999

"Apparitions" Día de muertos 1994

"Coyolxauhqui" Día de muertos 1993

2) PUBLIC ART:

Murals:

"Heaven 2" 2001 Galería de la Raza, San Francisco CA

Restoration of Sawtelle Park 1997

"Las Four" Estrada Courts Community Center, East L.A. 1997

"María de los Ángeles" Estrada Courts Community Center, East L.A. 1997

Posters:

The L.A. Queer Studies Conference, 2005

The Maquiladora Murders Conference, 2003

No More Wars, National Association of Chicana/o Studies Conference, 2003

Revolution and Ressistance: A Conference on Chicana/o Art and Action, 2003

Desert Blood, 2002

Graphics for Books and Journals:

Migrant Immaginaries, Alicia Schmidt Camacho

Women and Migration, Denise A. Segura, Patricia Zavella, eds.

The Virgin of Flames, Chris Abani

With her Machete in her Hand, Catriona Rueda Esquibel

Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Culture

American Quarterly, Ed Raúl Homer Villa, George J. Sánchez

San Diego Latino Film Festival, 2004

Les Voz, Vol. 8 No. 29 Mx, D.F. 2004

Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society, Aida Hurtano and Patricia Gurin

Velvet Barrios, Alicia Gaspar de Alba ed.

Signs, Vol. 28 No. 2 2002

Nerter 5-6, Maria Herrera-Sobek, ed. 2003

La llorona on the Longfellow Bridge, Alicia Gaspar de Alba

Theater Journal, David Román 2002

Decolonial Voices, Arturo Aldama and Naomi Quiñonez, eds.

Stages of Life, Alberto Sandoval Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternaback

Otro corazón, conference program, Alicia Gaspar de Alba

La gente de Aztlán, Vol. 30, Issue 2, Feb. 2001

Chicano Renaissance, David R. Maciel, Isidro D. Ortiz, Herrera-Sobek, eds.

Thunder Weaves, Juan Felipe Herrera

Puro teatro, Alberto Sandoval Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternaback

A Latina in the Land of Hollywood, Angharad N. Valdivia

Aztlán, vol. 25 No. 1, Soring 2000

Fronteirs, Vol. XX No. 1 1999

Color Lines, Vol. 1, No. 3, Winter 1999

Color Lines, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1999

Calyx, Vol. 18, No. 2, Winter 1998

3) VIDEO:

Book trailer “Calligraphy of a Witch” Alicia Gaspar de Alba, 2009

“Boi Hair” (20 minute video documentary) 2005

4) PROJECTS:

Our Lady of Controversy, website (emails from 2001-6, news, articles)

Tongues, magazine influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa (issues 1-4)

Homegirl Productions Public art (collaborations, L.A. based art and news, blog)

L.A. Coyotas, Under construction

5) BIOGRAPHY:

A paragraph written by Alma López about herself

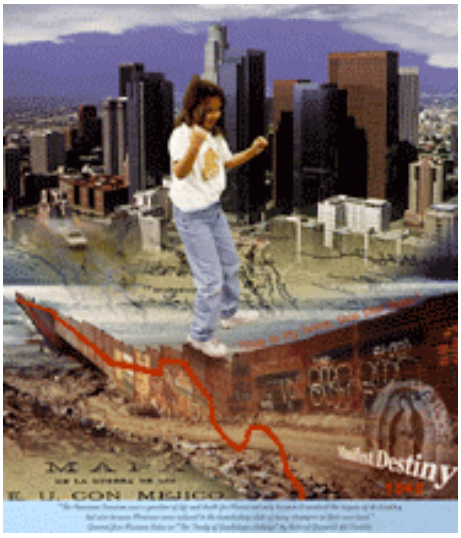



Figure C1. "La Línea."[139]

Figure C2. "Las Four."

[139] All images in Appendix C were borrowed from www.almalopez.net.

Figure C3. “December 12.”

Figure C4. “Our Lady.”


Figure C5. “Santa Niña de Mochis.”

Figure C6. “Tattoo.”

Figure C7. “Lupe and La Sirena in Love.”

Figure C8. “Ixta.”

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