TRANSNATIONALISM AND PERFORMANCE: MEXICAN ASTRID HADAD, CHICANA MÓNICA PALACIOS, AND STRATEGIES OF THE OPPRESSED

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ABSTRACT

ZAIDA GODOY NAVARRO: Transnationalism And Performance: Mexican Astrid Hadad, Chicana Mónica Palacios, And Strategies Of The Oppressed (Under the direction of María DeGuzmán)

The strong national emphasis contained in the works of Mexican Astrid Hadad and Chicana Mónica Palacios should distance them, since they come from different countries. Rather than that, the term “transnationalism” explains the similarities that will be analyzed between both contemporary women. The Mexico/US national borders crossed by means of “transnationalism” represent just one of the limitations that these women confront for not belonging to the “dominant” culture of their societies. The very genre that they work with, theater, is challenged by the relevance given to the elements added: dance, music, singing, visual elements and, in the case of Palacios, stand-up comedy. Both Hadad and Palacios have often been categorized as performance women because of this and the central role that their bodies achieve during their shows. This study links them first by focusing on the several historical traditions that have influenced them (diachronically) and, then, by analyzing the similar strategies with which they address oppression and create art (synchronously).
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CHAPTER I
A DIACHRONIC APPROACH.

In this first chapter, my attempt is to link diachronically or, in other words, throughout history, the Mexican Astrid Hadad and the Chicana Mónica Palacios. Both contemporary artists have been influenced by several artistic traditions but see their works as theatrical productions. Using ideas of Bulgarian feminist Julia Kristeva in “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” (1986), Astrid Hadad and Mónica Palacios insert themselves in history by “writing” their “readings” of previous texts. The different historical elements to be mentioned in this chapter did not only influence the authors' works but, more importantly, enabled them to create their own original art. The way in which they conceptualize some types of artistic expressions such as cabaret or rancheras was determined by their academic and personal (including here both family members and friends) environments. Those conceptions become their “readings” of previous texts and it will be reflected in their own work. This diachronic tour will also provide points of connection between these Mexican and Chicana women, so that history will justify this attempt to bring them together.

There is a relation between the process that made Astrid Hadad become the artist that she is today and the process that she goes through before every performance. The main elements of her shows are music, lyrics, her amazing and original dresses, and sometimes the stage design. Specialized critic in Latin American art, Gastón Alzate has Mexico as the center of his research and publications. Alzate characterizes Astrid Hadad
as a “conceptual artist” (Alzate, Teatro de Cabaret 51) in the sense that she usually starts her creative process with an abstract concept of the show, but she needs other people to make it real. In an interview conducted by Alzate (“Expandiendo los límites del teatro: Una entrevista con Astrid Hadad”), she talks about how, since she cannot write music, she organizes workshops with her musicians until they give her what she has in mind. Nor can she draw and all she can do to express herself is to resort to some already existing object that resembles her idea. Darío Tepié frequently helps Hadad with her costume and stage design. In the same interview, she mentions one occasion when, after rejecting Tepié's suggestion, she pointed out some rose windows in the streets of Mexico that resembled what she wanted (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 163). During her life, Hadad involved herself in different activities related to music, dancing, theater, musicals, etc but again, none of the things satisfied the aesthetic conception of her ideal work. She kept searching and, in that process, there are three main elements that greatly influenced her final result: traditional Mexican music (in particular, boleros and rancheras), the German cabaret, and the Mexican forms of teatro chico¹ (carpa and teatro de revista).

Several interviews and Hadad's own web page will be my main sources of information for the development of her career. She was born in 1957 in Chetumal, in the southern Mexican state of Quintana Roco. Of Lebanese descent, her deeply conservative family must have been shocked when it first learned about Astrid's career. However, she often recounts memories of her childhood and even uses that which impressed her as a child for her performances. It is also at home where the artist was first introduced to her passion for music and song. As Hadad herself explains: “Yo siempre he cantado. Desde que aprendí a hablar creo que aprendí a cantar. Mi mama me enseñó, porque en mi casa

¹ Also known as “light” theater, it originated as an imitation of the género chico in Spain. It is generally characterized by consisting of short pieces aimed at a proletarian audience. Whereas the genre started to disappear in Spain around 1910, it would develop a characteristic national flavor in Mexico, lasting until the 1930’s. Carpa and teatro de revista are two forms of género chico that will be discussed later.
se cantaba mucho y se oía mucha música”2 (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 156). She sang at local events in her town and at her parents' restaurant. Part of the music that she learned about at that time was Caribbean (she used to listen to Radio Habana) but she did not sing it as part of her show until later. Actually, her second compact disc Corazón sangrante contains mostly rumba, though as a start she sang almost exclusively ranchera and bolero3 music. Astrid Hadad took these music genres quite seriously and did some research because she found them to be undervalued. Although she even started studying music in Veracruz, she realized that she had to do something else: “Yo quería ser cantante pero cuando vi lo aburrido que era pararme frente a un público y empezar a cantar en un escenario inerte, busqué otra cosa”4 (www.astrihadad.com). Hadad took her first step by adding some irony to the ranchera and bolero songs that she interpreted in cantinas around Mexico, such as in Nostalgia arrabalera, Del rancho a la ciudad, and La mujer del golfo apocalipsis.

Music is important for the development of Hadad's work not only in terms of specific genres and songs, but also of famous figures in the music world. I have already talked about how much of a visual person Astrid Hadad is. The movies from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema (40s - 60s) helped her to visualize that which she had not lived but have become so important for her work. With the inclusion of sound in the 30s, the production of musicals (for instance, Allá en el rancho grande) already received some encouragement. Among important topics to be mentioned are the nationalistic movies or

2 I've always being singing. Since I learned how to talk, I think I learned how to sing. My mum taught me, because at home everybody would sing a lot and would listen to a lot of music.

3 “Ranchera” music is a traditional Mexican genre, closely associated with the mariachi groups which evolved in Jalisco in the post-revolutionary period. Drawing on rural traditional folklore, the ranchera was conceived as a symbol of a new national consciousness in reaction to the aristocratic tastes of the era. “Bolero” is a 3/4 dance that originated in Spain in the late 18th century, a combination of the contradanza and the sevillana. It is in triplet time but in Cuba and Mexico it developed differently, becoming a distinct dance in duplet time. (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia)

4 I wanted to be a singer, but when I saw how boring it was to sing in an inert stage, I looked for something else.
those dealing with a prostitute as their main character. The portrayal of women is very important for Hadad, since her art focuses on them and their unfair position in a patriarchal society. The big screen provides her with some strong female figures that represented an alternative option to that of the good mother or the whore. For instance, her production and acting of the musical tragicomedy La ociosa...O luz levántate y lucha is dedicated to Lucha Reyes (1904-1944), a very famous ranchera singer. The Mexican artist feels very close to this Peruvian singer, with whom, among many other things, she shares a courageous personality that helps each of them to fight the conventions of society. The powerful and dramatic way in which Hadad sings is explained by her own description of how ranchera music changed with Lucha Reyes:

Lucha Reyes digamos que es la que inicia el canto bravío aquí en México, por eso, no sé si sabes, pero en algunas casas estaba prohibido escucharla, porque la costumbre era que la mujer cantara la canción campirana o canciones bucólicas con voces muy suaves, muy agudas. La mujer no cantaba con esta fuerza como cantaba el hombre y Lucha es la que inicia la forma del canto ranchero de esta manera bravía en mujeres. Por eso es que ella le da un nuevo giro a la canción vernácula. (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 160-161).

We could say that Lucha Reyes is the one who started canto bravío here in Mexico, and because of that, I don't know if you know, but in some houses you were not allowed to listen to her, because traditionally women would sing the campirana song or bucolic songs with soft voices, with very high pitch. Women did not use the same force in singing compared to a man and Lucha is the one who initiates this type of ranchera singing in a bravía way among women. Because of that she changed the vernacular song.

Before producing any of the performances just mentioned, Astrid Hadad had to escape from the oppressive environment of her upbringing and move to Mexico City. There she studied at the Center for University Theatre and participated in some theatrical productions, always with the idea of doing something like Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. The most famous collaboration of these two men, the former a dramatist and the latter a composer, The Threepenny Opera (1928), is part of the German cabaret of the 20s and 30s, a form of entertainment whose popularity came hand in hand with its social and
political criticism. This explains the fact that both dramatist and composer (and most other artists doing the same thing at the time) had to leave Germany when the Nazi party came to power in 1933. During the Nazi regime, the German cabaret was reduced to dance routine, sentimentalism, and common jokes, which is exactly what Astrid Hadad found there when she visited the country. This did not match with what she had learned from her research of German cabaret. Hadad's use of hyperbole, strident comedy, and sensual dance might sometimes make the audience miss the critical attacks towards or in defense of Mexican society. As in the best years of the German cabaret, Astrid Hadad camouflages her real intentions, using what easily attracts the audience.

As her work shows, Hadad's interest in the German cabaret translated into her desire to apply it to the Mexican socio-political scene. This would have been a really hard task if she had not learned about what will become the second influential element to be discussed. The teatro de carpa and teatro de revista are two forms of the so-called género chico or “light” theater developed in Mexico from the late 1880s to the 1930s. A revealing point in Hadad's career involved a study of this genre, through which she became aware of the similarities with the German cabaret. The audiences of these German and Mexican forms of theater are alike too. They belong to very different socio-cultural spheres, conforming to a very peculiar space characterized by a relaxation of social norms. It is important to notice that this particular atmosphere developed in urban nuclei, in particular Mexico City and Berlin. Alzate enumerates several similarities between both capital cities:

La ciudad de México de principios de siglo XX y el Berlín de los años veinte comparten un tipo de imaginario colectivo que desencadena una serie de personajes urbanos. En ambas ciudades se producen fuertes cambios sociales. (Teatro de Cabaret 42).

Mexico City at the beginning of the twentieth century and Berlin of the twenties share a type of collective imaginary that unleashed a series of urban characters.
In Berlin those changes are a reaction against anything traditional that would somehow be reminiscent of the First World War. Whereas the German capital would greatly look towards the foreign, the new Mexican public arena is characterized by its national revolution. Still, the result in both cities was an increase of its population and of the power of the middle-classes.

Mexican poet, novelist, biographer, and journalist Armando de María y Campos makes a detailed study of the género chico in México during the first half of the twentieth century. There are two important questions that must be addressed in his definition of the teatro de revista: “Estas piezas se originan con algún pretexto, más o menos original, y los autores lo repiten hasta la saciedad. Además, la revista precisa de la actualidad. Viven lo que vive el suceso o el hecho que les dio vida”5 (María y Campos 22). Also like the German cabaret, revistas and Hadad's work coincide in their up-to-date dedication, since elements would be taken from the daily scene of events. This will partly explain Hadad's continuous effort for renovation and actualization of her work. In the calendar displayed in her web page, she adapts her shows to the different popular festivities. For instance, this year her regular performance of ¡Oh, diosas! at La Bodega will be replaced February fourteenth by a special one called “No me dejes en paz amor tirano” (“Don't let me live in peace, tyrant love”) celebrating St Valentine's Day.

Critic Gandhi Baca Barajas focuses on the year 1921 in order to analyze the teatro de revista and the Mexican identity created after the national revolution. He points out the importance of the revista in the diffusion of political information and ideas:

La inclusión de los temas de actualidad política, que podría ser calificada como una forma de periodismo escénico dado el alto nivel de las fuentes informativas a las que tenía acceso el libretista teatral, fue uno de los

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5 These pieces originate with some pretext, more or less original, and the authors repeat themselves over and over again. Besides, the revista depends on current affairs. They live what made them live.

6 “Oh Goddesses!” But it can also be read all together with the meaning “hateful women”
The revolutionary politicians wanted to spread the messages which originated among the governing leadership and which arrived directly to the popular environment in a natural and carefree language. In order to do that, they included topics of current politics, which could be classified as a form of scenic journalism given the high level of informative sources to which the theatrical *libretista* had access.

Often Hadad's criticism points at a general target, all the “tontos and poderosos” (“stupid and powerful people”), normally men and politicians. However, she also makes more direct references that her audience can easily recognize as those who used to attend the teatro de revistas would do. Because of this, she is always well-informed about the political events of the day not only at a national level, but also at an international level. On-line newspapers might give an idea of Hadad's reception in different countries. There is an interesting article written right before her performance in London in June 2004. Warning against Hadad's apparently naïve comment “I come to give pleasure,” the journalist adds that “after her last visit to London, the government she lampooned lost the elections for the first time in seventy years” (Mistry). Although Hadad cannot be blamed for the political party’s failure, her voice became part of the multiple messages that British people were getting during the elections. This also proves an interesting difference between Hadad and the teatro de revista of 1921: the political ideas diffused by Hadad’s shows do not support governing parties, but rather criticize them.

Alzate defines the *carpa* as “un género híbrido, es el circo que decae para luego introducir en él el drama, la comedia, la zarzuela, el sentimentalismo, los cantantes que olvidan la letra, los chistes del barrio, y desde luego las vedettes”7 (*Teatro de Cabaret* 46). This is exactly the feeling that Astrid Hadad wants to create in her audience: that of a

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7 A hybrid genre, it is the circus that decays in order to include drama, comedy, zarzuela, sentimentalism, singers who can't remember the lyrics, the jokes of the neighborhood, and of course the vedettes.
circus. She acts, sings, talks, dances, etc., all in one performance. Just in one body, her
own, there is a simultaneous display of different levels of performance. She can also be
considered an itinerant artist in the sense that she acts almost anywhere. Probably her
most regular place to perform now is La Bodega in Mexico City, a place where people
can go for drinks, food, Caribbean music, or to see shows such as those of Hadad.
However, she is very successful internationally and has done almost everything. For
instance, in the middle of Central Park, New York City, she arrived to the stage by
breaking through a fake wall first used by Eugenia León and Liliana López in their
interpretation of the song “La pared.” Like the carpa artists she takes her “circo” with her,
no matter what barriers try to insert themselves between her and her spectators.

A circus does not understand national borders. Its members feel capable of
communicating as well with the audiences of their native lands as with those that they
visit. The atmosphere of universality created in a circus show promotes a sense of
“transnationalism,” so that the Mexican carpas would still look Mexican but this would
not interfere in the relationship created with a foreign audience. Hadad is doing nothing
new by making her show “break” the Mexico/US frontier. The Mexican carpas had
frequently traveled up to New Mexico and California, even after the Treaty of Guadalupe
(1848), once the territory of those two states was enlarged by the annexation of Mexican
land. In establishing the historical antecedents of Chicano theatre for his contemporary
anthology, scholar Roberto J. Garza emphasizes the role played by those “Mexican
travelling shows” (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 3) in the latter half of the nineteenth
century. The most interesting quality of this type of theatre in relation to what later
becomes Teatro Campesino is that “for a very inexpensive admission price, the working

8 So far, “transnationalism” should be understood as a continuation of nationalism, in the sense that a
common identity is built upon the glorification of typical elements that distinguish the country from its
neighbors. The prefix “trans” empowers those elements so that they can cross political borders without
losing their value. I explain this term in more detail in my second chapter.
man or campesino could indulge in and savor the great satisfaction of watching the exposé of those corrupt politicians, figures who were his oppressors” (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 4). At a first stage the depiction provided was that of “the pain and beauty of the peasant's life in Mexico” (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 4). But later, the repertoire acquired a more “American flavor,” by addressing its critiques to the “mechinical [sic.] and inhuman” (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 4) society of the same land where they performed.

The moment came when the influence of those touring carpas led to the formation of folk theater groups in US territory. Some, like the Padua Hills Theatre, owe their foundation not only to those itinerant groups but also to the increased migration of national people after the Mexican Revolution. Although by mid-1950s the Mexican Folktheatre came to be an institution, not until the 1960s Chicanos address the Chicano experience in the US. In response to the strikes in Delano in October, 1965, Luis Miguel Valdez’s Teatro Campesino became the cultural wing of the United Farm Workers. At least in its first stage, Teatro Campesino consisted of brief pieces, with very simple or no scenography and a large amount of improvisation, with the farmers’ rights as its main topic. From the carpas it inherited the use of slapstick and the “colorful” slang of the lower classes (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 4). Just to give an example, those two characteristics will be underlined in Valdez's “Los vendidos,” where the Chicano Sancho has a shop that sells Mexicans. Characters perform with physical gestures what others would express verbally. Because of that, when Sancho is describing the qualities of Johnny (who is being sold to Reagan's secretary), he actually starts beating, bruising and kicking (Valdez 21) another Chicano character. Also, when Johnny is asked to speak English, the first thing he says is “Fuck-you!” (Valdez 21). This “colorful” expression is a result of a languages-learning method based on mimicry, so that the secretary is not just
insulted by also the whole system that she represents. “Fuck you” is a word very
commonly used and, because of that, the Chicano learns it quickly.

Similar qualities can be found in Mónica Palacios' work. Slapstick might be hard
to relate to someone who mostly performs by herself. However, the physical violence of
her words and movements, even if requiring a more active and imaginative audience, still
produces a similar effect to that of slapstick. For instance, at one point in her Greetings
from a Queer Señorita, she mimes kicking a field goal as if the ball were her niece, who
was annoying her in their family reunion. Her poses and movements seem very abrupt
and exaggerated like that of slapstick and the same can be said of her monologue. Talking
about the homophobic atmosphere of the stand-up comedy clubs, she expresses her anger:
“I wanted to smack them in their abdomens with an oar!” (Greetings 374). Her language
is also very “colorful” and slang words and expressions frequently slip in her discourse as
she expresses her emotions. She does not use “fuck” just as a swearing word but also to
openly talk about sex. Besides, she takes pleasure in repeating taboo words in an attempt
to make her audience feel more comfortable about them. “Lesbian” is one of those words.
She explains how she also had problems with that word and how she “got over it”
(Greetings 370) by repeating it “a bunch of times” as she does on stage. “Vagina” is
another word that people seem to feel uncomfortable with. Palacios introduces this word
in popular songs like “Lullaby of Broadway” or makes it become her central subject like
in her a cappella performance of “Vagina Medley” (389).

Palacios' motivations are very different from that of Teatro Campesino. Being a
woman and a lesbian, her major concern is not to talk about nationalism but about gender
and sexuality. Nationalistic discourse has commonly silenced women and encouraged
them to sacrifice their own well-being in favor of that of the Raza. However, as many
other Latinas (Cherríe Moraga among them), Palacios does not opt for a rejection of her
chicanismo⁹ but rather for a dialogue in which women do not just “talk” but “tell” (Puro Teatro: A Latina Anthology 284). The autobiographic quality of her representations compensates for the lack of numerous interviews and essays. During her performance, she clarifies that she does not hate men: “I have close male friends. I do shows with them.” (Greetings 387). Luis Alfaro and Alberto Araiza are two of these men and together they performed Deep in the Crotch of My Latino Psyche at Highways Performance Space in 1992. Like Teatro Campesino did before, these three performers try to fight for their community interests, in this case that of Latino gays and lesbians instead of farmers. Also similar to Valdez's theatre, they will make use of anything that is in their hands (stand-up, melodrama, satire, personal testimony, etc) instead of trying to be accepted within mainstream art. The three Latino artists also worked together in successful programs such as that of the AIDS Intervention Theatre project Teatro VIVA!

So far, Mónica Palacios has been influenced by the same theatrical tradition as Hadad, even if indirectly, that is, through Chicano theatre. To this should be added the presence of cabaret and Mexican traditional music in Palacios' work. For instance, at one point in her Greetings from a Queer Señorita, the stage assumes the atmosphere of a nightclub, and as she talks, cabaret piano music is heard (384). Like with music, her fascination for cabaret seems the result of her daily exposure in her family upbringing. Palacios attributes her artistic vocation to her family, in particular her father, described by the Chicana as a “pseudo-mariachi guy” (Puro Teatro 282) called “Guadalupe -- Lupe to his friends” (Greetings 371). Ranchera songs like “Cu cu ru cu cu Paloma” (“Greetings 371) become part of her show and she identifies herself with famous Mexican singers such as Lola Beltrán (Puro Teatro 281).

The historical elements mentioned until this point allow Astrid Hadad's and

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⁹ Bruce-Novoa uses this term in his book Retrospace as a signifier of anything that can be described as Chicano. Later, I will use the term chicanidad in an attempt to give it a more feministic flavor.
Mónica Palacios’ works to be related. As Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin seems to have been the first one to observe, nobody can write without being influenced by what has already been written (Kristeva 35). Writers are linked among each other no matter what spatial or temporal coordinates separate them. Political frontiers can be crossed too, and so, the very concept of a diachronic link advocates “transnationalism.” Astrid Hadad and Mónica Palacios belong to different countries but their art creates a medium of communication between each other as well as with their historical precedents. However, in this case, that which influenced these artists created a very close relationship between their audience and the current state of affairs of their communities, which will inevitably lead to the originality that could be feared by the apparent repetition of past artistic expressions. These women cannot only be studied from a diachronic point of view, because in their performances there are as many historical elements as there are present issues, and so, a synchronic approach is necessary as well. Their similarities in a synchronic way are due to the fact that they occupy a similar position in their societies. Neither of them belongs to what is known as the dominant culture. Palacios is a Chicana and, as such, belongs to a minority group within the US culture. Besides, she is homosexual and this is something not fully accepted by society without negative preconceptions even in the twenty-first century. Like Palacios, Hadad is a woman within a patriarchal society but with a very strong mind and voice. Throughout the discussion of the techniques used by both the Chicana and the Mexican artists, I will identify many of those as what professor and critic Chela Sandoval calls “technologies of the oppressed.” Whether being classified as “oppressed,” marginal or dissident (Alzate), this position will be essential to their artistic production. Interestingly, this same position served as the base from where the historical elements mentioned before developed, and so helps to relate both the diachronic and synchronic approaches. Also, this first approach in which Hadad
and Palacios are observed as “reading” their ancestors can be considered the first strategy enumerated by Sandoval: “sign-reading” (376). It is a very important tool for the oppressed because it gives him/her an active role, that of reading and interpreting. Hadad and Palacios assert their right to partake in history by reading and interpreting the “texts” (of any kind) that have just been discussed. Their interpretation can be as free as necessary so that they can create their own art. Although sometimes they need first to (re)validate some of the texts, eventually, this technique provides them with some recognition, which was gained by the previous works, so that they do not need to start from scratch.
CHAPTER II

TOWARDS A SYNCHRONIC APPROACH: THEIR STRATEGIES.

The previous diachronic approach still needs some abstraction\(^{10}\), so that Palacios and Hadad's work can be visualized as placed in their respective vertical axes but coming from branches that interlap at several points (that is, cabaret, teatro de carpa, traditional music, etc). In this new section, my attempt is to establish a horizontal axis so that the similarities of their productions are addressed as strategies. Having members from different oppressed or minority groups from different countries that link their works synchronically brings back the term “transnationalism.” This term needs some clarification. Cuban Fernando Ortiz’s theory of transculturation might sound more familiar. As a reaction against US theories of the melting pot, Ortiz “emphasizes the two-way cultural interchanges that take place in any situation where different cultures come into contact with one another” (Spitta 160). Scholar Silvia Spitta specializes in contemporary and colonial Latina/o American writers, theories of transculturation, and narratives of mestizaje or miscegenation. She applies transculturation to Cuban-American literature and, initially, I felt tempted to do the same with Palacios and what her Mexican culture brought to the US. There is probably some influence of her northern neighbors in Astrid Hadad’s work too. However, the fact that the historical traditions mentioned earlier and that influenced both Hadad and Palacios appeared during Mexican nationalistic

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\(^{10}\) I am using here Kristeva’s use of the word “abstraction” when she discusses the mental process necessary to go from a diachronic approach to a synchronic one. In order to relate two works written at different points in history, we need to “abstract” the link so that it can be seen in a horizontal line instead of a vertical one. “Abstraction” implies a relocation – both of the texts and ourselves in our position as thinkers – so that we are able of seeing a bigger picture.
period made me contemplate a different term, which is frequently used to talk about international relationships and economics. Transnationalism is seen as a result of globalization and is very often related to the US, since people with different nationalities live in the same country. Riva Kastoryano holds a degree in Economics from the University of Paris-Sorbonne and a PhD in Sociology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. In her article “The Reach of Transnationalism,” Kastoryano describes the “mode of action” of transnationalism as “de-territorialized.” In other words, as with Hadad and Palacios, there is no need for a common territory in order to represent the same nation. Kastoryano continues explaining that:

Transnationalism appears as a new type of nationalism. It differs however, from diaspora nationalism. Contemporary diaspora nationalism may transform into movements for “re-territorialization” and statehood. Transnational nationalism takes form after nationalism and nation-states have become realities; it may extend state nationalism in new ways, producing exclusionist discourses based on national membership that is “de-territorialized.”

This does not necessarily means that Palacios sees herself as a Mexican woman instead of a Chicana or that Astrid Hadad is incapable of seeing the uniqueness of Chicano culture. However, both Chicanos and Mexican nationalistic movements left women aside and “transnationalism” might be the perfect tool in a new post-nationalistic move. Actually, this term is used in feminist and interdisciplinary journals such as Meridians, whose complete name is Meridians: Feminism, Race, and Transnationalism. The goal of this specific journal is “to make scholarship by and about women of color central to contemporary definitions of feminisms in the explorations of women's economic conditions, cultures, and sexualities, as well as the forms and meanings of resistance and activist strategies.” There is a recent effort in feminism for finding ways to approach women’s needs from different countries. Transnationalism seems a very useful solution.
Performance

The most general aspect that links Mónica Palacios and Astrid Hadad synchronically is their use of performance. First I will discuss what this term means and how it can be related to both artists. Then I will look at possible reasons that make them use performance. It is difficult to find a good definition for this term. As pointed out by performance studies professors Diana Taylor and Rosalyn Costantino, as the other women included in their Holy Terrors, Astrid Hadad does not identify herself with performance (15). In Annette Frederas compact disk compilation Cabaret 2000, Hadad is included as a Mexican cabaret diva, a label that she might better agree with. Mónica Palacios' work is also often defined as a one-woman show without a clear reference to performance. However, there are two interesting points to be considered in Taylor and Costantino's discussion about performance in relation to the two artists to be studied here. In Mexico this term “comes out of the visual arts rather than theater” (15). If Palacios' written production is lacking, it is even more so in the case of Hadad who never publishes any kind of script about what she does on stage. To deal with performance becomes very frustrating, especially because the show depends so much on the visual.

Body movement not only helps to understand their comic tone but at many points becomes their only medium of expression. Dancing is a recurrent tool for the Chicana and almost indispensable for Hadad's shows. The arduous elaboration of the Mexican's costumes requires especial attention since it becomes the stage itself. As she explains in an interview for a weekly Spanish-language newspaper: "la escenografía soy yo, la llevo puesta"11 (Chayo Saad). She humorously adds that a good way not to have to carry any other stage props is to, literally, wear them.

11 I'm the stage design. I wear it.
Although there is not a satisfactory translation for the word performance in either Spanish or Portuguese, in English this term “invites English speakers to think about the sex/gender of performance” (Holy Terrors 15). What in these critics’ eyes is a “linguistic cross-dressing” in this paper links perfectly with the definition of Palacios’ work as “coming out stories,” as established by Women’s Studies professor Alicia Arrizón (141). Theorist Judith Butler explains gender as an illusion constituted by “bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 270), which conforms our identity. Palacios finds herself trapped in a patriarchal and homophobic society and refuses to submit herself to the established and instituted possibilities allowed to women. With her performance on stage she can create and enact her own “constitutive acts” so that she can build her own identity.

In his Introduction to Teatro de Cabaret, Gastón Alzate also spends some time talking about performance. Although performance is a result of very different manifestations, he distinguishes a common characteristic: “la confluencia de distintas disciplinas como el teatro, musica, artes visuales y danza”12 (15). It has already been mentioned how important the visual is for Hadad’s and Palacios’ work. They constantly sing and dance too. Paradoxically, probably the most difficult element to see is theater. Hadad always asserts her relation with theater because that is the discipline that she studied and the medium that allowed her to develop her other artistic qualities, that is to say, singing and dancing. Under the assumption that theater depends on a written text, it must be admitted that Hadad does not provide us with anything remotely similar to a script. Everything seems to be programmed in her mind and easily subjected to improvisation. However, there are other elements traditionally corresponding to theater: characters, little stories, and scenography. The only problem is that these components are

12 Junction of different disciplines as theater, music, visual arts and dance.
almost exclusively embodied within her body. In the case of Palacios, it is easier to see her relation to theater since she is included in some anthologies and we have some of her theatrical scripts. One more element to be added to Palacios' shows is stand-up comedy, and I will refer to this in more detail later. If performance is defined as the combination of different artistic genres, without allowing the work to be limited by one single set of rules, both Hadad and Palacios perfectly fulfill this requirement.

That requirement is also distinguished by Richard Schechner, one of the founders of the academic field known as Performance Studies. Schechner bases many of his ideas about performance on his interpretation of Victor Turner's anthropological work, mainly focused on ritual. In the preface to Turner's posthumous collection *The Anthropology of Performance*, Schechner describes performance as the aforementioned junction of genres and also as “the art that is open, unfinished, decentered, liminal” (Turner 8). The concept of liminal is related to Palacios' “Latin Lezbo Comic” by the professional scholar Barbara Simerka. With this term she defines the Chicana's position in her society due to the marginalization that she encounters based on her race, gender and sexual preference (Simerka 89). The plurality of coordinates that marginalize her (the fact that she is a Chicana living in the US, a woman who does not submit herself to the traditional role assigned by patriarchism, and a lesbian) does not allow her neither to enter the “dominant culture” nor to completely align herself with any specific liberation movement. It is in this sense that she finds herself in a “liminal” position and it is this reason that performance becomes her perfect tool, since also regarding genres or traditions she cannot opt for only one. Hadad finds herself in a similar situation, especially in her country. Although she is very successful internationally, the artist complains for not having a very strong support in her Mexico, where she mostly acts in cantinas but finds very difficult to be accepted in more largely reaching media such as television. This
should prove the “liminality” that Hadad's work goes through too, since being a woman in such a traditional society as what exists in Mexico, she should not have such a “strong” opinion. Her own feelings towards her country might also be a reflection of that “liminal” position, since her relationship with Mexico can be described as love/hate.

More needs to be said about rituals in order to understand better the concept of “liminal.” Turner parts from structuralist and anthropologist Van Gennep and the three stages that he distinguishes in any ritual: a moment of separation, when the ritual subject must be detached from his/her previous social status; a moment of transition; and a moment of incorporation when the subject returns to his/her new, well-defined position (Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 24). The second moment corresponds to the “liminal” stage and it locates its subjects in an “in-between” situation, between the way things were when they separated and how things will be once they incorporate again. During that phase, those subjects are temporarily beyond the normative social structure. This sounds similar to the relaxation of norms characteristic of the environment created by the German cabaret and the Mexican género chico that influenced Hadad and that would somehow (through Teatro Campesino) reach Palacios. To keep the relationship with Germany, in Turner's revision of the etymology of “liminal,” he relates it to “threshold” so that it is a term derived from the Germanic base “thrash” or “thresh,” that is, “a place where grain is beaten out from its husk, where what has been hidden is thus manifested” (Turner, The Anthropology of Performance 92). Turner adds that this is exactly what happens in social dramas. By dislocating people's social status, the inadequacies of the system can be at least glimpsed. Since Schechner defines performance as liminal, it must be noticed that performance corresponds to a specific moment of what would be a ritual.

Liminal seems to have become a very popular term in academia. However, there are not many references to the distinction that Turner makes between liminal and
liminoid, and for what he dedicates a whole essay titled “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology.” Basically, liminal moments occur only in more primitive societies whereas liminoid would be its equivalent in “complex” societies. Leisure is a new concept that belongs to postindustrial and urban societies, so that liminoid becomes part of their entertainment. On the other hand, liminal is a demanding and compulsory temporal inversion of order. However, contrary to liminoid, liminal does not subvert (but just temporarily invert) its system. That is, the satire, lampoon, and burlesque tone proper of modes of entertainment in modern societies go somehow against the system while liminal rather supports and reinforces the continuation of order once they are given a small relief. In talking about Astrid Hadad and Mónica Palacios then, the term liminoid instead of liminal should be applied.

Both in the case of liminal or liminoid, that “in-between” space reminds us of Chicana writer and critic Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of “borderlands.” Political borders are not enough to limit people's identities. Living right on the US-Mexico borders, there are cultural elements from both countries in Anzaldúa's daily reality and personality. Instead of denying that split nature or working towards the strengthening and imposition of one element (US or Mexican) over the other, the Latina starts out of her hybrid nature in order to construct and build her own identity. This is expressed not only in content but also in form. Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza mixes poetry and prose as Hadad and Palacios opt for the intrinsic hybridity of performance. They are contra-attacking by taking hold of what would have marginalized them as Simerka talked about. It is interesting that what anthropologically understood as temporal stage is used later, for instance by Anzaldúa or Simerka, in a more spatial way, even if it is a symbolical one (their position in society in an imagined social scale). Turner also explains that “the passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in
space, a geographical movement from one place to another” (From Ritual to Theatre 25). Still, the relevance of this spatial movement is secondary and is rather accompanying the temporal process. The determination of time instead of space makes things more inevitable, since time always passes whereas not everybody would encounter him/herself in the necessary spatial circumstances. This might just make the case of the Latinas and Hadad more special. However, the performances of Hadad and Palacios can be seen under more time-like coordinates and not just spatial. Theirs is also a process of transformation, since, like in rituals, they have previously separated themselves from the status imposed by their society and their performance allows them to build a new identity. This should also make their art be seen not just as the only possibility that they have for not being able to fit into a more properly institutionalized genre. Theirs is a conscious act. Diversity seems nowadays a very positive element to be included in political agendas. However, as usual, reality does not correspond to theories and marginalization persists. Hadad's and Palacios' shows celebrate the richness of their hybridity, not only because that is the way they are but also because they choose to be so. Their act is also a rebellious one, since they want to break with any liminal spaces by carrying them within themselves. They believe in transnationalism as was stated when talking about Astrid Hadad breaking through a fake wall in Central Park. The same Compact disc Cabaret 2000 says at the back “cabaret has no frontiers.” In the case of Palacios, that transnationalism should be clear since it is obvious that she does not want to forget about her Mexican heritage.

Intertextuality, recycling, “inter-iconography.”

Julia Kristeva would have probably classified the previous diachronic approach as “synchronic” in its realization. In her reading of Mikhail Bakhtin, texts would never occur
without a predecessor. However, the moment a text is written, even if it is after a process of reading a previous text, it becomes part of the actual panorama and relates to the existing (and not just the old) texts. In this way, “diachrony is transformed into synchrony” (Kristeva 36). This study has not reached farther than an analysis of the characteristics that Palacios and Hadad give to their works in an attempt to support or somehow even revive certain old traditions. Kristeva's theory requires one more level of abstraction so that those traditions and the qualities that constitute them are seen as “texts.” Instead of that, her words will be taken in a more literal sense throughout this essay.

Critics emphasize the importance of Kristeva’s essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” for its discussion of intertextuality as something intrinsic to the creation of every single text. A word lacks significance until it is actually used and it will always be used in a specific context. That context becomes a “text” and this explains why “text” and “word” almost become synonyms in Kristeva's article. According to the Bulgarian feminist, no text can be produced without referring, one way or another, to a previous one, since everything (that has meaning) has already been said before. For that reason, “any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 36). Mónica Palacios and Astrid Hadad “absorb” and “transform” texts with specific purposes.

In the case of Astrid Hadad, this tendency towards using intertextuality might be explained by her first steps out of the academy. Most of her biographical articles emphasize her acting debut in Jesusa Rodríguez's Donna Giovannni. Based on Mozart's “Don Giovannie,” this production challenges the original text by having several “Dons” played almost exclusively by women. A very important task in feminist agendas is to empower women with anything that has been denied to them throughout history, being men the agents of action. Many times, Astrid Hadad interprets well known Caribbean
songs where men normally address women in a very similar way to a Don Juan. Although the audience would know the song, it is still very significant that a woman is taking the active role. In some cases, Hadad does not just “absorb” the song but also makes some modifications which increase her active scope. This is the case of “Babalú,” in which the singer describes the offerings to the deity of the same name, an orisha in Santería religion. Among other requests, the Cuban Desi Arnaz and his Orchestra asks Babalú that his “negra” (“black woman”) love him, that she has money and that she has no other “negro” (“black man”). In her compact disc Corazón sangrante, the Mexican artist changes every “negra” by “negro” and vice versa, so that she is the one to be asking to the deity and leading the action.

Palacios also attempts to increase the power of her sex with her work. For her, any start is good, and so, recounting the time when she had to work as a waitress, she can be seen in full action when a man tries to order for his wife:

WAITRESS [Palacios]: Good afternoon. My name is Mónica, what can I get for you?
MAN: Well, the little lady --
WAITRESS: Sir, the little lady has a mind of her own and she will order for herself. Ma'am, what can I get you?
WIFE: Hi ... um, I'll have ... I'll have a ... a ... a steak!
WAITRESS: OK, a steak. A little hesitant but that was good -- keep it coming!
WIFE: And ah, ah, ah baked potato!
WAITRESS: OK, a baked potato. Much more assertive. Let it out. Let it out!
WIFE: And a salad!
WAITRESS: OK, a salad. You were fantastic! (To man) Wasn't she great? (To wife) Don't you feel much better? Now turn to your husband and demand oral sex! (373)

The wife is encouraged to make use of that faculty which distinguishes humanity from other living beings: language. Like many sports and other “manly” activities, men are exposed to practice their linguistic abilities more often than women, especially in public spheres. According to Palacios, all that women need is practice so that they
become more assertive. Demanding “oral sex” is not just a pun line but it also has to do with empowering women. Traditional patriarchal conceptions of sexuality grant men with agency by their faculty to penetrate whereas women are relegated to a passive position. Oral sex challenges Freudian assumptions of women's desire for a penis as a result of being castrated beings themselves. Men are not even that necessary anymore, and so, their power decreases. During her performance at UCLA and with her broken English, Hadad also promoted oral sex as a better option than Viagra. Her song “Punto G” (“G Point”) expresses someone's love with the anaphora “te quiero con” (“I love you with”) followed by an infinite number of complements describing that love. The pun comes at the very end when the last of those complements is “my tongue,” suggesting oral sex as the most desired way of loving.

Intertextuality can actually be considered a manifestation of the desire of taking control of language too. In order to see examples of intertextuality in the Chicana work, it can be noticed that words are added to famous songs like the Beatles’ “Let it be.” In her attempt to address sexuality with a greater freedom, Mónica Palacios creates a Women's Health Clinic on stage. After informing a pretended patient from the audience that she has “a yeast infection” (Palacios, Greetings 385), “doctor Palacios” wants to lighten the matter by explaining things “women to women.” It is then when she starts singing “Let it Please be Her,” referring to the woman's vagina and the need to relax and give it some time as if she were talking about a simple cold. “Vagina” is actually a word that the performer is trying to make her audience feel comfortable with by later including it in a varied repertoire of songs (Greetings 389). Palacios is aware of the power of language and how it reflects society. As literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin denounces about history, language always hides an ideology. It is common to find a social taboo behind a word that sounds shocking to our ears, like “vagina.” Propriety finds certain
words unsuitable in female mouths, especially swearing words. Palacios and Hadad challenge this assumption by ignoring any restrictions regarding the vocabulary to be considered proper. The Chicana uses “fuck” and “shit” as often as it is necessary for expressing her emotions. For instance, in her interpretation of “Camina como Chencha” (“She Walks as Chencha”) a traditional Cuban song included in Corazón Sangrante, the Mexican insults people and sends them to hell (“ay vayanse pal diablo / partía de canallas / pa que sinvergüenzas”). Insults are not necessarily addressed to men. Actually, intertextuality can also be discussed as the way in which these women retake qualifiers traditionally attributed to them. Many of the female characters of Hadad's songs represent the traditional mischievous and deceiving women, responsible for men's suffering due to their libertine nature. Some of the titles of her songs -- “La pecadora” (“The Sinner”) or “Lúdica mujer impúdica” (“Ludic impudic Woman”) -- reveal this. Such appellative nouns are inherent in the patriarchal and Catholic society where these artists grew up. Palacios also confronts those negative nominations by criticizing male comedians who think that to tell jokes about “bitches” (Greetings 374) is funny. By using such a dismissive term instead of any other more politically correct alternative, Palacios' power starts out from that historically imposed as belonging to men. Lesbians have also been identified with many disrespectful terms that Palacios bravely cries out: “lezbo -- dyke -- queer -- homo -- butch -- muff diver!!” (Greetings 374). Interestingly, her use of those words creates humor and, in this way, she is dispossessing that language of its damaging nature towards women or, more precisely, lesbians. In women's repossession of language there is also a need to take away its hurting power.

By using those words, these women break with limits imposed on them. This places them at the same level of power as men. Fortunately, their creativity allows them to adopt some other techniques in their appropriation of language. Many times the
inter textual transformation creates a funny and original twist with which their audience would completely agree as being a better suggestion than the original. Palacios remembers how she and her brother would impersonate the Beatles and sing, for instance, “Girl.” They sang “and I held her hand in Hawaii” (Greetings 370) instead of “in mine” which, according to her, was “stupid, but -- crafty!” The power is there, that is, in being “crafty” and creative. “Hawaii” sounds exotic and adds an extra detail easily enjoyable. Humor plays an important role in these creations. Coming back to “Babalú” song, Hadad adds a couplet that might even sound absurd: “los marcianos llegaron ya / y llegaron bailando el chachachá” (“Martians already arrived / and they did so dancing chachachá”). Another example is the beautiful bolero “Virgen de media noche” (“Midnight Virgin”) where the singer praises the Virgin Mary almost as might praise his/her beloved. At the end of the famous Puerto Rican singer Daniel Santos’ version, there is not “cuando me dejas sin coche” (“when you leave me without my car”) as in the compact disc Heavy Nopal en vivo. Apart from being a perfect rhyme with “noche” (“night”), the use of “coche” (“car”) surprises and is funny because all the praying comes to be for the singer’s car or for him/herself when his/her car breaks down. Something to be noticed here is the sense of actuality given by such references. Astrid Hadad continually shows her concern for contemporary issues, especially those that prove the craziness and inhumanity of her times. One more example is the well known song “Lágrimas negras,” recently re-versions by Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés and flamenco singer Diego El Cigala (2004). Whereas in this later version and some others there are references to Seville and the River Guadalquivir, Hadad breaks with that romanticism using lines such as “tengo mi condón para hacer el amor / quiero que le encuentres el sabor”¹³ (Corazón sangrante). Once more, it creates a perfect rhyme, sounding hilarious and bringing the traditional song to present

¹³ I have my condom to make love / I want you to find out its flavor.
times. As Alzate reminds us, in Mexico there are still groups like Pro-Vida that denounce the use of preservatives, an anti-liberating solution for women with which Hadad cannot agree (Teatro de Cabaret 57).

As might have been noticed, the texts absorbed and transformed do not belong to the literary cannon but rather to popular culture. Those songs became part of these women's memories since their very childhood, the same time when they would listen to their mothers and their bedtime stories. It is very common for Chicanos to have been raised in the US among Mexican folklore. One of those legends is “La Llorona” (“The Crying Woman”), a fascinating story about a mother who kills her kids and about whom many Chicano artists, among them Cherríe Moraga and Mónica Palacios, have written. After explaining her fascination with the story and her drive to research its origins in the UCLA archives, Palacios completely recreates the story, having the crazy Llorona be a lesbian woman who kills her unfaithful lover. Once more, the Chicana does not only attempt to give a voice to women but also to homosexual women by re-using a story belonging to the folklore of such a Catholic and homophobic society as Mexico.

This “re-using” can be related to Hadad's description of her own art when she talks about “recycling” in order to describe her work: “Es un poco retornar a lo que hacía y retomar lo que eran valores y símbolos nacionales para reutilizarlos y reciclarlos como la basura. Eso es un poco lo que yo hago: reciclar”14 (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 158). This ecological terminology should not surprise due to the greater attention paid to environmental problems nowadays and Hadad's preoccupation for including actual issues in her work. Just to give one more example of that preoccupation, during her performance at UCLA on February 25th of 2006, she wore a completely black dress covered in fake flowers that more or less looked like tulips. After singing “Pa' que me sirve la vida”

14 It's a little like coming back to what used to be done and retake those that were national values and symbols in order to re-use them and recycle them like garbage. That's a little bit what I do: to recycle.
(“What's my life for”) she gave her opinion about transgenic agricultural products: “they
taste like nothing, they look great.” In the previous diachronic approach, we already
justified this preoccupation with actual issues by the influence of teatro de carpa and
teatro revista. It is interesting though how her desire to “recycle” values from those
genres results in a discourse that necessarily distances her work from those former types
of theater. Similar to revista theater, Hadad cannot help giving her opinion about current
events in every performance. For instance, on the first of April of this year, La Jornada
describes her show in La Bodega and how she started by telling people to forget about all
that was going on with the president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (so that they could
focus on and enjoy her show). Once more, she adds an ecological flavor to the language
with which she gives her opinion: "La política se ha vuelto en algo de provecho personal.
Y todavía falta lo de las campañas. ¡Pobre de la ecología! Saturarán la ciudad con su
propaganda"15 (Cruz Barcenas). Even though Palacios does not necessarily use that
“ecological” language, the concept of “recycling” can also be used in relation to her
because of her similar closeness to the social issues of her community. The Chicana’s
already mentioned collaboration with Teatro VIVA! is just one example of that similar
attitude and willingness in taking part in actual problems. A very remarkable project of
this Teatro attempts to teach Latinos about AIDS. “Recycling” serves then as one more
strategy for the comparison of the two artists.

I see “recycling” as one more technique. It might sound very much like
intertextuality, being the main difference that it is not limited to things already said by
someone else, that is to say, texts. The elements to be recycled are those that have
previously been used in a different cycle. Patriarchism has ruled Mexican and Chicanos’
societies since their very foundations and even nowadays some of its premises persist.

15 Politics has become something like personal benefit. And we still have to wait for the political
campaigns. Poor ecology! The city will be saturated by their propaganda.
Hadad and Palacios opt for recycling some of those premises by subverting the traditional sexual categorization that assigns different activities to men and women. The Mexican artist recalls in several interviews that as member of a Lebanese/Mexican family she was born into a very conservative environment and, because of that, she was educated to marry ("La Entrevista"). In her show, Mónica Palacios also blames what she calls the "societal pressure" (Greetings 386) for her decision as a little girl to choose a doll instead of a machine gun. The toy that she really wanted was the machine gun but her patriarchal society would not have tolerated this.

Intertextuality is just one way to give women the power that has traditionally belonged to men. Now, by recycling patriarchal elements and impersonating men and male symbols, Hadad and Palacios retake male power and, at the same time, criticize the persistence of such an out-dated ideology as patriarchism. Humor is very important for the works of both the Mexican and the Chicana. However, humor is one of those activities that have traditionally belonged to the male realm. A very important element in Palacios' show is stand-up comedy. Actually, her first steps in performance took her to the club scene, which she would later abandon because she felt alienated. Apart from a homophobic audience, she complains because "club owners don't like to book women because, quote: 'They talk about women things and their periods.' End of quote" (Greetings 374). Even though to arouse or provoke laughter is not a desirable quality in women, there are and there have been many female comedians throughout history and even today. Focusing her survey in US stages, scholar Suzanne Lavin points out how women were basically barred from stand-up comedy until Phyllis Diller's entry in the fifties. Despite her independent, aggressive, and bold presence, Diller's show completely depends on "ideal women" images. She makes fun of family roles but only through the presentation of her dramatic persona as the incompetent mother. The women's movement
of the sixties and seventies will bring “New Wave” comedians such as Lily Tomlin. Instead of the stereotypical woman, her multiple characters bring about more varied social issues with whom the audience can somehow relate. Female presence on US stages in the eighties and nineties multiplied due to the previous “New Wave” feminists as well as to older predecessors such as Diller. Although Palacios' work turned towards theater and cannot be limited to stand-up comedy anymore and Astrid Hadad never even pretended to be a comedian, the two of them have much in common with the women included in Lavin's book. In particular, the innovations described about “New Wave” seem somehow to distance these new artists from stand-up comedy and get closer to performance: “breaking away from sole dependence on the punchline joke, they told stories, became characters, or shared their observation” (Lavin 11). Form is not the only common ground between “New Wave” and the shows of Palacios and Hadad but also its social critique, especially when it extends to sex, race, and gender.

Suzanne Lavin discusses each of the female comedians in her historical review in terms of two specific social roles normally performed by stand-up comedians: the “licensed spokesperson” and the “negative example.” Specialist in American popular culture Lawrence Mintz is the first one to define those roles. The former consists of a constructed persona “permitted to say the things about our society that we want and need to have uttered publicly, but which would be too dangerous and too volatile if done so without the mediation of humor” (Mintz, “The ‘New Wave’” 1). Both Astrid Hadad and Mónica Palacios perfectly fulfill this role. The latter's attack on what she terms “Male Sexual Power” (Palacios, Greetings 386) proves its devastatingly possible effects when she needs to back up and explain “And, folks, please note, I don't hate men. I don't want to read somewhere: ‘...Funny but hates men.’” (387). This line serves as some kind of calming of the waters after she has described male sexual advances in the following way:
Astrid Hadad's critique is often addressed to men and the way they treat women. “Me golpeaste tanto anoche”¹⁶ (¡Ay!) deals with a woman who is constantly beaten up by her lover but still cannot live without him. Roselyne Costantino says about this show: “Each of the four times I have seen this segment the response was the same: the audience goes wild with laughter, at first” (Holy Terrors 199). The facetiousness of Hadad's performance allows her not only to criticize men's misuse of women but also the latter's own complicity like Palacios' former acceptance of “Male Sexual Power” and “societal pressure.” At UCLA, Hadad was trying to explain why many of the Mexican symbols that she was using were not that unfamiliar to her Californian audience. She was talking of such a serious issue as the injustice of US and Mexico's Treaty of Guadalupe and how, after all, Mexicans have the right to be in what is now US land. However, by describing this as “silent penetration,” the people at the theater could not but laugh at the sexual reference.

Most of Hadad's humor results out of the female figures portrayed through her own body. For instance, in “Milonga del Mono” she calls herself ugly and wears her “Multimamada” costume, consisting of several rows of breasts, so that she actually does not look very attractive. “Camina como Chencha” (Corazón Sangrante) describes a woman with a funny way of walking because of her limp leg. This links with the second

¹⁶ “You beat me up so much last night.”
role described by Mintz, the “negative example” who is on stage “to ridicule, to feel superior to, to renounce through laughter” (“The ‘New Wave’” 1). Distance is created between audience and actor so that the latter can be laughed at instead of with. In the case of Hadad, laughter is not just provoked by her characters but also by the persona that she creates of herself on stage. At the aforementioned performance at UCLA, she sang in Spanish but when talking directly to the people at the theatre she used what she called “her best English” pronunciation. Astrid Hadad actually had a very strong foreign accent and from the very beginning warned us, saying that even those who could not speak Spanish would probably understand her songs better than her speeches. These speeches seemed to be written down in a few pages with which she kept a continuous fight until she ended up throwing them away. She clarified problems that as any Spanish speaking person she had with English, for instance, with the consonant sound in “the.” Almost at the end (when she was not using her pages any more), she started using “I mean” so often that she had to stop and comment on how fluent she felt in English at that point and what a shame it was that the show was about to finish. It was really interesting because she could be criticizing anything but people would not stop laughing. Humor frequently releases tensions so that any topic can be addressed. It also allows the creation of (at least apparently) harmless characters with whom the audience can easily sympathize. Many people there were Hispanic and understood how difficult English must be for her. English speakers do not have a very high esteem of themselves regarding their linguistic abilities either, especially regarding foreign languages. Mónica Palacios also presents her artistic persona as the one to be laughed at, since all the funny stories she recounts on stage are about herself. The importance placed by the writer on humor can be proved by the fact that she teaches creative writing seminars through the use of comedy (UCLA, summer 2001).
In the chapter dedicated to comedian Lily Tomlin, Lavin distinguishes a third comic type, relating Tomlin's work to shamanism. This brings back Turner and Schechner and their study of ritual as a performative act. The comedian becomes the liminal subject who has to go through the three stages discussed earlier but, this time, “his [her] work is social work” (Schechner 42). That is, her purpose is not that of changing his/her own status but that of bringing “a ‘cure’ for society” (Lavin 39). Like a shaman, Palacios seems to go through some processes of trance. In one instance while reciting a poem, she struggles to free herself from the chair to which her hands are tied (Greetings 379).

However, the autobiographical character of her work might make it hard to see her as doing anything for anybody but herself. As it has been commented before, hers can be considered a personal “coming out” story. However, she is not only trying to accept herself but also to be accepted by us. She is trying to help us to get over the problems entailing a homophobic and patriarchal psyche. Besides, she wants to encourage people to do what she is doing, not just “coming out of the closet” but also being more tolerant and less prejudiced. Still she does that in a very subtle way, since she does not want us to react like those relatives who thought that she was going to hypnotize their daughters (Greetings 379). The Women's Health Clinic is just one example of how she expects to help women. Women would talk about their visit to, for instance, the dentist but not the one to the Women's Health Clinic. The problem seems to be anything related to the vagina, and so, her final message is a song for all women:

Women gather 'round women
we must laugh, we must laugh.
We must learn to be less uptight,
so we can relax our vaginal muscles. (389).

Even though Hadad puts a little of herself in all her characters, calling herself a “todóloga” because she is trying to represent all women, her attitude is more clearly that of the shaman, since even though she strongly criticizes the evils of her society, she aims
at making something better out of it and curing some of its evils by attacking them. One of those evils is the already mentioned mistreatment of women by their male partners and, more than that, the fact that women allow it to the point that they seem to be masochistic. While interpreting “El Calcetín” (“The Sock”) at UCLA, Hadad seemed to get into an authentic trance while flagellating herself with a fake whip (which at least from far away looked more like a feather duster). The song talks about how a woman is treated as a sock by her lover in the sense that she is stepped on all the time and that once she is ripped off, it is not worth it to “sew” her again. The inability of women to see their own value is what often causes those situations of domestic violence. Hadad expresses the suffering that those women undergo in an exaggerated whipping, where the movements of the whip, her long black hair and her whole body continue until the audience can no longer stand it. With a cathartic relief, the song ends but nobody misses the message. As shaman figures, these women show an interest in active change towards “egalitarian social relations” (Sandoval 376). Because of that, this can be distinguished as Sandoval's technology of “democrats,” the fourth one enumerated in hands of the oppressed.

An important difference with the shaman discussed by Turner and Schechner is the continual laughing of Palacios' and Hadad's audiences during their trance moments. Nevertheless, humor is not the only element that these women take out of the realms of men and recycle. They actually dare to impersonate men, being these reduced to mere postures and typical symbols. Palacios starts her Greeting from a Queer Señorita “in a muscle man pose” (369) and later even “grabs crotch like a man” (374). Sports are not something that women are supposed to do and that is the reason why she describes herself as a “jock” (369) when she was young and played basketball. In her recount of “La Llorona,” one of the rumors that starts circulating when Caliente (name given by Palacios to La Llorona) does not seem interested in finding a husband is that “she wears spurs --
on her house slippers” (Palacios, “La Llorona Loca” 49). More than representing men, these are masculine accessories that people normally relate with lesbians. The same masculine symbol, the spurs, is used by Hadad in her video clip “Corazón Sangrante,” representing the instrument with which her heart is hurt and the man who is causing her suffering (it could also take us back to the fact that women hurt themselves). Often she also puts on a mustache that would remind Mexicans of “former President Salinas de Gortari, or the macho figure par excellence, Pancho Villa, or any other authoritarian figure” (Holy Terrors 195). Mexican playwright Sabina Berman plays with the same element in one of the pieces in her Suplicio del placer. Berman’s specialization in psychology and the title of her last play, Feliz nuevo siglo, doktor Freud (2001) lead us to interpret the removable mustache with which both the male and female members of a couple play around as the symbolic phallus which in Freudian terms women supposedly long for. Hadad and Berman were in contact during the first moments of the former’s career. These women take control of that symbolic mustache but, contrary to Freud’s assumption, not in order to stop being a castrated man. Humor allows them to ridicule such a theory and men’s image itself, proving how little power provides man’s masculinity per se.

Men's power comes out of tradition while women have been denied the same rights. For that reason, Palacios and Hadad also impersonate men in their activities and not just looks. Palacios says that she is going to be a Don Juanita (Greetings 375) and she performs very active scenes with women that she tries to conquer. The attitude of the stranger (La Llorona’s girlfriend) is also very masculine and aggressive: all she needs to seduce Caliente is to catch her eye, take off her hat, and say “if you want something good, you will ride with me and you will be my woman, mi mujer!” (Palacios, “La Llorona” 50). This arrogance contrasts with her pleading tone later when she confesses that she has
been sleeping with another woman. This brings back the necessity to encourage women to lead the action. However, the humor accompanying those scenes rather satirizes the incongruity and lack of honesty in men's behavior. Women should not be the passive object and it is good that they can also express their desires. But to imitate men might lead to failure too like in the case of the stranger who is killed by her wife Caliente.

Violence and physical strength seems another trait taken from men. This can be seen in the Palacios scenes just mentioned and also in Hadad, for instance when she is flagellating herself or eating her own heart (video clip “Corazón Sangrante”). Hadad also applies those same qualities to the way she sings. She complains about how before Lucha Reyes, a woman “no cantaba con esta fuerza como cantaba el hombre” (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 160-161). Reyes' canto bravío allows her to express herself better. Again, this violence is satirized by means of the inclusion of really high pitch sequences in the low and “masculine” interpretation of songs.

Hadad not only imitates the way Lucha Reyes sings, but she actually brings her to the stage. She interprets some of her songs and, more interestingly, she represents her in her work. She produced and acted for the musical tragicomedy Occisa o Luz, Levántate y Lucha and also wrote a movie script about her life, but she got really upset with the result once taken to production by Arturo Ripstein. Reyes is a symbol for Hadad because she represents the “strong woman who takes responsibility for, and claims as her own, her sexuality, her economic well-being, her career, and her public and private identity” (Holy Terrors 195). Since Astrid Hadad uses Reyes as an icon instead of just as intertextuality demands -- that is, reinterpreting her songs --, I will distinguish this technique as “inter-iconography.”

Hadad is not the only one to see Reyes as an icon for resistance (as many other Mexican artists have been trying to recover her legend), neither is Reyes the only icon
used by Hadad. Actually, her new show ¡Oh, diosas! consists of a series of goddesses that she brings together to the stage because, according to the artist, “de prevalecer el poder femenino nos hubiera ido mejor”¹⁷ (Cruz Barcenas). After announcing the title of her show and explaining it, when she appears dressed up as some kind of little deer singing “El Venado,” we must think of Diana, the goddess of hunting. During the chorus of the song Hadad opens her arms and it can be seen Frida Kahlo’s painting “El Venadito,” in which there is a little deer with Kahlo as its head and several arrows sticking in its body. Mexican painter Frida Kahlo becomes another icon which, as she explains, has had such good marketing that t-shirts with her paintings can be bought in Chinatown. Hadad’s tone was not condescending. She seems to love popular culture and any kind of cultural manifestation as those Chinatown reproductions can be. This could actually be considered similar to what she does, resulting in several critics labeling her work as kitsch. She honestly seemed to be willing to take Kahlo’s place in those t-shirts. The reason why she chose Frida Kahlo is probably because this painter is also an icon of freedom for women; she bravely fought for her life after a terrible accident and dealt with the difficult relationship with her husband Diego de Rivera, also a famous nationalistic Mexican painter, and his infidelities.

At the end of her interpretation of “Regresas,” by some mechanism Hadad gets to reproduce the number of her arms to eight. This and the multiple faces surrounding her reproduce the image of the Hindu goddess Kali. Although in the show Hadad did not provoke but laughter with this costume, there are many descriptions of this goddess as that of death so that the heads hanging around are some kind of little trophies that she takes everywhere with her. However, there also seems to be much misunderstanding about the interpretation of this goddess. The death she brings is to “the ego as the illusory

¹⁷ If female power had prevailed, everything would have been better.
self-centered view of reality” (Infinite Goddess: Embracing the Divine mother18) and she actually brings liberation. Humans are spiritual beings and the body beings are just something transitory. So, those “trophies” symbolize the liberation brought to her children, that is, their liberation from their body. Whether Astrid Hadad knows this or not, it is still interesting to see how easily female goddesses are misunderstood and believed to be evil beings. Rather than that, Hadad asserts that “cuando gobernaron las mujeres fueron tiempos de paz”19 (Cruz Barcenas). Palacios and Cherríe Moraga also have done some investigation in order to find out the truth behind so many awful stories about Mexican women. “La Llorona” is just one of them, telling the official version that she woke up one morning mad and killed her children. Both Palacios and Moraga found out that that was not the truth. Then, they created their own versions.

During the same show at UCLA, while singing “Viene la muerte” Astrid Hadad might be impersonating Coatlicue, since this is the goddess of death and life for ancient Mexican culture. First, while singing as if she is not afraid of death, she wears a black, wide skirt with many skulls and a vast hat with skeletons in different postures. But when she turns around, the rhythm of the music completely changes and she is happily dancing in a colorful costume. Now she is like a waitress and offers different types of food to the audience. The already mentioned costume of “Multimamada” has also much to do with Coatlicue, since she is the great symbol of Mexico and its mother. As a good mother, she is supposed to feed her children, but the point that Hadad criticizes is that she would need an infinite number of breasts in order to feed so many people who want to benefit from the country: Spaniards in colonial times, US more recently. This icon is nothing new in her performances. In the video clip of “Corazón sangrante” she also appears as Coatlicue

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18 The reason why I chose to research about Kali on the web and not in “more academic” books is Hadad’s interest for popular culture, practices and beliefs.

19 When women governed, those were times of peace.
who, falling asleep, is transformed into Ixtacciuatl. Both icons were part of Mexico even before the Spaniards arrived. The latter is the story of the woman who became the volcano of the same name after dying when she and her lover tried to escape together. The reason why those lovers had to escape was because they were not allowed to be together due to belonging to different indigenous nations. Probably the reason why Hadad decides to work with this icon is because it shows the hybrid nature of Mexico since its very beginnings, even before colonial times. The transformations that she submits herself to are equally illustrative of that same nature that occupies the very chore of her work. In the same video, when waking up, Hadad suffers one more transformation, looking this time like the Virgin of Guadalupe. This Virgin, who would become Mexico's patron saint, “supposedly appeared on a site already sacred to the Aztecs. Her image sometimes had a dark face and Nahuatl-speaking Mexicans continued to call her by the name of an indigenous earth goddess, Tonantzin” (Chasteen 72). Again, Hadad chooses a perfect example of hybridity. Also in Heavy Nopal, she presented herself as the daughter of both the Coatlicue and the Virgin of Guadalupe. These images are loved in Mexico and she is to a certain extent exalting and somehow glorifying them. However, the lyrics of the same video that was mentioned above, “Corazón sangrante,” deal with a woman who is suffering because of a man. Both the Coatlicue and the Virgin of Guadalupe are great givers who get nothing in return. They suffer as much as this woman and also mostly because of men, Ixtacciuatl being the extreme case since, after all, she dies for a man.

Mónica Palacios does not use complicated costumes but rather the opposite. She looks simple (although sexy) and neutral, so that she still impersonates several well-known icons but just through her body gestures, words and speech. It has been already mentioned her desire to be like a “Don Juanita” (Greetings 376) and how she actually acted like that with other women. This is not the only male icon used by Palacios. The
stage directions describe the way this girl “labeled a dyke” (Greetings 372) approached her while being alone and playing basketball. She walks like John Wayne, as if there was a “John Wayne way of walking.” It is very interesting because everybody gets an idea of what that means, especially when the same girl also gets “into a straddle position” (372), since most people tend to remember Wayne riding horses. The writer knows her audience very well and does not need any explanation. John Wayne is a symbol of masculinity and certain aggressive arrogance that successfully conquers women. Some other icons are indicated by her use of capital letters: once she gets her machine gun in exchange of the doll, she enjoyed playing to be “the Dad, the Soldier or the Sheriff” (Greetings 386).

Palacios' “inter-iconography” not only emulates men for their masculinity and “Male Power.” It has been hard for women to establish a space in the music business. Since she was a little girl, Palacios loved music. She and her brother would impersonate the Beatles and James Brown (Greetings 370). In “Describe your Work,” the author describes herself as a cross between different well-known icons. For instance, she mentions Frank Sinatra and Boby Darin (“Describe your Work” 281), taking us back to music and, especially to the fifties where, according to Palacios, her soul is. As a female singer, Palacios gets closer to Hadad by having the ranchera singer Lola Beltrán as one more of those icons. She has other female idols like the actresses Sophia Loren and Doris Day or others who belong to both film and music like Charo. One more interesting icon in her work is Lenny Bruce, a controversial Jewish-American stand-up comedian and satirist of the fifties and sixties. Even though Palacios had to move out of stand-up comedy, she still has some of that in her. Like Hadad, Palacios' “inter-iconography” is perfectly recognized by her audience and although some are part of her Mexican background, as famous Mexican character Cantinflas (“Describe your Work” 281), others are a clear result of her living in the US. More interestingly, those icons belong to US-TV: film
director and actor Woody Allen (“Describe your Work” 281), the teenager character Samantha in US TV program “Bewitched” (Greetings 379) or the simple image of a cheerleader.

Those icons needed to have been used before for their presence in Palacios' and Hadad's work to be considered “inter-iconography.” The fact that those icons are easily recognized proves that they must have been used before. They appear in commercials and television constantly and, more notoriously, they are even used by political parties. In her article “Power Plays and the Mexican Crisis,” Mexican theater specialist Jacqueline E. Bixler discusses the issue of power in three of Sabina Berman's plays. It has been already mentioned how both Hadad and Berman use a fake mustache to symbolize masculinity and those famous Mexican men who represent the macho par excellence. One of those men is Pancho Villa who even becomes a character in Berman's Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda (1996), although only Adrián, the main male character, can see him. According to Bixler, Villa “has served the PRI as a revolutionary prototype” (89). Berman and Hadad are aware of this and consciously take hold of this icon, disauthorizing it through ridicule and humor. In Berman’s play, Villa tries to help Adrián with chauvinist pieces of advice and, at the end, none of them are successful: Adrián humiliates himself by asking Gina, the main female character, to come back while Villa receives a bullet with each of Adrián's failed attempts. The reason why it is important for these women to use “inter-iconography” with a satirizing tone is that “it is the very fixation of an image as ‘natural’ which lends it its power” (Mehluus 1). This corresponds with the third of the five “technologies” described by Chela Sandoval in her discussion of the methodologies of the oppressed. Being women in a still patriarchal society, Hadad and Berman belong to the oppressed and they participate in what Sandoval calls “meta-ideologizing.” This is defined as “the operation of appropriating dominant ideological forms and using them
whole in order to transform their meanings into a new, imposed, and revolutionary concept” (376). If it worked for PRI to use “myths of the Revolution” like Villa “for the seventy years to legitimize and maintain its complete domination of the country” (Bixler 89), it follows that Hadad and Berman should also have successful results. To a certain extent, this could also be understood as deconstruction in the sense that those icons need to be deconstructed first.

Derrida's Angels

Many find Jacques Derrida's writings difficult because his linguistic theory becomes part of his style of writing. One of the problems pointed out by Derrida is that the signifier of a sign refers to a signified that is absent. In his discourse he proves that absence following linguistic Ferdinand de Saussoure's concept of difference. The meaning of a signifier lies in its difference from other signifiers. This logic creates a continuous transition from one signifier to another without ever reaching the signified. Astrid Hadad and Mónica Palacios are “Derrida's Angels” in the sense that they are continuously deconstructing terms that affect their own identity. I will discuss two main ways in which these artists deconstruct terms: first, by giving so many signifiers to one signified that the latter can never be reached. Also, those signifiers are ridiculed and, as a consequence, they lack real value or meaning. Second, if a term should be explained by its opposite (what is “white”? The opposite to “black”) as the concept of differance implies, these women put together those opposites and prove how they coexist instead of canceling each other. In one case or the other, they show their audience how many commonly believed-to-be-true notions are just empty of meaning.

Deconstruction is also commented by Chela Sandoval as the second one of her five technologies used by marginalized groups of people (Sandoval 376). A very
important (mis)conception for Palacios to be deconstructed is the word “lesbian.” Nobody seems to be able to give a real definition of lesbian. Rather than that, this word takes people's mind to another referent. By presenting those referents (or signifiers in Derrida's words) and showing how ridiculous they are, Palacios calls, to begin with, for revision and insight into homophobic feelings. Once the lack of grounding in those feelings is rationalized, things should be called by what they are and real words should be constructed with real meaning (Derrida would probably be skeptical about this second step). The first connection with the word lesbian that Palacios brings up is that of “some yucky sexual activity that has to do with a tractor!” (Greetings 369). From that moment on, every time the word lesbian comes up, the Chicana mimes driving a tractor. There is no reason to think of lesbians neither as tractor drivers nor even as masculine. She actually looks feminine and sexy on stage and performs some erotic scenes so that the more she repeats that gesture the less sense it makes. When she takes her girlfriend to her parent's house, she has to tell them about her sexual inclinations. Her family does not even want to know, even though they have their suspicions. Those suspicions are created by the fact that she is a vegetarian. Food, especially in family reunions, is supposed to be a very important thing for Mexicans. When Palacios announces that the woman who is accompanying her is her girlfriend, all her mum says is “come on, everybody, let's eat” (Greetings 377). Nobody wants to talk about this if it is going to ruin their meal. Palacios impersonates their thoughts but none of them even use the word lesbian. One of her older sisters tries to find the right word: “Her woman? Her lover -- person?!” (Greetings 378). Her dad is very disappointed but he does nothing apart from including in his singing lines “you don't eat chicken, fish or cheese” or “she is not married” (the two women actually got married) as if that were the problem. Her brothers are fine with it as long as their wives do not get involved, threatening their masculinity. It seems that being a lesbian
means to want to have sex with all and any women. This is exactly the way that her other
relatives see homosexuality. Palacios complains because they “never encourage their
daughters to say hello to me because they think I'm going to hypnotize them!” (Greetings
379). She mimes hypnotizing with hand and eyebrow movements emphasizing once more
how ridiculous the idea is. Later, Palacios denies that her “coming out” caused in her an
“uncontrollable desire to chase Girl Scouts” (Greetings 388). This fear of being chased or
hypnotized reflects a threatening feeling toward an identity defined in terms of sexual
orientation. Edward Said's idea about “Orientalism” can help us to understand
homophobia too. If the Western needs the Orient in order to define their own identity,
heterosexuals need homosexuals in order to define theirs. Homosexuality must be
presented as threatening and dangerous, so that the frontiers between both sexual
inclinations are broad and clear. Also, and coming back to Derrida's theories, in order to
have a positive pole a negative one must exist too. By creating those negative images
(some of them already mentioned, like the truck driver or the girl scouts chaser) the
positive connotations of the “dominant group” (Westerns for Said, heterosexuals here)
can be highlighted.

Recalling one of her Chicana conquests, Palacios talks about all the discussions
she and her “lover-to-be” had before she “finally lured her to my [Palacios'] bed”
(Greetings 383). One of the woman's main objections was that she had doubts regarding
“whether she was a consumer or a lesbian” (Greetings 383). Consumerism constantly
encourages people to buy things that are not necessary. A good commercial tactic is to
make consumers feel that they will not be “complete” until everything is tried before the
end of their lives. Consumerism permeates every aspect of a person’s life living these
days. That woman seems worried in case she is just a victim of consumerism looking for
one more experience. This is also a wrong referent because it starts off from the
assumption that being heterosexual is the normal thing and anything else is just an experiment.

The other topic that Palacios has to discuss with that Chicana before giving a step further in the relationship is the “Virgin Mary” (Greetings 383). As most Chicanos, that woman is probably Catholic and Catholicism is totally against homosexuality. This religion pictures homosexual people as evil, with “horns or fangs” (Greetings 388). Still, Palacios places both this vision and how she actually got “her training” (Greetings 372) into homosexuality in a Catholic school. Many writers have claimed how important Catholic figures such as Sor Juana20 were lesbians, because even though Catholicism places homosexuality as its negative pole, both traits (-being a Catholic and being a homosexual) can perfectly coexist. Palacios even talks about the Virgin Mary (Greetings 372) granting her a miracle that helped her see what she should do with her life and future. By presenting two supposed opposites and proving how they actually can get along, Palacios is deconstructing again.

Opposites are also presented regarding the term “lesbian” itself. The negative poles of the word have already been discussed. At the opposite end, accepting her homosexuality meant for Palacios the desire to “embrace” herself, “feel safe,” and “feel a sense of equality” (Greetings 388). Accepting her love and desire for women means also loving herself as a woman, especially after men's desires have been described as their wish to impose their “male power.” Heterosexuality implies the necessity of having a dominant agent and a passive one. On the contrary, homosexuality means “equality.” These positive images should question the negative and more commonly believed ones. Palacios' work shows the binary opposites regarding sexual inclinations already known,

20 Mexican playwright Rosario Castellanos already included Sor Juana as a character in El eterno femenino (1982). Mexican director, actor, playwright, performance artist, and social activist Jesusa Rodríguez has dedicated several plays to the same figure: Sor Juana en Almaloya (1995), Las horas de Belén, A Book of Hours (1999) and Sor Juana In Prison: A Virtual Pageant Play (translated by Diana Taylor and included in Holy Terrors).
but with a very different (and positive) picture. The dark and menacing view of lesbians is lightened by having “the other” giving her point of view.

In her essay “(Re)Mapping Mexicanidades: (Re)Locating Chicana Writings and Translation Politics,” Claire Joysmith looks at the reception of Chicana writings in Mexico. I would like to borrow the terms with which she addresses a Chicana identity (chicanidad) or a Mexican one (mexicanidad). Palacios asserts that her work is bicultural because she creates it “from a Chicana lesbian perspective” (Greetings 367). Her chicanidad must be reflected in her work as much as her “coming out” as a lesbian. There are basically two positions among Mexican immigrants in the US: complete adaptation and immersion in the dominant culture or, on the contrary, an attempt to keep their own cultural practices. Those who opt for the second option are looked upon (maybe those of the first one too) as funny. In order to deconstruct the term, Palacios needs to show both sides, and so she also makes fun of things related to Mexico. For instance, she asks her dad “why must every mariachi song end the same way?! Tan, Tan! (Greetings 371). The mariachi people of her story are quite hilarious themselves: her dad's name is Guadalupe and his two comadres are Lala and Trini. Palacios impersonates them singing “Cu cu ru cu cu Paloma” and the result is really amusing. They would have little Mexican parties “now and then” (Greetings 371) and this fulfills the expectations regarding how much Mexicans enjoy having parties. However, Palacios is probably giving this portrayal as a proof of how close her sexual orientation and her chicanidad are. As she says, “I am never one without the other” (Greetings 167). Her mariachi father is called Guadalupe but, at the same time, he cannot understand how his daughter is not married with a man. This is actually something very common in Mexico, where homosexuality occurs more often than what is recognized just because sexual orientations are distinguished according to active and passive roles. And so, Palacios' father might look like a woman and he
might even like men and still he will not be considered homosexual if he is the one to penetrate. As commented earlier, the other thing that the father is concerned about regarding Palacios is the fact that she is a vegetarian. It is interesting because in spite of the commotion, many of the typical products included in a Mexican meal do not contain meat. Palacios takes the relevance of food to an extreme when she uses it to create a love poem, describing how the woman she likes eats a “vegetarian burrito” (Greetings 380).

The Chicana eroticizes scenes with food. For instance, the meal she cooked for this woman is what, according to Palacios, “lured her to bed” (Greetings 383). The poem’s sounds are also easily associated with sex started during the meal:

Mmmmm
Mmm-Mmm
M-M-M
God I'm a good cook. (Greetings 383)

This is the positive side of the binary: something that seems so banal as food has actually the power to create poetry, to calm waters (like after Palacios' revelation to her parents) and to conquer people's hearts. Palacios is aware though of the injustices against her people and how they are not just considered funny, but those misconceptions are actually used to limit their opportunities. For instance, she realizes “how every great Latino actor got their start -- a foot in the back door” (Greetings 375) when the only role she would be given in television was that of the maid. Living in Mexico, Hadad has no need of defending the positive values of her mexicanidad. Her interest in this concept instead is about what is included and not included there. With her costumes, music and artistic persona, she displays all the typical elements of the traditional Mexican: Mexican hats, tequila, ranchera music, etc. This could be considered the widely recognized and positive side of the term. Hadad seems very fond of those elements. They help her to understand her country, but, at the same time, she is prepared to ridicule them due to their coercive power, especially in relation to women. On the other hand, she questions the
definition of *mexicanidad* by claiming many other elements that have been excluded from
the big picture probably because of the Catholic morality. This is the case of the cabaret
woman. Once more, a concept is deconstructed by closely examining the definition
largely accepted. Hadad´s interest in *mexicanidad* and Palacios´ in *chicanidad* make them
representative of their people or nation. In this sense, their work could be considered
national. However, Palacios´ nationalism depends not of one country but of two: the US
and Mexico. Because of that, she should be rather taken as a “transnationalist” artist. The
same can be said about such a Mexican woman as Astrid Hadad who, nevertheless, pleads
for a connection that crosses borders as her breaking through a wall in Central Park
symbolizes.

The importance of deconstruction lays in its ability to decentralize power. The
arguments that traditionally give power to the dominant members of society are not
discussed but deconstructed. For instance, Palacios has no need to deny the reason that
she is given regarding why women should not be comedians: “they [women] talk about
women things and their periods” (*Greetings* 374). As a good “Derrida's angel” she offers
the opposite binary, that is, male stand-up comedians and what they do instead of talking
about “women things and their periods:” “guys would get on stage, grab their dicks, talk
about shit, talk about farts, and the audience was on the floor!” (*Greetings* 374). This
negative presentation deconstructs men's arguments. If women should not get on stage
because they talk about women things, men do exactly the same, that is, they do and talk
about men things. Besides, as with the word vagina, there is nothing wrong with women's
periods. It is just one more taboo that must be fought because it impairs women and their
femininity.

It is not just men's arguments in their attempt to diminish women's equality that is
deconstructed. Men themselves and their masculinity are also deconstructed by means of
the impersonations carried out by both Palacios and Hadad on stage. Nevertheless, Hadad is more interested in women, particularly in Mexican women. The notion of the Mexican woman is defined by the binary opposition inside/outside the house. The woman who spends most of her time inside the house occupies the positive pole. The virginal girlfriend, the loving mother, or the good wife are typical women within this position. Contrary to men, a woman who has a public voice goes against social rules and cannot be considered a good woman anymore. Being public means being outside and this is something negative. It is basically equivalent to being a prostitute. What those two types of women share though is their mexicanidad. Curiously, it seems to be very ingrained in the Mexican mind, that the more a woman suffers, the more Mexican she is. Hadad’s interest in the notion of mexicanidad makes her interpret an important number of love songs where women suffer because of men. Still, they have to be strong about it. For instance, in “La tequilera” (“The Tequila Lady”), Hadad sings: “Como buena mexicana sufriré el dolor tranquila, al fin y al cabo mañana tendré un trago de tequila” (“As a good Mexican woman I will suffer my pain quietly, after all tomorrow I’ll drink some tequila”). I have already commented on how the cabaret artist ridicules this appraisal of suffering that could well be taken as masochistic by means of hyperbole. The song “¡Ay qué dolor vivir!” (¡Ay!) is a good example of that hyperbolic language with a comic twist at the end that increases the nonsense of so much suffering:

¡Ay qué dolor vivir!
Cuando se pierde el alma
¿Para qué revivirte en mi piel?
¿Para qué de desgarro quitarla?
Mejor perecer.
¡Ay se me dispara el alma!
Desde mi lecho mortal
Sólo el sensor de al cantar
Me deja la esperanza.
¡Ay qué dolor sin ti!
Cuando me empeña el alma,
Di por qué no me dejas seguir,
Para qué sin piedad me desangras
Si ya soy de ti.
Así me hace polvo el alma.
Sobre mi tumba fatal
Sólo el vampiro al volar
Me lleva a Transilvania.

Oh, how life hurts!
When a soul is lost
Why would I revive you again in my skin?
Why would I tear it away?
It's better to perish.
Oh, my soul fires away!
From my deathbed
Only my singing
Gives me some hope.
Oh, how it hurts without you!
When my soul is in hock.
Tell me why can't you let me go,
Why do you bleed me without pity
When I'm already yours.
My soul knocked down.
Above my mortal grave
Only the vampire flying
Takes me to Transylvania.

The woman inside the house must be submissive, as there are physical barriers limiting her. This is a closed body ruled by a patriarchal figure. God can be such a figure too when talking about a nun or a Virgin, as often appears in Hadad's work. Although in a religious instead of domestic environment, these types of women are still within the positive pole and, in fact, as its extreme representation of purity, a necessary quality to be at this side of the binary. Like Palacios, Hadad grew up in a Catholic environment and she explains how that influenced her work:

Yo fui educada en una familia religiosa. Yo hablo siempre de lo que a mí me preocupa, de lo que a mí me ha marcado en mi vida. Entonces, como vengo de una familia totalmente religiosa, pues todo esto influyó en mí. Aunque después tuve una liberación, una distancia para poder con ojo crítico leer esa influencia. Por eso es que saco temas religiosos también, porque crecí con todas esas imágenes. (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 159)

I grew up within a religious family. I always talk about what worries me, about what has left a mark on me during my life. Then, since I come
from a completely religious family, all this influenced me. Although later I went through liberation, some distance so that I could read with a critical eye that influence. That's why I also have religious topics, because I grew up with all those images.

An example is her show *La monja coronada* (1992), where she wants to relate all the women who took part of the Aztec religious services in Mexico with those nuns of the colonial period. According to Gastón Alzate, Hadad is attempting to relate silenced sections of society not just to give them a voice, but rather to create a space of reflection for contemporary women and the indigenous Mexicans (*Teatro de Cabaret* 54). The same critic explains the name of Hadad's band, Heavy Nopal, by describing her style with the same word, “heavy” (*Teatro de Cabaret* 55-56). This denomination is explained by the aggressiveness of her shows and supported by “el lenguaje de los políticos y de la Iglesia Católica”21 (Alzate, *Teatro de Cabaret* 56). The artist is aware of how direct and rude her messages are as can be seen when she says in an interview: “siempre me regañan porque me paso”22 (“La Entrevista: Astrid Hadad”). However, she is also able of explaining her training in that style. On the one hand, she studied political sciences and this language became part of her for “deformación profesional”23 (“La Entrevista: Astrid Hadad”). On the other hand, her Catholic upbringing does not merely justify having religion as one of her main topics as seen in the quote above but it also permeated in her style:

Tengo recuerdos tan fuertes del miedo que me podían producir. Por ejemplo, las imágenes de dolor en las iglesias, sobretodo cuando estaba semioscuro con las velas, y cómo te podían afectar tu infancia o también el misticismo que te pudieran provocar, o el éxtasis, porque muchas veces llegaba uno a fuerza de rezar. Lo que se hace ahora a través de la meditación oriental, nosotros lo lográbamos rezando el Rosario. Y esto lo digo en serio. (Alzate, “Expandiendo los límites” 159).

I have so strong memories of the fear they could make me feel. For instance, the images of pain at the churches, especially when it was semi-dark with

21 The language of politicians and the Catholic Church.

22 I'm always told off because I go too far.

23 Professional deformation.
candles, and how they could affect your childhood and also the mysticism that they could provoke in you, or the ecstasy, because many times you would experience ecstasy after so much praying. That which people do now through oriental meditation, we did by praying the Rosary. And I'm saying this seriously.

According to this quote, those moments of trance seen on stage owe much to how Catholicism impressed Hadad. Her shows are also defined as hysterical by Alzate (Teatro de Cabaret 47). “Hysteria” is defined as:

Diagnostic label applied to a state of mind, one of unmanageable fear or emotional excesses. The fear is often centered on a body part, most often on an imagined problem with that body part (disease is a common complaint). People who are "hysterical" often lose self-control due to the overwhelming fear. (Wikipedia).

As a medical condition, hysteria has commonly been related to women. Freud explained it as symbolic representations of a repressed unconscious event. However, Hadad blames her Catholic upbringing and the nonsense of politics for her hysteria.

An artist is neither a good wife or mother, nor a virgin. Hadad's own image as a cabaret woman or diva exemplifies the binary opposite to the good Mexican woman. Women as Reyes also belong to that negative pole. Reminding us of Palacios' hypnotic powers, Roselyn Costantino describes Hadad's dancing movements and “seductive Caribbean salsa rhythms” as trance-inducing (Holy Terrors 197). The female protagonist of “La mesera” (La Cuchilla), although looking naive, seduces the man who is telling us the story. She starts by innocently offering herself “yo estoy pa' servirle” (“I'm here to serve you”) forgetting later to bring his tacos because of the way he is looking at her, and to the question “¿Estás casada?” (“Are you married?”) she answers “Vivo sola” (“I live alone”). However, when he tries to leave the restaurant with her, she asks for money first. It is interesting that his point of view is given instead of hers. Women like these would not deserve any consideration, even when they die. This is the case of the bandolera in “Sobre una tumba, una rumba,” where the singer asks the gravedigger not to cry for her
because she was a bad woman. Hadad should not be believed to be seriously criticizing these women. As journalist Olga Harmony explains for La Jornada en Internet about the show La pecadora (1997), Hadad’s message is that “el pecado de la carne” (“the sin of flesh”) is not bad if compared with politicians' sins, which are mortal sins. In order to question the negativity created around the public woman, Hadad needs to make her audience see that there is nothing wrong with sexual pleasure, that this is not a bad thing but just one more coercive mechanism disguised under the banner of morality.

There would be no deconstruction if those two poles were not brought together. In Heavy Nopal “she's dressed in her beautiful Virgin skirt” but “her accessories and makeup evoke an image certainly not of the Virgin/Mother type but of a woman transgressively comfortable with her body and sexuality” (Holy Terrors 199). And the opposite is true, although she is considered a diva, her costume does not show her body but, actually, sometimes she is covered to the point that she cannot even move.

Whatever the concept to be deconstructed or the technique (intertextuality, “inter-iconography”) to be used, everything takes place on or through their bodies. Their bodies reflect their identity, how they see themselves. The beauty inside then must be reflected outside too. Because of that, these women care about presenting their bodies as desirable and sexy. “Derrida's Angels” should remind us of the sexy and strong girls in Hollywood's Charlie's Angels. This strengthens themselves in their rebellion against exterior forces that could try to define them. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan talks about how much, at least in a first stage, the construction of our own persona depends on the way others see us. It has been commented before the importance of the visual in Hadad's and Palacios’ show and also about their search for interaction with their audience. However, they never let the audience take control of what they construct on stage. If, as expressed in Butler's words, “the body which one ‘is’ is to some degree a body which
gains its sexed contours in part under specular and exteriorizing conditions” (Bodies that Matter 17), these women subvert any expectation by means of deconstruction or continuous change. At the same time, they show so much self-assurance and ease with their bodies that the outsiders cannot question them. They get this self-assurance by emphasizing the beauty of their bodies, their femininity and eroticism. There are very sexy pictures of Mónica Palacios, taken during her shows, commonly wearing black and short dresses with high heels. She performs erotic scenes like that tied to a chair and sitting “á la Sophia Loren” (Greetings 379) and “bikini contests” (Greetings 377) was one of the activities in which she got involved in order to reaffirm her identity after “coming out.” Astrid Hadad criticizes those skeletal and anorexic bodies so applauded and desired in her society (show at UCLA), praising her own sensuality both through her movements on stage and the protagonists of her songs. When analyzing the political situation of today, she claims the necessity of women in order to succeed in the necessary changes. Female beauty and the pleasure that it can offer are essential to the world. Traditionally, intelligent women have not been considered attractive. This idea is deconstructed by simply having these women on stage.

The importance that these artists give the body aligns them once more with performance instead of traditional theatre. As Alzate explains: “el performista trabaja su cuerpo a manera de texto”24 (Teatro de Cabaret 16). Also, in Butler's words, the performer does not just express because that would mean that there is a “preexisting identity” (Butler, Gender Trouble 141). Palacios and Hadad construct their own “body” as they perform so that nobody can define them but themselves. Alzate corroborates this when he says that “el performista asume su cuerpo como una distorsión en sí, es decir

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24 The performer works with his/her body as if it were a text.
como parte de una representación”25 (Teatro de Cabaret 16). A whole picture of a “complete Palacios” or a “complete Hadad” is never provided. Rather than that, several “distortions” represent specific angles. One can identify “the young Palacios when she was in the Catholic school,” “the married Palacios,” “the Don Juanita Palacios” etc. and the same can be said about Astrid Hadad: “Hadad la Tequilera,” “Hadad Kali,” “Hadad mistreated by men,”...

Alzate sees in those distortions the reason why the performer “exalta y celebra su cuerpo como una forma de conocimiento de su cultura y de su historia”26 (Teatro de Cabaret 17). This would take us back to the type of nationalism already explained regarding these two artists. Besides, and as stated at the beginning, the outermost intention of these women is to inscribe themselves in history. The problem is that, as Butler explains about French philosopher Foucault’s theories, “history must subject the body in order to create values and meanings” (Gender Trouble 130) and neither Hadad nor Palacios will allow that. For that reason, they contradict Foucault's assumption that history destroys “[F]orces and impulses with multiple directionalities” (Gender Trouble 130), since by means of performance they inscribe themselves in history and at the same time provide a multiple and hybrid account, the one represented in their bodies.

Technically, they contradict the traditional qualities found in history too. Even though there seems to be some sort of chronological attempt in Palacios, because she is reviewing her whole life, she actually jumps back and forth in time. Sometimes it is even hard to determine if she is talking about the same person. For instance, one moment she talks about being tired of commitments and the next one she talks about having gotten married. Her different publications are assemblages of multiple pieces, and so, Greetings from a Queer Señorita is a combination of her “Latin Lezbo Comic” and “Confessions ...

25 The performer assumes his/her body as a distortion itself, that is, as a part of the presentation.
26 Praises and celebrates his/her body as a form of knowledge of his/her culture and history.
A Sexplosion of Tantalizing Tales.” It is even easier to see the disruption of linearity so necessary for history in Hadad’s show. Her stories are multiple and even though there seems to be a topic in common (for example, her show ¡Oh, diosas! is about different goddesses), chronological time is never respected.

As representative of the oppressed, and so, of those who have never been given a voice in history, Hadad and Palacios succeed in giving their “her-tory” without completely conforming to the rules of their dominant culture. Along the discussion of these writers, I have commented on Sandoval’s technologies of the oppressed: “sign-reading,” “deconstruction,” “meta-idologizing,” and “democratics.” It would have been very difficult to organize this essay in terms of those techniques because these women also make use of Sandoval's fifth technique, still not mentioned here. This is called “differential movement” (Sandoval 376) and consists of constantly changing, re-aligning and re-organizing themselves and their works in one of the previous techniques. The oppressed's main goal is not to be oppressed anymore. Because of that, it is important to make it as difficult as possible for their dominant culture to control them. This also reflects their concern for creativity and continuous development of their art.
CONCLUSION

The relationship established with this essay between Mónica Palacios and Astrid Hadad does not entail any direct influence between both artists. Actually, Mónica Palacios and Astrid Hadad might have not even heard about each other. The diachronic approach of the first chapter provides the necessary common context in order to justify any comparative study. The traditions described that influenced both Palacios and Hadad mark several points of connection between the two of them. The second chapter proves that Hadad and Palacios coincide in similar strategies. They both use performance, intertextuality, recycling, “inter-iconography,” and deconstruction. By succeeding in establishing a connection between a Mexican and a Chicana writer, this study aims at three main goals. First, it supports feminists’ recent calls for a stronger connection and solidarity among women from different countries. Postcolonial and feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty defend this need and analyzes its difficulties in her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Globalization creates the perfect arena for practice of this solidarity. Second, performance becomes the most adequate medium for these women in order to include their voices in history. Performance is very closely connected to the position that Hadad and Palacios occupy within their societies, namely, the liminal (also referred to in this essay as the in-between, the dissident, or the oppressed). Finally, I agree with critic Juan Poblete’s view of Latino and Latin American studies as complementary. The comparison of Palacios’ and Hadad’s works helps us to understand them and their conceptions of art better.


Spitta, Silvia. “Transculturalism, the Caribbean, and the Cuban-American Imaginary.”

