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El Drag Guadalupista: Confronting Hegemony in Mexican and Chicana Feminist and Queer Performance[1]

Rachel Combs-Gonzalez

Abstract

This article analyzes *La Frontera* (the border separating the US from Mexico) as a *performance* by studying the relationship between sexuality and politics. Specifically, it compares heterosexual hegemony with political hegemony, and demonstrates how both sexuality and politics engage in a navigation of power through performance by proposing the term *el drag guadalupista*. An analysis of a virgin-whore complex present in contemporary Mexican and Chicano society, made apparent by the roles of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* in the creation of Mexican and Chicano national identity, will show how the visual representations of the Virgin created by the artists Alma López, Alex Donis, and Jim Ru challenge both the heterosexual hegemony within *Mexicanidad*, *Chicanidad*, and *Latinidad*, *and* the political and cultural power of the United States by means of representing, and *re*-presenting, the sexuality of *La Virgen*.

Keywords

Border, Chicano, hegemony, sexuality, queer studies

A legacy of inequality, racism, and economic exploitation, implemented by the United States in its interactions with Mexico began when the English-speaking citizens of Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836. The ensuing war resulted in Mexico losing nearly half of its territory, including parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado,

1 *El drag guadalupista* is a concept that conveys the performance of drag via the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. In their book *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development* (2006), Daniel C. Levy, Kathleen Bruhn, and Emilio Zebadúa discuss the impact of the Mexican-American War and its influence on future relations between the two neighboring countries:

> It [the Mexican-American War] marks the first but not the last episode that would bring many Mexicans to judge their neighbor and arrive at a sad conclusion: a country's internal democracy is no guarantee of democratic or fair behavior in foreign policy (182).

This war — also known as "La Intervención estadounidense a México," or "The United States Intervention to Mexico" — marks two turning points in the history of US-Mexico relations. Firstly, the Mexican nation-state shifted from being the colonial subject of Spain to the neocolonial subject of the United States. As a result, the Mexican citizens living in territories lost to the United States became subjects of the American nation-state without becoming full participants of the "internal democracy" that it supposedly exercised. Secondly, a trend of US interventionist policies with Latin America began with this southward shift of *La Frontera* (The Border), signaling the beginning of US political hegemony in the Americas. The subsequent US acquisition of Puerto Rico and Cuba during the Spanish-American War of 1898, its occupation of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and its interventions in several Central and South American countries in the twentieth century all attests to an aggressive foreign policy geared toward establishing and protecting US political and economic interests. For the Mexican-American population, the lack of guaranteed democratic behavior in US foreign policy was extended to include them; often treated as second-class citizens, or even as non-citizens, Mexican-Americans today still face many obstacles to accessing such "internal democracy" because of systemic racism and cultural prejudice.

The connection between political borders and cultural borders is particularly palpable for the populations of former Mexican citizens now living in the United States who came to be known as Chicanos. In her article "La Llorona, la Malinche y la mujer chicana de hoy. Cuando ceda el llanto"/'La Llorona, La Malinche and the Chicana Woman of Today. When the Weeping Stops' (2007), Carmen Melchor Íñiguez studies *La*

Frontera not only as a political border, but also as "*un terreno de difusos linderos*" [a land of vague boundaries] that must be explored by the Chicano subject, particularly the Chicana woman (154).[2] Focusing on the myth of La Llorona, an archetypal Mexican figure that dates back to the time of the Spanish conquest, the author argues that the Chicana woman "*representa y personifica una realidad cambiante, cruzando esta frontera no solamente física, sino cultural, sociológica y emocionalmente*" [represents and personifies a changing reality, crossing not only the physical border, but the cultural, sociological and emotional borders as well] (155). Here we see the interconnectedness of culture, national identity, gender, and sexuality because the Chicana is presented as the embodiment of border-crossing. The Chicana woman, particularly the Chicana lesbian, exists within the intersectionality of race, socio-economic class, gender, and sexuality as a minority subject in the US. Such intersectionality is a double-edged sword that has the potential to both oppress her and provide her with the necessary tools to combat oppression. By applying the concept of performance to our understanding of the intersectionality of identity, we can better understand how Chicana women and other minority groups can challenge hierarchical systems of political power and oppressive cultural norms.

This article analyzes *La Frontera* as a *performance* by studying the relationship between sexuality and politics. Specifically, it compares heterosexual hegemony with political hegemony, and demonstrates how both sexuality and politics engage in a navigation of power through performance by proposing the term *el drag guadalupista*. An analysis of a virgin-whore complex present in contemporary Mexican and Chicano society, made apparent by the roles of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* in the creation of Mexican and Chicano national identity, will show how the visual representations of the Virgin created by the artists Alma López, Alex Donis, and Jim Ru challenge both the heterosexual hegemony within *Mexicanidad*, *Chicanidad*, and *Latinidad*, *and* the political and cultural power of the United States by means of representing, and *re*-presenting, the sexuality of *La Virgen*. Taking my cues from Ramón H. Rivera-Servera's *Performing Queer Latinidad* (2012) and Laura G. Gutiérrez's *Performing Mexicanidad* (2010), I am defining *Mexicanidad*, *Chicanidad*, and *Latinidad* as performative modalities of ethnic, nationalist, and popular cultural representations that shape notions of femininity, masculinity, and

2 All translations from Spanish to English that appear in this article are mine.

national identity. As artists, López, Donis, and Ru use the medium of visual art to engage their audience in the crossing of multiple *fronteras* — national borders, cultural borders, and gendered borders — and create a site for queer *Mexicanidad*, *Chicanidad*, and *Latinidad*.

The Queer World-Making Possibilities of *El Drag Guadalupista*

In her book *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative* (2008), Gill Jagger reviews Butler's theories of performativity and studies how heterosexual regimes maintain their hegemonic positions, how they function through cultural symbols and language, and how they dichotomize and police the gendered and sexual identities of male/female within a society. Butler focuses on how language and the symbolic order of basing the category of woman in the materiality of bodies have become heterosexualizing forces that produce the "duality of bodies that sustains reproductive heterosexuality as a compulsory order" (6).[3] Following this analysis of "heterosexualizing forces," the concept of drag becomes a parody, a double performance that places doubt on the presumed essential nature and omnipotence of heteronormativity (which is a performance in and of itself). By attributing a "female" sexual and gendered identity to a "male" biological body, or vice versa, drag demonstrates how these identities are performances and that the distribution of these identities to whichever physical body does not follow an essentialist, compulsory order. *El drag guadalupista* therefore becomes the attribution of a female, lesbian sexual identity to the ubiquitous image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. The very name of the image — *La Virgen* — alludes to the desexualization imposed upon it by heterosexual regimes, such as the Roman Catholic Church, as part of the virgin-whore complex within Mexican and Chicano societies.

By appropriating a sexual identity and agency to the iconic image, or better said, by resexualizing *La Virgen*, the artists discussed within this study perform drag on the image known, adored, and utilized by people living on both sides of the US-Mexico border. At the level of the study of heteronormativity, *el drag guadalupista* critiques heterosexual regimes, the binary societal structures of gender and sexual identity, and exemplifies the possible failure of heterosexual hegemony. At the transnational level,

3 For more information on the nature of heteronormativity, please refer to "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" by Adrienne Rich in *Signs* 5.4 (1980): 631-660.

el drag guadalupista critiques the regimes of the political hegemony of the United States. Consequently, the borders between the virgin and the whore, heterosexual identity and homosexual identity, the performance of the masculine and the feminine, and *La Frontera* between Mexico and the United States are social constructions and performances of a dichotomous ideological system that assumes a dominant, hegemonic, and omnipotent role in a multifarious and dynamic world. In her classic Chicana feminist work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (originally published in 1987), Gloria Anzaldúa calls the border between the US and Mexico "*una herida abierta*" [an open wound] created by the friction between the two neighboring countries; the constant bleeding and mixing of blood forms a third country, what Anzaldúa calls "a border culture" (25). This border culture, like *el drag guadalupista*, challenges the binary societal structures of identity by providing a third option for performing and representing identity that is both critical and empowering.

In his groundbreaking book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), José Esteban Muñoz began to fill a gap within the field of queer theory that Muñoz argued had continued to "treat race as an addendum" (11). Over ten years later, two books were published that not only are essential in the understanding of the queer world-making possibilities of *el drag guadalupista*, they also make race and national identity the central focuses of their queer studies: *Performing Mexicanidad: Vendidas y Cabareteras on the Transnational Stage* (2010) by Laura G. Gutiérrez and *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (2012) by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera. Both works make reference to Muñoz's theory of "disidentification" and show how, as Gutiérrez states in her introduction, queer artists of color "are not only challenging head-on heterosexist and nationalist discourses [...] but also participating in the construction of a queer world-making project" (19). Anzaldúa was participating in a queer world-making project when she published *Borderlands/La Frontera* nearly twelve years before Muñoz would publish *Disidentifications*, yet her construction of a queer border cultural is a perfect example of "disidentification." She rejected heterosexist and nationalist discourses on both sides of the US-Mexico border in order to create a political and critical position from which to defend herself as a Chicana lesbian.

Disidentification, as a means of creating an identity for the minority subject who suffers a double or triple marginality (e.g. the queer subject

of color within the context of heternormativity and white normativity in the United States), allows for the creation of an alternative identity for the minority subject within the margins through the use of performance. Performance, as Rivera-Servera elaborates in *Performing Queer Latinidad*, offers minority subjects a site to make a collective home based on shared experiences where they can safely "devise strategies of being and being together" (29).

Thus the queer minority subject neither identifies nor counter-identifies with hegemonic ideologies and identities, and instead disidentifies through the use of performance in order to create a new, queer space and the possibility of community. The artists discussed within this study create their own queer Latino and Chicano spaces through the use of *el drag guadalupista* in their art. In the following sections we will see how, by performing a queer and female sexual identity on the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Alma López and Alex Donis disidentify with heteronormative ideologies and thereby participate in a queer, minority world-making project. *El drag guadalupista* therefore becomes a tool for this project, which allows López and Donis to make their political and social critique by showing what was previously *unshowable*: a Virgin of Guadalupe who expresses sexual desire and actively participates in her sexuality.

Dichotomous Discourses of Mexican and Chicana Sexuality

It is very important to note that the two representational images of the virgin-whore complex, as it exists in Mexican and Chicano culture, have their roots firmly planted in the history of Spanish colonialism. The virgin-whore complex comes from dichotomous discourses within a society that represent female sexuality as one of two heteronormative extremes that aid in the policing of female sexuality: a woman is either virginal and pure, or she is the hyper-sexual and dangerous whore. As the constructions of female sexuality and gender roles from the indigenous populations collided with those of the invading Spanish forces, two iconic images were produced that would have a lasting impact on how Mexican and Chicana female sexuality and gendered identity are contrived, reproduced, policed, negotiated with, and challenged on the current transnational stage. In the book *The Archaeology of Colonialism: Intimate Encounters and Sexual Effects* (2012), the editors Barbara L. Voss and Eleanor Conlin Casella have

compiled a collection of essays studying the connection between sexual politics, imperialism, and recent archaeological research. In the second chapter of the work, "Sexual Effects: Postcolonial and Queer Perspectives on the Archaeology of Sexuality and Empire," Voss lays the theoretical foundations for the collection that will prove to be useful in understanding why the cultural representations of *La Malinche/Chingada* and *La Virgen* originate in colonial discourse of the Spanish Empire and how this discourse later permeated the formation of the independent, Mexican nation-state and national identity.[4]

The following definitions provided by Voss can be used to better understand how this clash between indigenous gender roles and concepts of sexuality with those of the Spanish Empire would become integral components in the creation of the Mexican nation-state and national identity:

> Imperialism can be taken broadly to refer to the ideologies and practices associated with the imposition of this [the incoming Empire] external power. Empire generally involves an *expansion* of the spatial scale of governance (territorial, political, economic, religious, or cultural) and an *intensification* of governance to include heightened surveillance and regulation of bodies, relationships, transactions, and movements [...] Colonialism most commonly refers to imperial strategies that involve the direct domination by one polity over a population in its own home territory (13-14).

The Spanish Empire, as it existed between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, included the territorial, political, economic, religious, and cultural expansion of Iberian governance and social supremacy. Ideologies influenced by the power of the Roman Catholic Church within the empire system utilized the female indigenous body in order to gain and defend their hegemonic position in the New World, therefore creating the image of *La*

4 "La Chingada" comes from the culturally specific Mexican-Spanish verb "chingar" which roughly translates as "to violently violate or humiliate." "La Chingada" therefore means "The Violated One."

Virgen de Guadalupe. These ideologies did not disappear with the gaining of independence; rather, they were placed under the protection of the fledgling Mexican state. Post-independence Mexican nationalist discourse that critiqued Spanish imperialism also used the female indigenous body to challenge the former hegemony of Spanish colonialism, therefore creating the image and discourse of *La Malinche/Chingada*.

As the governance and surveillance of female Mexican and Chicana sexuality shifted from being under the jurisdiction of the Spanish colonial system to that of the Mexican nation-state, *La Virgen* and *La Chingada* became the two co-existing cultural representations of the virgin-whore complex within Mexican and Chicano societies. In her article "*Imágenes de la Malinche en el teatro mexicano contemporáneo*" [Images of *La Malinche* in Contemporary Mexican Theater] (2011) Beatriz Aracil Varón analyzes the dualistic roles of *La Virgen* and *La Malinche* in the creation of the Mexican nation-state. According to Aracil Varón, as Mexico gained independence, the myth of La Malinche served as a juxtaposition to the Virgin of Guadalupe; Mexicans, especially Mexican women, were supposed to identify themselves with the Virgin-Mother while repudiating La Malinche, the whore and traitor (97). The Virgin Mary, as represented by *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, fulfills the patriarchal role assigned to her as the mother of Jesus and of the nation, while also being bereft of any sense of female sexuality or sexual agency. She serves as the heteronormative standard by which all Mexican and Chicana women are compared. On the other hand, Doña Marina, also known as Malintzín, or Malinali, was to become the legend of *La Malinche*, the lover and translator of Hernán Cortés and betrayer of the indigenous peoples of colonial Mexico. The hypersexuality implicated on the body of Malintzín is the source of this betrayal, just as the "purity," or the supposed lack of sexuality, of the Virgin's body is the source and symbol of pride in Mexican and Chicano identity within the framework of hegemonic, heteronormative discourse.

Postcolonial and Chicana feminist scholarship have critiqued the virgin-whore complex of Mexican and Chicano societies, as represented by *La Chingada* and *La Virgen*, while also denouncing the imposition of Iberian beliefs, culture, racial hierarchies, political systems, and sexual and economic exploitation on the indigenous peoples of the Americas both during and after the colonial period. Two such examples of Chicana feminist scholarship are Anzaldúas *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Ana

Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994). Castillo's work is particularly interesting in relation to the virgin-whore complex because her proposed political philosophy, *Xicanisma*, combines female sexuality and indigenous political consciousness in order to promote activism and empowerment for Chicana women. This scholarship therefore questions History (as propagated by "official" nationalist discourse) in order to examine the legacy of colonialism and its structures within a postmodernist and poststructuralist critical framework. However, it is important to remember that we should not view the colonial interactions between the colonizers and the colonized as a one-way imposition of power, such as the dominance of Spanish imperialism, which denies the agency practiced by the colonized. For example, in the chapter entitled "El Teatro Campesino and the Mexican Popular Performance Tradition" of her book, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (1994), Yolanda Broyles-González speaks of the "indianization of the Mexican Catholic Church" as evidence of the agency used by the Aztec peoples. Broyles-González cites Aztec oral traditions that celebrate Guadalupe's inclusion into Catholicism as a "great historical triumph for the indigenous population of the Americas" (64). This celebration of the indigenous populations' influence in Mexican Catholicism has, according the Broyles-González, largely been ignored by Mexican scholars and popular discourse that continues to view the Virgin of Guadalupe as nothing but a tool of conversion of the indigenous populations.

Similarly, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa discusses the indigenous roots of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and the agency Tonantsi/Guadalupe exercised to combat colonial forces. Anzaldúa first recognizes the desexualization of the Aztec goddess at the hands of the colonial Spanish Catholic missions: "After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continued to split *Tonantsi/Guadalupe*. They desexed Guadalupe, taking *Coatlalopeuh*, the serpent/sexuality, out of her" (49). Later in the text, Anzaldúa reaffirms Guadalupe's actions in undermining and combating "the Spaniards and their Church." Guadalupe, then, became the spiritual, political, and psychological symbol for the oppressed indigenous populations and even helps them to carry the burdens of psychological and physical devastation caused by the Spanish Conquest. For both Chicanos and Mexicans, *Guadalupe* is "the symbol of our rebellion against the rich, upper and middleclass; against their subjugation of the poor and the *indio* [indian]" (52).

La Virgen de Guadalupe is therefore an important symbol not only for Mexican and Chicano national identity, but also for Chicana feminists and lesbians in their critique of the patriarchal legacy of Spanish colonialism. Such a critique reclaims the image of *La Virgen* for the purpose of decrying the virgin-whore dichotomy and discourse of *La Chingada-La Virgen* and its role as a policing force for heterosexual hegemony. Both Anzaldúa and Ana Castillo emphasize the importance of female sexuality in this critique and utilize female sexuality as a necessary tool in their queer world-making projects. The sexuality of the Virgin of Guadalupe therefore becomes an integral part of the act of reclaiming her and using her image to break the virgin-whore dichotomy.

This reclaiming of the Virgin of Guadalupe and critique of popular and national *guadalupismo* (the veneration and representation of the Virgin in popular culture and nationalistic discourse) has its counterpart in the re-evaluation of the figure of *La Malinche*. Like all cultural icons — whose identities and representations are never static — *La Malinche* has performed several roles in the story of the Mexican nation-state. Even while still alive, she underwent three name changes that reflect this constant process of creating and reinventing herself, as well as being created and reinvented by others: she was born as *Malintzin* in Náhuatl; assumed the Christian name, *doña Marina*, upon being baptized; and later, through mispronunciation, she came to be known as *Malinche*. Sold to Mayan merchants after the death of her father, *La Malinche* went from being the daughter of chiefs to a slave and eventually was sold to Jerónimo de Aguilar, and later, Hernán Cortés, to work as their translator. In 1522, she gave birth to Cortés's son, Martín, and in 1524 Cortés gave her to his lieutenant, Juan Jaramillo, as a new bride (Aracil Varón 93-95). The exact dates and places of her birth and death are still unknown.

Perhaps the most well-known and important work that first re-evaluated the role of *La Malinche* in the creation of Mexican national identity is Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad/The Labyrinth of Solitude* (originally published in 1950). In it, Paz not only reaffirms the virgin-whore complex by explicating the significance of *La Malinche's* fourth name change that would rename her as *La Chingada*, he also demonstrates how she is also a mother figure for the nation for she and Cortés produced a mestizo son. Paz writes: "*Por contraposición a Guadalupe, que es la Madre virgen, la Chingada es la Madre violada*" [As a comparison to Guadalupe,

the virgin Mother, *la Chingada* is the raped Mother] (94). *La Chingada/La Malinche* became the representative figure of the indigenous women who were fascinated by, seduced, or raped by the Spanish and were labeled as traitors. As Aracil Varón demonstrates in her analysis of Mexican theatrical works from the mid-twentieth century, such as Celestino Gorostiza's *La Malinche* (1958), this trend of re-evaluating *La Malinche* led to new artistic representations that transformed her from hypersexualized traitor to the mother of the *Mestiza* race. By the close of the twentieth century, theatrical representations of *La Malinche* attempted to move beyond the duality of *La Virgen-La Malinche*; one example, *La Malinche* (1998) by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, is highlighted by Aracil Varón for its attempt to offer the audience "*una visión actual de la Malinche, se ancla en el presente para hacerla testigo y cómplice de la realidad política y social concreta de su país*" [a current vision of La Malinche which anchors itself in the present in order to make her [La Malinche] a witness and accomplice in the concrete political and social reality of his [the author's] country] (109). As Aracil Varón's analysis, Anzadlúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Ana Castillo's political philosophy of *Xicanisma* demonstrate, *La Malinche* and the Virgin of Guadalupe are iconic figures in Chicano and Mexican popular culture and national identity that can be used either for female sexual and political suppression, or for the empowerment and liberation of Mexican and Chicana women. Through the power of performance, *La Malinche and La Virgen* are transformed and the presumed unchanging nature of these icons as representatives of female sexual norms is broken. As will become evident in the following section, artistic representations of the Virgin of Guadalupe will cross the boundaries of these norms and elucidate a female sexuality that is not dependent upon the presence of masculinity or heteropatriarchal norms.

El Drag Guadalupista

As evidenced in the previous section, the image of *La Virgen* performs many roles for various discourses within Mexican and Chicano culture and subcultures. She is a virgin, a mother, and an indigenous woman who symbolizes the birth of the Mexican nation and the culmination of religious, genetic, and social *mestizaje* (the mixing of the Spanish and indigenous populations in the New World). Additionally, the image is employed and

manipulated for the purposes of making queer or feminist critique by groups such as Mexican and Chicana feminists, lesbians, and other sexual minorities. Such groups seek to evaluate the traditional image of *La Virgen* and show how she has been used as a symbol for heterosexual hegemony to engender patriarchal values regarding female and non-heterosexual sexuality and sexual agency. By reconfiguring, manipulating, and reinterpreting the traditional image itself, Mexican and Chicana artists have revealed the performative nature of this image, and one such performance is demonstrated by *el drag guadalupista*; it can be said, therefore, that these artists utilize *el drag guadalupista* in order to resexualize *La Virgen*. In the case of Alma López, this process of resexualization does not imply returning an essentialist sense of female sexuality to the image, but rather aims to represent the artist's female agency and non-heterosexual identity, therefore affronting the heterosexual and hegemonic use of *La Virgen* as a symbol of heteronormativity and female passivity.

In the first chapter of *Performing Mexicanidad*, entitled "Sexing Guadalupe in Transnational Double Crossings," Gutiérrez analyzes various manifestations of *el drag guadalupista* — including the film *El crimen del Padre Amaro/The Crime of Father Amaro* (Carlos Carrera 2002), an interpretation of *La Virgen* created by the artist Rolando de la Rosa in 1987 as part of his exhibition at the Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas/National Hall of Plastic Arts, and three digital prints produced by Alma López — as well as the religious and (trans)national backlash that each of these examples received. The first digital print, called *Lupe & Sirena in Love* (1999),[5] was featured as the cover of *LesVoz* in 2004, a lesbian and feminist magazine printed in Mexico (61). The work depicts a mimicked image of the traditional Virgin of Guadalupe embracing and caressing another icon from Mexican and Chicano culture: *La Sirena* of the popular card game called *lotería*. In *Encuentro* (2000),[6] López shows the Virgin and *La Sirena* reaching out toward one another, again depicting a lesbian sexual desire in both icons.

5 Image as found on: Cherry, Kittredge. "Queer Lady of Guadalupe: Artists Re-Imagine an Icon." Web log post. *Jesus in Love Blog: A Place for LGBTQ Spirituality and the Arts. Home of the Gay Jesus and Queer Saints. Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit. Open to All.* Blogspot, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

6 Image as found on: Cherry, Kittredge. "Queer Lady of Guadalupe: Artists Re-Imagine an Icon." Web log post. *Jesus in Love Blog: A Place for LGBTQ Spirituality and the Arts. Home of the Gay Jesus and Queer Saints. Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit. Open to All.* Blogspot, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

Figure 1: *Lupe & Sirena in Love* (1999), digital print

Figure 2: *Encuentro* (2000), digital print

The digital print that received the most attention however, was *Our Lady*, created in 1999.[7] In *Our Lady*, López replaces the traditional body of the Virgin with that of a Chicana woman whose breasts and vaginal area are covered with roses. She stands with her hands on her hips while wearing a mantle and being uplifted by an angel with butterfly wings and exposed breasts. The near-nudity of *Our Lady*, along with the abundance of lesbian symbols (the roses, butterfly wings, and angel), added to the defiance of the Chicana female figure standing in for the Virgin of Guadalupe. The hostility and criticism López received was spearheaded by the Catholic Church in New Mexico because of the inclusion of *Our Lady* in the exhibition entitled *Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology* in 2001, at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan stated: "Instead of showing her as the innocent Mother of Jesus, she is shown as a tart or a street woman, not the Mother of God!" (Sheehan qtd. in Gutiérrez, 56).

7 Image as found on: Cherry, Kittredge. "Queer Lady of Guadalupe: Artists Re-Imagine an Icon." Web log post. *Jesus in Love Blog: A Place for LGBTQ Spirituality and the Arts. Home of the Gay Jesus and Queer Saints. Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit. Open to All.* Blogspot, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

Figure 3: *Our Lady* (1999), digital print

The archbishop's statement provides a starting point for a multilevel analysis of the importance of *Our Lady* as an example of *el drag guadalupista*. At a superficial level, it is evident that the lesbian sexual identity López depicted in *Our Lady* is seen as a threat to patriarchal and heterosexist values supported by heterosexual regimes, such as the ideologies of the Roman Catholic Church and its connections with Chicano populations in the United States, the Mexican nation-state, and national identity. At a deeper level, the archbishop's comments reflect and support the virgin-whore complex; the artist is vilified for depicting the "innocent" Virgin Mary as a "street woman." The patriarchal values of female passivity, lack of sexual agency or experience, and motherhood are juxtaposed with patriarchal fears of the prostitute, a representative of excessive and dangerous female sexuality. In reaction to the controversy generated by *Our Lady*, López collaborated with her partner, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and published *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* in 2011. In the book, López and Gaspar de Alba analyze the controversy caused by the digital print, which also sparked death threats, violent protests, and the removal of the work from the exhibit.

Figure 4: *Abdullah and Sergeant Adams* (2003), ink and gouache on board

Figure 5: *Officer Moreno & Joker* (2001), oil and enamel on plexiglas

The Los Angeles-based artist, Alex Donis, was invited to create the cover image for the special issue of the *Theatre Journal*, entitled "Dance," in 2003. The cover image was the painting *Abdullah and Sergeant Adams*[8], which was part of Donis' series entitled *Pas de deux*; in the "Artist Statement" that appears at the beginning of the issue, Donis explains that he became interested in using dance as a metaphor to "understand — and somehow erase — hatred" (584). This was not the first time Donis had used dance as a metaphor in his artistic creations. In the fall of 2001, his former employer, the Watts Towers Arts Center of Los Angeles, commissioned Donis to exhibit his work during the re-opening of the Towers. Donis installed the exhibit *War*, a series of 14 paintings that depict Los Angeles Police Department officers dancing with male gang members.[9] Four days before the opening reception of his work, however, the director of the Towers, Mark Greenfield, took down the paintings without the artist's knowledge or consent due to community protests and threats of violence (Meyer, 581-582).

The painting *Mary Magdalene and Virgen de Guadalupe* was part of Donis' series,[10] *My Cathedral*, and was first exhibited in 1997 at the Galería de la Raza in San Francisco. The plexiglas and paper panels featured

8 Image as found on: Donis, Alex. *Alex Donis*. N.p., 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

9 Image as found on: Westcott, Gloria. "War Press Release." *Alex Donis*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2001. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

10 Image as found on: Cherry, Kittredge. "Queer Lady of Guadalupe: Artists Re-Imagine an Icon." Web log post. *Jesus in Love Blog: A Place for LGBTQ Spirituality and the Arts. Home of the Gay Jesus and Queer Saints. Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit. Open to All.* Blogspot, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

Figure 6: *Mary Magdalene and Virgen de Guadalupe* (1997), pastel on paper

historical figures kissing each other in same-sex pairs, and Donis made a point to pair each figure with one who represented an opposing view point. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. was shown kissing a member of the Klu Klux Klan. Much like the *War* exhibition of 2001, the artist's works were labeled as controversial and two paintings — one depicting Jesus Christ with Lord Rama, and another of Ernesto "Che" Guevara with Hugo Chávez — were even destroyed by vandalism and totaled in over $10,000 in damages (Meyer 581).

Bob Armstrong, writer for *Progressive* magazine, quoted Donis in the article "Kissing Icons;" Donis defended his work, arguing that he was attempting to "draw conclusions between art and faith. In my fantasy, these figures are martyrs who do battle for my cause" (16). The image of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin of Guadalupe kissing each other is not only an example of *el drag guadalupista*; like López's *Our Lady*, these images cross the barrier between the virgin and the whore, and the sacred and the profane, in order to construct new sites of identification. These sites are created through the process of disidentification; through *el drag guadalupista*, the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe rejects the virgin-whore complex by utilizing elements from both extremes of the complex in order to challenge the heteropatriarchal norms it propagates, as well as provide a new site for queer Chicana/o and Latina/o identification.

As Gutiérrez states in *Performing Mexicanidad*, artists such as Alma López and Alex Donis create their own "Queer Mother for the Transnation"

(53). By combining the "innocent Virgin Mother" with queer sexuality (that supposedly transforms her into a "street woman"), López and Donis create a new Queer Mother and martyr with whom they can identify, venerate, and utilize for their causes. By claiming that these new representations of *La Virgen* provide a new mother for the "transnation," Gutiérrez is pointing to the transnational nature of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Alex Donis defines himself by claiming a "tri-cultural identity;" he is pop, queer, and Latino.[11] As a Latino of Guatemalan descent living in Los Angeles, his inclusion of the Virgin of Guadalupe in his art demonstrates the transnational status of the originally Mexican and Chicano icon. The prefix "trans-" also alludes to movement and within the context of *el drag guadalupista*, it alludes to the multidirectional movement of *La Virgen* across the border of heteronormativity and homosexual agency and representation, as well as the political and nationalistic division between Mexico and the United States.

Confronting Heterosexual and Political Hegemony

In his study "The 2006 *Mega Marchas* in Greater Los Angeles: Counter-hegemonic moment and the future of *El Migrante* Struggle" (2009), Alfonso Gonzales employs Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to demonstrate how "the Latino Historic Bloc was capable of defeating a particular legislative proposal in H.R. 4437, but in the long run, failed to out maneuver the hegemony of anti-migrant forces" (34). Gonzales therefore uses the definition of hegemony and its focus on political power — "in which one group has achieved cultural, moral, and ideological leadership" over subordinate groups—in order to analyze the interactions between, and strategies used by, both sides of the immigration debate resulting from laws proposed in 2006, such as H.R. 4437 (Gramsci qtd. in Gonzales, 32). Gonzales' study serves as a starting point for a discussion of the relationship between heterosexual and political hegemony, and how *el drag guadalupista* reveals not only the performativity of heteronormativity, but also the performativity of the nation-state.

As a counter-hegemonic movement, the 2006 *Mega Marchas* not only protested against proposed anti-migrant legislation within the United States, it also shed light on xenophobic and homogenous notions of American national identity. Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

11 Alex Donis provides this definition of himself on his homepage: http://www.alexdonis.com/

critique the concept of the nation-state in their dialogue, *Who Sings the Nation-State?: Language, Politics, Belonging* (2007). In her discussion of Hannah Arendt, Butler explains how the nation-state both includes and excludes certain groups of people according to its definition of national identity and who fits this definition. The "stateless" then exist outside the jurisdiction of politics within the nation-state:

> the stateless are not just stripped of status but accorded a status [of statelessness] and prepared for their dispossession and displacement […] Arendt argues that the nation-state, as a form, that is, as a state formation, is bound up, as if structurally, with the recurrent expulsion of national minorities. In other words, the nation-state assumes that the nation expresses a certain national identity, is founded through the concerted consensus of a nation, and that a certain correspondence exists between the state and the nation (15, 30).

In the case of the 2006 *Mega Marchas*, the Latin American immigrant symbolically became "the stateless" according to the hegemonic discourse concerning American national identity and who has the "right" to claim that identity. The Latin American immigrant, as a minority subject, is faced with disenfranchisement and the possibility of both physical and metaphorical expulsion from the United States.

The concept of hegemony has also been used within the field of political science to study the relationships between nation-states and their struggle for dominance and power at the global level. In his article "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power" (originally published in 2001) John Mearsheimer develops his theory of political realism and defines the international system of nation-states as anarchic. Mearsheimer explains that at the international level, sovereignty "inheres in states because there is no higher ruling body [...] There is no government over governments" (61). Instead of relying on a governing body, states depend on a hegemonic system of power in their economic, political, and militaristic interactions, which recognizes the supposed superiority of certain states. Of course, the ability to claim and utilize this superiority is dependent upon a system of

competition among the states. According to Mearsheimer: "This inexorably leads to a world of constant security competition [...] the best way for a state to survive in anarchy is to take advantage of other states and gain power at their expense" (64). In a system in which power is not a means to an end, but the end itself, the ultimate goal of every state is to become the global hegemon and therefore dominate every other state in the system. Mearsheimer points out, however, that it is nearly impossible for a particular state to become the global hegemon because of the large amount of competition, but it is likely for a state to become a regional hegemon (67). The United States, for over one hundred years, has been the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere and, as evidenced in its victory in the Mexican-American War, has used brute force and interventionist policies to maintain its hegemonic position.

In the 2008 critical edition of Mayra Santos-Febres' novel, *Sirena Selena vestida de pena/Sirena Selena Dressed in Pain*, the editor and writer of the forward to the novel, Debra A. Castillo, quotes Judith Butler while analyzing the phenomenon of drag:

> *La promesa crítica de lo drag no tiene que ver con la proliferación de géneros [...] sino, más bien, con la exposición del fracaso de los regímenes heterosexuales para legislar o contener plenamente sus propios ideales.*
>
> The critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders [...] but rather with exposing the failure of heterosexual regimes in fully legislating or containing their own ideals (xxv).

With the first publication of Santos-Febres' novel in 2000, a new wave of scholarly work analyzed the interactions between the United States and the Caribbean through a queer lens, highlighting the role of transvestism as a metaphor for the performance of the Caribbean. Comparisons between the Caribbean and the transvestite are popular among literary critiques of the novel; these critiques make this comparison by showing how the Caribbean, like the transvestite, has received the violence of the dominant hegemonic powers and policing discourse.[12] By making the

12 A well-known example of such critique is Efraín Barradas' article "*Sirena Selena vestida*

body into a spectacle that exposes the scars left from such violence, the body becomes a weapon against oppression and, as Santos-Febres argues in the essay "Caribe y Travestismo" of her collection *Sobre piel y papel* (2005), "*Travestirse es, por lo tanto, reinscribirse, borrarse e intimidar a la vez*" [Cross-dressing is, therefore, simultaneously re-inscribing yourself, erasing yourself, and [being] intimidating] (130-131). Within this argument, just as the transvestite confronts heterosexual hegemony, the Caribbean confronts the political hegemony of the First World, particularly that of the United States.

In a similar fashion, *el drag guadalupista* sheds light on the performativity of the nation-state as well as the performativity of *La Frontera* as a concept that separates one nation-state from another. Because it utilizes the transnational icon of *La Virgen* to denounce heterosexual hegemonic discourse and regimes, it also demonstrates the performative nature of both the United States and Mexican national identities. These national identities are dependent upon the concept of the nation-state, whose validity requires the participation of the majority within the state, and whose actions within the anarchic international political system are dependent upon the struggle for a hegemonic position of power. The United States constantly needs to defend its position as the regional hegemon, just as the heterosexual hegemony constantly needs to assert its position as the hegemonic sexual identity and police those who would challenge its authority. *El drag guadalupista*, like the Caribbean-as-transvestite metaphor, uses sexuality as a means to enter into the political realm and challenge existing power dynamics and exploitation in US-Latin American relations.

By utilizing Muñoz's theory of disidentification, we can now see how Alma López and Alex Donis use this mode as a means of making their own space for identification within their marginalized existence as the "stateless, queer Other". They, as artists, disidentify with *Latinidad*, *Chicanidad*, or *Mexicanidad* as racialized minorities within the United States that continue to exclude them for being Queer. Keeping in mind the history of US interventionist policies in Latin America, in addition to the violent reactions that the artists Alma López and Alex Donis received because of their "controversial" works, we can also see that *el drag guadalupista* not only critiques and transgresses heterosexual regimes on both sides of *La*

de pena o el Caribe como travesty," *Centro Journal* 15.2 (2003): 52-65.

Frontera. Alma López, as a Chicana lesbian, and Alex Donis, as a gay Latino, also challenge the exclusive national identity of the United States that is shaped by hetero-patriarchal and white normativity; their representations of the Virgin of Guadalupe cross the border into the United States and express homosexual agency and desire.

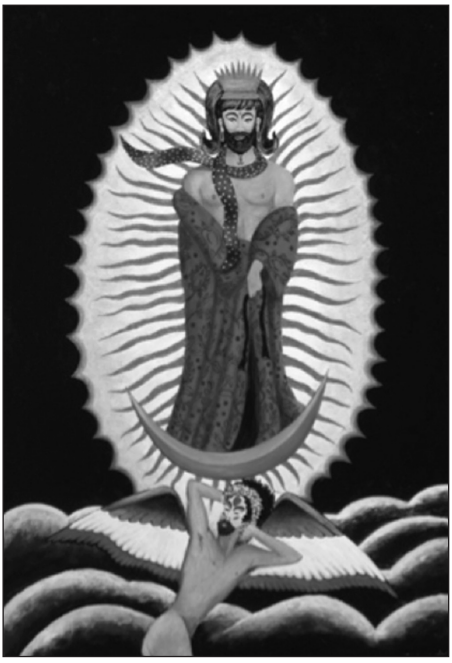

Figure 7: *Virginia Guadalupe* (1997-1998)

The painting *Virginia Guadalupe* by US American artist Jim Ru, takes this discussion a step further.[13] *Virginia Guadalupe* was first exhibited December 1997 through January 1998 at the Wingspan Art Wall in Tucson, Arizona, as part of Ru's show, "Drag Queen of Compassion." The painting was later shown in Bisbee, Arizona as part of the exhibit entitled, "Transcendent Faith- Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Saints" (*Tucson Observer* 2). In the painting, Ru literally represents the Virgin of Guadalupe as a drag queen that is uplifted by a male angel whose wings are the same colors as the Mexican flag. The Virgin of Guadalupe has been

13 Image as found on: Cherry, Kittredge. "Queer Lady of Guadalupe: Artists Re-Imagine an Icon." Web log post. *Jesus in Love Blog: A Place for LGBTQ Spirituality and the Arts. Home of the Gay Jesus and Queer Saints. Uniting Body, Mind, and Spirit. Open to All.* Blogspot, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.

replaced by a gender-bending drag queen whose name, Virginia, alludes to the colonization of North America by the British and connects the patriarchal, Catholic legacy of the Spanish with the puritanical, Protestant legacy of the British in the United States. The homoerotic desire and gender performativity expressed in this painting are undeniable, but more importantly a gay, American artist chose to include a traditionally Mexican and Chicano icon to be one of his "transgendered saints." In the works of the artists analyzed within this study, the Virgin of Guadalupe, as a transnational icon, has crossed political, cultural, gendered, religious, and sexual boundaries. As a transnational, queer icon, *La Virgen* represents the potential of queer artists and activists to challenge heteronormativity and its connection with national identity.

In the second to last page of *Disidentifications*, Muñoz includes a quote from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's article, "Enactment of Power: The Politics of the Performance," which clearly demonstrates the use of performance by both the nation-state *and* the queer artist of color: "The state has its areas of performance; so has the artist. While the state performs power, the power of the artist is solely in the performance" (199). This relationship between the performance space of the artist and the performance of politics by the state is clearly seen in Derrick Mathis' article "Thought-Police Brutality," originally printed in the gay rights and interest magazine, *Advocate*, in 2002; in the article, Mathis comments on the censorship Alex Donis faced with his *War* exhibition. Donis transformed the re-opening of the Watts Towers into a performative space where he, along with the help of a flamboyant drag queen named Carmen, combated censorship by handing out flyers and petitioning the signatures necessary for the National Coalition Against Censorship (75). The intersection of politics, heteronormativity, and performance allowed the artist to defend his right to freedom of expression while simultaneously breaking gender norms.

By appropriating a sexual and drag identity and agency to the iconic image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the artists discussed here perform drag on the image known, adored, and utilized by people living on both sides of *La Frontera,* thereby shedding light on the use of performance by both the artist and the nation-state. *El drag guadalupista* critiques heterosexual regimes, the binary societal structures of gender and sexuality, and exemplifies the possible failure of heterosexual hegemony. At the transnational level, *el*

drag guadalupista critiques the regimes of the political hegemony of the United States. The border between the United States and Mexico is not a physical entity that separates two countries. It is rather the performance of a dualistic interpretation of reality in which one social construct resides next to, confronts, challenges, and interacts with another.

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