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Badasses in Bad Movies:
Border Hybridity, Women's Models,
and Gendered National Identity in
Cine Fronterizo

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Churros, cine naco, Cine Fronterizo: cheap, “redneck,” border films, or whatever else we choose to call these low-budget, border-based Mexican exploitation movies, one thing that is well known about them is that they are *bad*. In this paper, I will set out to expose that which is not yet known about them: as an extremely popular and prolific genre of Mexican national cinema from the mid-1970’s to mid-90’s, these hybrid Mexican action films are endowed with much more cultural value than meets the eye. Following in the footsteps of Maricruz Castro Ricalde and Adán Avalos, I argue that despite the wholesale dismissal of this genre of film by critics, academics, and the cultural elite, as a hybrid form of cultural production, *Cine Fronterizo* reflects valuable cultural information that sheds light on the potential for the reimaginings of national identity in the context of the Mexican community in the borderlands of Mexico and the United States, while finally offering the doubly-marginalized and under-represented population of Mexicans in the United States a cinema with which they can identify.

Because of the social, political, and economic context in which this strand of national film emerged, the independent filmmakers and companies that produced these movies were operating on a low-budget, exploiting timely and popular actors; themes; trends; and spectacles as quickly as possible for a quick buck. The result is the infamously “low-quality” lowbrow films that became incredibly popular among the working classes of Mexico and Mexican communities in the borderlands and the United States. *Cine Fronterizo* movies tend to be plot centered, featuring little artfulness in the way of cinematographic aesthetics as the characters, action, and dialogue fulfill all the narrative functions. There are substantial amounts of camera and audio errors, messy scene transitions and editing, and low audio-visual fidelity. As a hybrid genre, *Cine Fronterizo* displays characteristics from Hollywood action films, such as car chases, shoot-outs, and enough explosions to make up for

whatever else it may lack; as well as substantial influence from classic Mexican film. For example, these action films construct the characters similarly to the melodramas of Mexico's Golden Age of cinema, as they fulfill specific functions in relation to each other and the structure of the plot.

Furthermore, nearly each of the films in my sample features a number of diegetic song or dance performances: such as cabaret-style dance sequences as seen in classic Mexican *Cabaretera* films, or performances of *corridos* by known Mexican *ranchero* or *norteño* bands, as seen in classic Mexican *Comedia Ranchera* films. As the most important aspect of Mexican national film, *Cine Fronterizo* maintains classic Mexican cinema's function as a tool for the discussion and dissemination of national moral values, serving to reflect the cultural codes of conduct that determine Mexican national identity, or *mexicanidad* – Mexican-ness – in a reciprocal process of negotiation and construction.

Applying Néstor García Canclini's theory of hybrid cultures to Mexican national cinema, minding its function as a tool for the negotiation and dissemination of national identity, *Cine Fronterizo* can be analyzed as Canclini's conception of national monuments: illustrating "the changes the most solid commemorations of patrimony suffer," as they "contain several styles and references to diverse historical and artistic periods" (221), hybridizing national cinema to suit its new spatial and temporal context. In Ana López' analysis of the primary female characters in classic Mexican cinema, through an extension of Colina and Díaz Torrez' "inseparable trinity of social equilibrium" in Argentine melodrama, she references the cinematic depiction of the Mexican pillars of society: nation, family, and patriarchy as the basis of Mexican cinematic narratives (147). These pillars, though rearranged and problematized, provide the structures and characteristics that serve as *Cine Fronterizo*'s "referents of legitimacy" (Canclini, 243), by mixing these classic "styles" with the new

genre in the hybrid culture model, while their structural role in the narratives is drastically reimagined to suit their new, hybrid context in the Mexican-American borderlands. Though the three pillars overlap with each other in defining national behavioral codes, the pillar that will be examined as the focal point of this paper will be that of the patriarchy, as the structure that most influences sex and gender relations in society. Through an analysis of the construction of key primary female characters in relation to their function in the negotiation and renegotiation of gendered national identity, my goal is to illustrate how the models for female *mexicanidad* have been hybridized in the face of their new spatial and temporal setting in border film.

Essential to establishing of the degree to which these rearranged cinematic models of gendered *mexicanidad* have shaped and been shaped by the national moral values is an understanding of the role of national cinema throughout history. To illustrate this role, I will begin my discussion with a brief overview of Mexican film history, aiming to demonstrate the industrial, social, political, and economic context in which *Cine Fronterizo* emerged, as well as the manner in which the official history has neglected to acknowledge this genre as a valid form of national cultural production. Secondly, in reference to the aforementioned works of Ricalde and Ávalos, I will underline the importance of considering *Cine Fronterizo* in the study of Mexican cinema, as a genre that is *del pueblo* (of the people), therefore perhaps not meaningful to the small group of cultural and academic elite, although extremely meaningful for the majority population. While representing the popular classes on screen, these films also provide these popular audiences with empowering narratives with which they can identify, as, particularly in the case of the Mexican-American working class, Mexican national cinema has neglected to do so in the past. The subsequent section will then address this audience, focusing on the history and composition of the diaspora of

Mexican-Americans, whose problematic and perpetually hybridized discourse of national identity provides a basis for the characters of *Cine Fronterizo* and are therefore essential to its understanding. A description of the social, economic, and political factors that have affected the Mexican presence in the United States historically and during the era of the films in question provides the foundation upon which this cinema is based, therefore illustrating the reciprocal relationship that this cultural production has with its audience in the construction of a hybrid national identity.

To address the rearrangements that have taken place in *Cine Fronterizo*, a description of the historical symbolic background of the classic models for women in cinema must be established to develop a contextual understanding of the pervasive nature of the elements that shape their construction. Furthermore, the historical framework influencing female *mexicanidad* provides insight on the role of women as signifiers of national identity. With this context in mind, I will begin to draw examples from a choice of films in describing the problematization of the aforementioned pillars of Mexican society – nation, family, and patriarchy. As the three categories are not mutually exclusive, I seek to exemplify the manner in which the pillars of the nation and family have been renegotiated and problematized in *Cine Fronterizo* as a prelude to the focus of the paper: the analysis of Camelia la Texana and Lola la Trailera's characters in their respective films in the exemplification of how they, as primary female characters, have been constructed in a way that drastically rearranges the classic models for female *mexicanidad* in Mexican film, and consequently, the cinematic depiction of the patriarchal order.

I have chosen these two characters to exemplify my thesis of border hybridity's influence on the models for women on screen in border film as they are the most prominent, if not the *only* primary female characters in *Cine Fronterizo* from the era in question: 1976-1994. In the preliminary stages of my research, I chose the *Lola la trailera* series (1983, 1985, 1990) solely because of the popularity of her films and of her character as a "badass" female protagonist. Her character had proved to exemplify how border hybridity opens possibilities for reimaginings of national gendered identity, and how its cinematic depiction serves as a new model for women's roles in the borderlands. Camelia la Texana, on the other hand, is chosen based on her original appearance in cultural production as an equally "badass" Mexican popular ballad, or *corrido* heroine from Los Tigres del Norte's 1974 hit song "*Contrabando y traición*" (Contraband and Betrayal). Though the first cinematic adaptation of her narrative, the *Cine Fronterizo* film also titled *Contrabando y traición* (1976), had drastically changed the nature of her character, it had provided substantial insight on the constrictions of cinema versus popular song in the construction of female *mexicanidad*. Furthermore, Camelia's structural role in the film demonstrated precisely how *Cine Fronterizo* appropriated the characteristics of the classic models of Mexican cinema to problematize the gender binary. Both these characters serve to exemplify how the hybridization of the borderlands, illustrated through border cinema, present possibilities for reimagining modern border identities while showing substantial influence from their traditional Mexican "referents of legitimacy" (Canclini, 243) in their new spatial and temporal context.

A Brief History of Mexican Cinematic Production

To begin my discussion, I'd like to emphasize just how important a contribution cinema has been to the cultural production of Mexico – nothing short of a staple for about a century. Carlos Monsaváis asserts that “from the beginning the film industry set out to mirror popular culture, to reflect its achievements, its myths, its prejudices, its tastes [...]” and that “more than any other cultural instrument, [it] brought pleasures and prejudices up to date, and reshaped the notion of Mexican national identity by turning nationalism into a great show”(quoted in Ortiz, 2). At its height between 1949 and 1955, known as Mexico's Golden Age of cinema, new releases confirming and disseminating the nation's moral values and identity were hugely popular and widespread throughout Mexico, in the United States, and across Latin America. Although it never enjoyed the same level of funding and technology as Hollywood, Mexico's national movie industry thrived nonetheless, receiving state support and some Hollywood equipment that contributed to the quality films that received as much critical and academic acclaim as popular attention. These were the formative years of the Mexican cinematic style, in which nationalistic plot formulas were established and perfected, narrating the threats to and subsequent restoration of the hegemonic pillars of Mexican society: patriarchy, family, and nation.

Following the trajectory of Mexican cinema in academic literature, I noticed quickly that with each six-year presidential term came cultural policies that affected the film industry, some more radical than others, depending on social, economic, and political factors, including how much each new president disliked his predecessor. According to academics, at the end of the Golden Age cinematic production started to become stale. Film scholars became tired of the same melodrama and *Comedia*

Ranchera formulas produced by the same old filmmakers. There was a turn towards more spectacular, Hollywood-esque formula films made by independent producers, including cabaret, action, monster, and western films – now in color – featuring explosions, car chases, and female nudity. But as much as critics and academics lamented this slump in content and quality, the number of films produced continued to increase and Mexicans continued to flood into movie theatres. It is worth noting, however, that “the popular classes are the only sector that has continuously attended Mexican cinema” (Maciel, 71), foreshadowing the direction in which national cinema as a whole was headed.

With less and less state funding for cinema, this trend continued until the end of 1970, when Luis Echeverría Alvarez was inaugurated as president. Echeverría, unlike his predecessor, was very interested in films as well as having family in the industry. The result was a short-lived flip in cultural politics with visible results for film production. The censorship from the previous leaders was all but lifted while state funding was restored, leading to a brief return to “quality over quantity” for the national movie industry. Though “package films,” such as cheap melodrama and action flicks continued to be made by private producers who were excluded from the rest of the industry’s movement, the state’s involvement sparked an era that has been termed “New Mexican Cinema,” characterized by quality films with a political left slant, a national film making school, and the nationalization of the *Banco Cinematográfico* as well as several studios and production companies.

This era of Mexican film was brought to an abrupt halt with the end of Echeverría’s six-year presidential term. Policies flipped yet again, this time drastically. The new president, José Lopez Portillo, viewed Echeverría’s term as a complete disaster, promptly getting to work on undoing that

which had been accomplished by his predecessor. Replacing Echeverría's brother Rodolfo as head of radio, television, and cinema, came Portillo's sister, Margarita. Due to the country's debt crisis and high inflation as well as "associating state support of film production with his disliked predecessor," (Ortiz, 5) the national cinema bank was dissolved and studios and production companies went from national to private yet again. As if to symbolize the end of an era of national film, the *Cineteca Nacional* (the national film archives) was devastated by a fire, destroying and damaging countless irreplaceable Mexican films. This event signaled an almost full take-over of the cheap, exploitative films that independent producers had been churning out below the radar of film scholarship throughout Mexican film history.

It is also worth noting that Echeverría's liberal filmmaking policies were also flipped by Margarita López Portillo, who, strategically evading the word "censorship" itself, declared that she would "avoid the presentation of coarse themes that poison the mind" (Mora, 139).

Despite the country's dire economic situation, the shift in cinema policies benefited the film industry financially in the post-Echeverría era. Production increased by 32% per year compared to the "New Cinema" era, though critics and academics attributed this to "a commercialist thrust that exploits traditional genres, soft-core sex, and whatever other timely topics can be quickly taken advantage of" (Mora, 139). The trend for filmmakers had moved towards making "the least expensive sure-formula film[s] possible, with major themes including immigration, crime, drugs, soft-core sexual comedies, and urban violence" (Maciel, 72). The private sector was now producing 95% of the total films (Maciel, 72). The centers of production and the diegetic settings moved away from the capital and out of the studios in a shift towards the northern border regions of the country.

Todos Somos Nacos: Why to consider churros

This is where, in my research, I ran into a hole. There is a vacuum in the literature pertaining to the post-New Mexican Cinema where *naco* movies should be, as if the official film history skipped two decades entirely.

To say the least, documentation for national Mexican cinema after 1976 is sparse. Historians, film, and culture scholars alike demonstrated a wholesale dismissal of the popular films being produced at the time despite their prolificacy and undeniable popularity. Carl Mora – whose historical-industrial work chronicles Mexican film production from 1896 to 2004 – blatantly displays his attitude towards popular films of the post-Echeverría era:

“Some filmmakers doggedly kept alive the tradition of good cinema in Mexico even though their efforts were hard put to compete against domestic *churros* and [...] American films” (143).

Those with cultural authority neglect to acknowledge the importance of the sheer prolificacy and huge popularity of these films, demonstrating the elitist nature of Mexican film scholarship. The academic literature dealing with this era focuses on the few highbrow art films that were being produced, making comments like the following:

“*For once* commercial success is linked with artistic cinema”(Maciel, 77), referring to the acclaimed novel-turned-movie *Like Water for Chocolate* (1991).

Maybe the independent movies from the mid-70’s to the mid-90’s were not of the highest artistic merit. Sure, they were made quick, cheap, and dirty, exploiting popular actors, themes, spectacles and formulas. But should this mean that they are culturally invalid, especially considering how popular and widely dispersed they were?

It was not until Maricruz Castro Ricalde confronted the rigid cultural hierarchy dismissing lowbrow movies as trash that the importance of audience reception and the popularity of the films became valid indicators of their cultural “worthiness.” Applying her observations on *La India María* to all lowbrow Mexican film, Adán Avalos denounces “the manner in which public taste takes a back seat to media reception; it is the critics, [Ricalde] argues, that determine aesthetic achievement, not the box-office records” (187). Despite their superficial lack of “quality” – as (dis)qualified by the cultural elite – *naco* movies exhibit substantive cultural information that reflects the society that produces and consumes it: the Mexican popular classes. This cultural information portrayed in *naco* cinema functions in a reciprocal relationship with its audience the same way that Mexican cinema has done since the Golden Age: reflecting and reproducing while shaping and disseminating national moral values and identity. When considering *cine naco* from this perspective, it can be used as “an illustrative tool” to serve as a means of understanding contemporary Mexican society (Ortiz, 10), the same way Mexican cinema has done so since the Golden Age. Therefore, to deny the cultural significance and impact of these films is to deny the validity of a substantial feature of its consumers’ culture, marginalizing the cultural production by and for the popular classes.

Avalos, like Ricalde, seeks to “democratize the study of culture,” rightly attributing cultural value to *cine naco* because of its popularity while critically reevaluating the films: “The very fact that these films are so wildly popular with recent Mexican and Latino immigrant audiences, the fastest growing demographic in the United States, suggests that it is worthwhile to undertake a second look at this genre” (188). He particularly focuses on *Cine Fronterizo*, the genre of *naco* movies that captures elements of the Mexican-American migrant experience on the Mexico/U.S. border, finally providing this rapidly growing and marginalized demographic with a cinema with which they could identify (185). Border cinema, in the tradition of Mexican national cinema, “reflects and creates the identity of recent Latino immigrants into the United States, a group that is constantly transgressing established boundaries” (187).

“Mexican-Americans don’t like to go to the movies,
Where the dude has to wear contact lenses to make his blue eyes brown,
‘Cause don’t that make my brown eyes blue?” (Cheech and Chong)

Cine Fronterizo’s era of prominence coincides with what has been characterized as the third pattern of Mexican migration to the United States in the late 1970’s, though throughout history there has been a strong Mexican presence that goes beyond that of the proximity of the countries. Much of the U.S. southwest was historically Mexican territory – all or part of Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. These territories were annexed by the U.S. in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that concluded the Mexican-American war in 1848, later becoming integrated as part of the country. This shift generated a large number of Mexican-Americans with a problematic national identity as “natives” of both nations.

On top of this base-population of Mexicans in the United States, there has been a relatively constant flow of migration regardless of socio-political conditions and policies, though Katharine Donato has indicated three waves of large-scale migration patterns, further complicating the matter of the community's national origins. The first of these is the *bracero* period from 1942 to 1964, when millions of Mexican men migrated for agricultural employment under a U.S.-sponsored temporary worker program, brought on by a shortage of labor during World War II (707). Following this period, many of the Braceros obtained resident status and sponsored their families (women and children) to join them legally in the United States, while those without papers brought their families in illegally, comprising the second wave of Mexico-U.S. migration known as the post-bracero period from 1964-1976. The third wave, coinciding with *Cine Fronterizo*, is characterized by soaring numbers of Mexicans entering the United States without legal documents, perhaps as a consequence of Mexico's debt crisis and the devaluation of the peso. In this period, the women's migration pattern diverged from that of children: females were now crossing the border without families, now comprising 32% of total migrants – a substantial number compared to the past (Donato, 712).

Considering this deep-rooted and dynamic history of Mexicans north of the United States border, it comes as no surprise that this group has struggled not only for human and civil rights in this land, but also in negotiating a new hybrid identity: what does it mean to be a Mexican in the borderlands or the United States, a Mexican-American, or Chicano/a? *Mestisaje*, or hybridity is an essential part of Mexican national identity – be it a physical reality of an individual's ethnic makeup or not – it denotes the racial mix of Spanish and Indigenous American, serving as the symbolic foundation of *mexicanidad*. Going beyond the *mestisaje* that took root in the colonization of the Americas, border-dwelling Mexicans and/or Mexican-Americans embody a two-fold *mestisaje*, internalizing the

hybridity essential to Mexican national identity as well as that of those in the territory of American cultural imperialism.

To try to consolidate the identity of Mexican-Americans, or Chicanos/as is a precarious pursuit. The demographic itself is in a constant state of flux: integrating a constant flow of new migrants into the already present generations – native or otherwise, with a variety of distance between the individual and the homeland – negotiating a space for their community in a region where they are pushed to the margins of society by the dominant culture that appropriated their lands: white Anglo-Americans. This marginalization is not the consequence of official legal dealings alone, as Néstor García Canclini points out: “agreements between nations and people are also organized by a collective imaginary which expresses a particular viewpoint – more through the use of stories and metaphors than through numbers and hard data” (118). On top of the “vulnerability of all [outsiders] on the basis of [...] skin color and language,” Mexicans, particularly Mexican-Americans in the Anglo-U.S. imaginary are constructed as an economic burden in the United States, despite the fact that even undocumented workers contribute much more than they cost for the state (124). In addition, an abundance of negative stereotypes such as laziness, criminality, and hyper-sexuality are attributed to this group by the dominant culture. This image of Chicanos/as perpetuated by the dominant discourse influences the construction of Mexican-American self-identification as they internalize the otherness projected onto them, much like in a hegemonic colonizer/colonized relationship in which the colonized accesses their identity discourse through the colonizer’s translation of their culture as a contrasting image to themselves (Niranjana).

The Anglo-Americans are not the only central group placing Mexican-Americans on the periphery: they also face marginalization from their home culture. As evidenced in the derogatory words for Chicanos/as in the Mexican Spanish lexicon, there is a sentiment of betrayal towards those that leave their country. The adjective *pochola*, for example, in standard Spanish translates to “overripe, discolored, or rotten,” like a piece of fruit; or “pale and ill” when referring to a person. In Mexico, it is used to describe a Mexican-American, suggesting rottenness in the act of leaving Mexico for the United States – a person who has gone bad. The act of migration, interpreted as betrayal of the nation, is not taken lightly in the nationalistic Mexican society. Though not necessarily related to migration, the adjective *malinchista* is another derogatory term denoting an individual who has betrayed Mexico, being corrupted by or selling out to foreign, particularly American influences. The root of this word comes from the name Malinche, the symbolic ultimate betrayer of the Mexican people, whose ambivalent myth I will go into more detail about later.

Because of the double-marginalization and double-*mestisaje* of Mexican-Americans, their national identity is in a constant state of crisis, perpetually negotiating their position as “in-betweeners”: neither Mexican nor American yet both at the same time. The Mexico-U.S. borderlands have become a symbolic space for these perpetual negotiations and re-imaginings of national identities for Chicanos/as – a space where they can reclaim their symbolic homeland: Aztlán, the pre-Cortesian mythical place of origin for the Aztecs. The Chicano/a movement of the 1970’s appropriated this symbol through their identification with the Aztec people as a metaphor for their concept of nationalism: “like Chicanos themselves, Aztlán is *from* but not *in* Mexico, *in* but not *of* the United States” (Beltran, 601).

Mexicans in the United States and the borderlands have opened a space for fluid negotiation and re-imagination for their problematic identity, therefore making regional cultural production particularly meaningful for this group as they develop a sense of collective self, preserving and evolving their *mexicanidad* in a new space. Writers, such as feminist Chicana academic and writer Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chicano intellectual and performance artist Guillermo Gómez Peña have written artistic, self-reflective, and hugely meaningful works trying to negotiate and theorize what it means to be a Chicano/a, though their brand of cultural production is not the most accessible to the popular classes. Popular cultural production such as music and movies function as a more accessible tool for the common people to join the discussion of their identity. Cinema, beginning in the Golden Age, has been an extremely meaningful and direct means of connection to their Mexican identity. As I discussed earlier, Mexican film has always been a vehicle for transmitting its national cultural values, therefore functioning to reflect, reproduce, shape, and disseminate these values and identity for Chicanos/as in a space where their access to national identity has been limited by the dominant society. As Rogelio Agrasánchez exposes in his chronicle of Mexican cinema in the United States, hundreds of Hispanic movie theatres were successfully functioning for a Spanish-speaking audience since the Golden Age, exhibiting only Mexican films. Though the prominence of Mexican movie theatres in the United States began to decline in the 1960's due to the competition from television, the tradition of movies as a connection to Chicano/a heritage has continued to be a substantial signifying cultural practice as Mexican and American distributors continued to thrive with this market (36).

Another noteworthy aspect of this fluid diaspora and their changing identity is how the composition of the migration waves changes the community's features: I am referring specifically to the number

of male vs. female immigrants and the nature of their journey (to work or to join their family). As I mentioned earlier, the late 1970's marks the third wave of mass-migration from Mexico to the United States, and this cohort features more women migrating than ever before, and without families. This trait suggests that the role of women, particularly of those migrating to the United States, is beginning to be rearranged, which is to be reflected in the cultural production of the period.

All About the Ladies: Traditional models for women's roles in classic Mexican cinema

An aspect of Spanish culture that has been successfully implemented in the Americas is that of the role of women. Recalling Mexican Golden Age Cinema's three pillars of society that I mentioned earlier – nation, family and patriarchy – I will now discuss the symbolic structure and background of the patriarchal order in more detail. In Mexico – a *macho* patriarchal society – the woman is the central figure in the family and nation's honor and identity. Women have historically been appointed the position of objective carriers of meaning: the family's "good name" and reputation depends on her. As central as these values are to traditional Mexican identity, this position bars women from subjective agency: though influential in the meaning she carries, she is unable to generate meaning of her own. The national patriarchal or 'manhandled' rhetoric defining what it means to be a woman in Mexico dates back to the conquest and colonial periods, and is "at the heart of the definition of Mexico as a nation" (López, 150). Pertaining to film, there are two national, historical and mythological female archetypes, both components of the conception of Mexico as a nation, that compose a virgin-whore duality that has served as the 'manhandled' model of women's roles for the nation, as portrayed in national cinema. Both maternal figures, each of the two has been deemed the "Mother of Mexico," though certainly under different circumstances. As the virgin archetype, *La*

Virgen de Guadalupe presents the model for all things pure – what a woman *should* be. Her counterpart, La Malinche, as the whore archetype demonstrates the ‘necessary evil’ of that which a woman *should not* be, yet, for the pleasure of men, someone has to do it – presenting female sexuality as an inherently impure yet necessary evil: the bad woman.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a pervasive myth that has been implemented as a defining symbol of Mexico by the Catholic colonial powers: she is the patron saint deemed ‘mother’ of Mexico. After the defeat of the Aztec empire, taking place in Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City), the Spanish *conquistadores*, colonizers, and clergymen systematically began stripping the natives of their indigenous religion, among many other things, destroying sacred places of worship to erect Catholic cathedrals in lieu. Perhaps the most well known example of this is the Mexico City Cathedral, constructed on top of the former Aztec *Templo Mayor*, the main temple. During this systematic evangelization of the American natives just a decade after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the *Virgen de Guadalupe* appeared to the Indian Juan Diego, a native peasant, on Tepayec mountain. Speaking to him in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec empire, she performed a miracle for him to prove her identity. This miracle yielded the famous image that now adorns the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City – the Catholic structure that replaced the Aztec temple of Tonatzin: the indigenous mother-goddess. The Virgin of Guadalupe therefore embodies the Virgin Mary and Tonatzin, representing the mestizo virgin mother of the Mexican nation – indigenous and Catholic. The behavioral code that she provides for Mexico has been titled *Marianismo*, whose etymology comes from *La Virgen María*. Described by Evelyn Stevens as the “Other face of Machismo,” it denotes the female gender role in a macho-patriarchal society in which a woman’s value is based on her purity and resilience in the face of mistreatment by men. She must be:

“[S]emi-divine, morally superior and spiritually stronger than men. A female cannot hope to attain full spiritual stature until her forbearance and abnegation have been tested by male-inflicted suffering. Men’s wickedness is therefore the necessary precondition of women’s superior status” (Stevens, 61).

The woman, under this model, must be virginal, docile, compliant, and eternally self-sacrificing, facing mistreatment from ‘the macho’ in order to achieve her superior status as mother, creating a *machista/marianista* cycle throughout the generations:

“Typically a man may comment that he is going to try to make restitution to his mother for all the suffering his father has caused her. At the same time he is acting toward his wife in such a way that his children, in turn, will see her as a martyr” (Stevens, 60).

The cinematic depiction of this part of the duality, as laid out by Ana López in her study of Mexican Golden Age Cinema is “evidenced in the deployment of the Mexican cinema’s so-called mother obsession” (153). Based on the Virgin of Guadalupe’s *marianismo* model, the asexual and saintly mother characters are the repositories of conservative family values in male-centered narratives. López exemplifies this character model with the 1941 film *Cuando los hijos se van* (When the Children Leave Home), in which the mother displays the aforementioned characteristics in her attempts to maintain the honor of her family that has been threatened by her husband’s poor judgment. Though perfectly exemplified through mother characters, this model is not limited as such: it is applied to all “good” women, including innocent daughters and pure, asexual wives. These “good” women “have a guaranteed place in the home as pillars of strength, tolerance, and self-

abnegation [...] but outside the home they are prey to the male desires that the Mexican home and family disavow,” (López, 154) which brings us to the other half of the Mother of Mexico duality: the whore.

The archetype upon which this model is based is a woman of many names – Malinche, *Malintzin*, *Malinalli*, *Doña Marina*, *La Chingada* – the fucked mother of Mexico. This historical figure’s many names are a good indication as to the ambiguity that surrounds her figure: documentation of her life is less than concrete. The conquest-era chronicles of her life and work were written by men with agendas that may have skewed her image, while her side of the story was never taken into account or documented. This is to say that La Malinche, though a foundational figure in Mexican history, has been constructed through a similar patriarchal and mythical lens as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*: her cultural impact greatly outweighs the actual historical evidence from the time of her existence. What is indeed known is that she was an indigenous princess-turned-slave during the conquest of Mexico. She was gifted to Hernán Cortez, the Spanish *conquistador* responsible for the defeat of the Aztecs and subsequent colonization of Mexico, for whom she served as translator and concubine. As an interpreter, she aided the Spaniards in the conquest of the indigenous people – “her people” – performing what has been interpreted as the unforgivable betrayal of her race that led to the fall of the Aztec empire. To further this betrayal in the popular perspective, she bore him a child, Martín, symbolically considered the first “Mexican” as a mix of Spanish Catholic and indigenous American. Through the “manhandled” interpretation of this relationship as one of master/slave or rapist/victim, Malinche has been deemed “*La Chingada*,” or The Fucked Woman, making Martín, and by extension all Mexicans through his symbolic status as the first Mexican, “*Hijos de la Chingada*”: Sons of a Fucked Mother (Paz). She was the victim of the violation that founded the nation, in turn utilizing her

sexual power to betray her people and compromise her race's integrity by selling out to the Spanish colonial powers. This betrayal inspired a neologism in contemporary Mexican Spanish:

“*malinchista*,” an adjective denoting a person who betrays their nation or people, being corrupted by or selling out to foreign, particularly American influences (Berg, 57), as previously described. This vilifying construction of La Malinche has been popularly accepted until the feminist “rescuing” of her figure in the 1960's and therefore has fed Mexican national identity with this whore-betrayer mother symbol for centuries, being deeply ingrained in the introspection into national character.

The cinematic repercussions of this archetype are manifested in the model of the “other” or the “bad” woman, as Ana López describes, the “haughty and independent” seductress who is “as passionate and devilish as the mothers are asexual and saintly” (155). This “bad woman” is the necessary opposite of the previously outlined virgin: she represents the satisfaction of the unconsummated desires resulting from the good woman's asexual character. This female model, exercising her power over men through her sexuality, is often applied as a prostitute, cabaret dancer, or other sexually desirable forms of a “man-eater” in Golden Age films, such as the *Cabaretera* genre. Despite the power, sexual and otherwise, allotted to the bad woman in these films, paralleled to that of La Malinche, her independence is not a consequence of choice. Like Malinche's rise to power through her enslavement and sexual abuse, the bad woman has innocent beginnings until she becomes a victim of circumstance. The death of her family, betrayal, or rape are the types of incidents that force her into sexual deviance, the woman's only vehicle for power according to the patriarchal structure. Another feature of the bad woman's narrative that reminds the audience of the limitations and temporary nature of her independence is the nature of her ending. The bad woman is a fallen woman – one who was not able to lead the life of a virginal good woman, having been “tricked or forced by

circumstances into successful careers [...] while all they really want to be is wives and mothers” (López, 157). The patriarchal structure shows through in the end of each film’s narrative, in which the bad woman is only redeemed through marriage and motherhood, returning to the status of a virginal good woman, or death.

The models of the virginal, self-sacrificing good woman and the independent, sexualized bad woman are mutually exclusive categories, both necessary to the patriarchal structure of the macho Mexican society. Their presence in Mexican Golden Age Cinema has functioned as a means of disseminating the national moral behavioral codes for maintaining the hegemonic pillars of society, pillars that remain central in the contemporary construction of *mexicanidad*. This sentiment of nationalism and national identity derived from Mexican films has been of particular importance for Mexicans living in the United States. Recalling the above discussion regarding the problematic construction of Mexican-American national identity, this diaspora consumes cinema as means to access their *mexicanidad*, though as they inhabit a space that calls for drastic reimaginings of their national identity, this *mexicanidad* is subject to the hybridization and renegotiation that characterizes the borderlands. *Cine Fronterizo* expresses these reimaginings, essentially rearranging the traditional pillars of Mexican society – fatherland, family, and patriarchy, whose intactness was the basis of classic Mexican films – reflecting their new context in the borderlands. As there is significant overlap between these pillars, they are all affected to varying degrees in contrast to the classic models.

The Pillars

The foremost pillar that has been rearranged in border film is that of the nation, which by the mere act of migration is fundamentally challenged. Though to leave Mexico and migrate to the United States can be interpreted as the ultimate act of *malinchismo*, or betrayal of the nation, this migration does not necessitate the full abandon of the nation. Considering the historically problematic boundaries of Mexico and the United States and the variety of situations under which Mexicans become Mexican-Americans, migrating north of the border may constitute as an abandon of the *country*, but by no means a betrayal of the *nation*. To exemplify this rearrangement of the pillar of the fatherland – *la patria*, the 1980 *Cine Fronterizo* movie *Contrabando por amor* (Contraband for Love) clearly demonstrates the nationalistic sentiment of Chicano brothers Jimmy and Jorge, born dual citizens as sons of a Mexican-American police officer in the United States.

In this drug-smuggling action film, the two protagonists lead the narrative through a series of border crossings that demonstrate the life offered by both sides of the border. Reminiscent of one of Mexico's 'unofficial national anthems,' Chucho Monge's "*México Lindo y Querido*," the protagonists of "*Contrabando por Amor*" demonstrate their undying patriotism despite having been born and raised in the United States: "*México lindo y querido / si muero lejos de tí / que digan que estoy dormido / y que me traigan aquí*": "Beautiful beloved Mexico / if I die far from thee / tell them that I am just sleeping / so back to you they may bring me." This devotion to the nation is strongly illustrated in the film's ending in which both brothers, having lived most of their lives north of the border, are transported back to be buried in Mexico after their murder in the United States. Jorge and Jimmy, both Mexican-American citizens, were born outside of the fatherland to a Mexican-American

police officer – signifying his full integration into U.S. society. As reflected in their names, Jimmy chose to remain in the United States after the death of his father, whereas Jorge moved to *la patria* to build a life for himself there. The end of the narrative found them both in the United States anew, with the ultimate wish of being laid to rest in Mexico. This illustration of allegiance to Mexico despite their inherited distance from it complicates the pillar of the nation: while both brothers, particularly Jimmy, have allegedly “betrayed” their fatherland in favor of the United States, their very last move is an act of fidelity towards their beloved Mexico. In his lifetime, Jimmy illustrates a complete abandonment of his *country* – Mexico – in only venturing south of the border for the transportation of goods for his work, though the aforementioned demonstration of fidelity to Mexico reminds the spectator that he never abandoned his *nation* as a symbolic, sentimental space (Anderson). This notion problematizes the traditional concept of the fatherland as the physical land of the country and the sentimental and meaningful nation, creating the possibility to separate the two in symbolic acts of patriotism.

The second pillar of Mexican society – the family – can be seen to have been rearranged in *Cine Fronterizo* as a collateral effect of the former. Recalling the nature of the migration patterns of the late 1970’s, the increase in northbound migration from Mexico witnessed less family units migrating together, and more individuals – male and female – migrating in search of work, rupturing the society in which the family unit was central. Demonstrated through the character development of the protagonists in border film, the theme of “family” as the main motivator for character action is consistent, though the composition of said family is completely rearranged, therefore also rearranging the patriarchal hierarchy for which the family unit stood as a foundation. Replacing the structure of the all-controlling father and self-sacrificing mother as the bedrock of society, a more fluid, less

structuring concept of family becomes a *raison-d'être* for protagonists instead of a regulatory body. In the 1976 film *La Banda del carro rojo* (The Red Car Gang), based of the *corrido* by Los Tigres del Norte, each of the protagonists forwards the plot by reluctantly resorting to crime for the sake of their "family." Rodrigo (Mario Almada) unwillingly enters the world of narco-trafficking with his brother Lino (Fernando Almada) in order to afford the pricey medical treatment for his daughter, who is hospitalized in the United States for leukemia. While fulfilling the role of the proud, righteous, macho father – the foundation of the family structure – throughout the entire film there is no mention whatsoever of the child's mother. The audience is left without knowing if the child was born out of wedlock; if the mother had perhaps died; or if she resides in Mexico. This Mexican-American family, limited to father, daughter and uncle, challenges the family pillar in an essential way: the honor and reputation that the mother would carry goes unmentioned, as well as the abuses at the macho patriarch's hand that would determine her value, demonstrating a total rearrangement of the traditional household values. Because of the mother's absence, the family is now valued on the basis of the interpersonal relationships between the members, unlike the classical model in which each member's function is essential to the structural basis of the patriarchal rule.

Because of the new imaginings of the nation and family structures in *Cine Fronterizo*, the third and trickiest pillar of Mexican society has consequently been susceptible to rearrangements as well: the patriarchy. As the most pervasive of the three pillars, the patriarchal order has proved to be the most inescapable, therefore most problematized constraint in these on-screen narratives – and will be the focal point of this study. Women, as the traditional carriers of meaning in the macho-patriarchal society, provide the space upon which this rearrangement is most notable: it is the female character upon whom the negotiation of national identity depends through the actions she takes; their

consequent reactions; the degree of agency she is allotted in these actions; and the manner in which they produce meaning through the macho gaze. The rearranging of women's roles in *Cine Fronterizo* and the meanings these rearrangements produce demonstrate how the pervasive, "manhandled" virgin/whore models of classic cinema have influenced the reconstructions of national women's identity in the borderlands, though their divergence is indeed reflective of the dynamic nature of their new context. Like the societal pillars of fatherland and family, the patriarchal order remains a strong presence in *Cine Fronterizo*, though drastically rearranged through modification, reversal, or complete subversion of the traditional models, adding a complex dimension of problematization. As the focal point of this study, I have chosen two female characters from *Cine Fronterizo* movies that serve to characterize the types of changes allowed as well as the constrictions applied to the female models in film. The first example of a rearranged model for women's roles in the Mexican-American imaginary is the character of Camelia La Texana (Camelia the Texan): first introduced as the protagonist from Los Tigres del Norte's 1974 hit *corrido* "*Contrabando y traición*" (Contraband and Betrayal), and her translation to the 1976 *fronterizo* film by the same name. Since her beginnings as a badass *corrido* heroine, Camelia la Texana's character has become a household name in Mexico and the borderlands, inspiring a plethora of cover versions, films, cartoons, pop art, a *telenovela*, and even an opera. By comparing her construction in the *corrido* genre and the *Cine Fronterizo* film – both narrative styles traditionally utilized in the dissemination of national moral lessons – one can observe the way her cinematic interpretation acknowledges the classic models for women's roles while rearranging her position within the constraints of the film's genre, which changes the nature of her character as originally depicted in the *corrido* according to the respective structures of each.

Camelia la Texana

The *corrido*, as defined by Guillermo Hernández, is “An epic-lyric-narrative genre [...] a literary form based on a musical phrase of four members, describing events that cause a deep impact on the masses” (3). With supposed origins in Mexico as a syncretic genre having influences from Spain and indigenous traditions, *corridos* have been used throughout Mexican history for disseminating news of current events, history, and other cultural information in a formula that “takes a side” regarding the characters involved by attributing positive or negative values to them. Because of the specific discourse style and structure, the *corrido* listener can easily discern the details and meaning of each narrative, as they are presented in a standardized manner. Furthermore, the voice of the narrator is imposed in the narrative, often providing commentaries that “may also highlight the exemplary nature of the events narrated and the role of corridos in prescribing community behavior” (18). Hernández has indicated that the cultural importance of the thematic representation in *corridos* “reflects the world-view of corrido communities and, in turn, produces a substantial impact on the beliefs and practices of corrido audiences” (4). Despite the folkloric essence of the longstanding oral tradition of *corridos* in Mexican history, they aren’t just your *Abuelito*’s jams. This ballad-like narrative form continues to be applied to Mexican musical genres such as *Banda*, *Norteño*, and even *Mariachi*, by popular youth-oriented artists, such as El Komander and Calibre 50, as well as time-tested national superstars such as Intocable and multiple Grammy-winning group Los Tigres del Norte.

The characters of *corridos* are qualified as heroes or villains, as Hernandez explains, conforming to “a traditional code of ethics according to which the actions of individuals are judged either in positive

or negative terms” (8). The positive values that construct a hero include features such as courage, love, loyalty, strength, pride, righteousness, and competency; whereas the values constructing a character as a villain include deception, cowardice, corruption, treachery, weakness, selfishness, arrogance, ungratefulness, mistreatment, and unfitness (4). Though the protagonists are predominantly male figures, the few woman-subjects portrayed with these positive characteristics are allotted an equal space as a *corrido* heroine. One famous example would be the Mexican revolutionary song “*La Adelita*”, about a beautiful and valiant woman-soldier who was in love with the leader of the Maderista revolutionary movement, Francisco Madero. Described in the song as beautiful, loving, brave, and respected by her male peers and superiors, her name – Adelita – has become synonymous with “woman-soldier” in the context of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. As seen in the example of this non-fiction character, the female protagonists of *corridos*, though much less common, are essentially allowed the same status as their male counterparts as long as they conform to the traditional code of ethics.

Beyond just a *corrido* heroine, Camelia la Texana is the model *narco-corrido* protagonist par excellence. Her song, “*Contrabando y traición*,” is widely considered the first *narco-corrido*: a *corrido* based on illegal drug trafficking. This genre, having been consolidated decades after the recording of “*Contrabando y traición*” has now modified the features of the discursive style to suit its resistant new context and moral set, though “*Contrabando y traición*” adheres to the discursive and narrative structure of traditional *corridos*. The story goes as follows:

Salieron de San Isidro,
 Procedentes de Tijuana
 Traían las llantas del carro
 Repletas de hierba mala
 Eran Emilio Varela,
 Y Camelia la Texana.

They left the border at San Isidro,
 Proceeding from Tijuana
 The tires of the car
 Were packed full of marijuana
 They were Emilio Varela,
 And Camelia la Texana.

Pasaron por San Clemente,
 Los paró la emigración,
 Les pidió sus documentos
 Les dijo: '¿De dónde son?'
 Ella era de San Antonio,
 Una hembra de corazón.

They passed through San Clemente,
 The migration police stopped them,
 Asking for their documents
 He said "Where are you from?"
 She was from San Antonio,
 A woman of heart.

Una hembra si quiere un hombre,
 Por él puede dar la vida.
 Pero hay que tener cuidado
 Si esa hembra se siente herida.
 La traición y el contrabando
 Son cosas incompatidas.

A woman, when she loves a man,
 Would give her life for him.
 But you must be careful
 If that woman feels hurt.
 Contraband and betrayal
 Are incompatible things.

A Los Angeles llegaron
 A Hollywood se pasaron
 En un callejón oscuro
 Las cuatro llantas cambiaron
 Allí entregaron la hierba,
 Y allí también les pagaron.

They arrived in Los Angeles
 And went to Hollywood
 In a dark alley
 They changed the four tires
 There they exchanged the weed,
 And there they were paid as well.

Emilio dice a Camelia:
 "Hoy te vas por despedida,
 Con la parte que te toca
 Tu puedes rehacer tu vida,
 Yo me voy pa' San Francisco
 Con la dueña de mi vida."

Emilio says to Camelia:
 "Today you'll bid me farewell,
 With your share of the money
 You can start a new life.
 I'm going to San Francisco
 With the love of my life."

Sonaron siete balazos,
 Camelia a Emilio mataba.
 La policia solo hallo
 Una pistola tirada.
 Del dinero y de Camelia,
 Nunca más se supo nada.

Seven gunshots sounded,
 Camelia killed Emilio.
 The police only found
 A discarded pistol.
 Of the money and of Camelia,
 Nothing else was ever known.

The narrator develops the characters of Camelia la Texana and her boyfriend Emilio Varela through the narrative as they smuggle marijuana into the United States from Mexico. The second verse develops Camelia as the leading agent of the narrative: it was her citizenship status that eluded their arrest, and as it was her that carried out the dialogue with the officer, it is implied that she is literally and metaphorically in the driver's seat – controlling the operation. The third verse features the explicit moral lesson of the narrative as the only verse in the song that is modulated (played and sung in a higher key), emphasizing its function as a lesson rather than narrative movement like the rest of the verses. It also serves to foreshadow the subsequent action that takes place: preparing the listener for the upcoming events by asserting the righteousness of Camelia's choices before she acts upon them; while warning against the wrongful betrayal of a strong woman. In the last verse, Camelia demonstrates her agency in an act demonstrating her resilience and refusal to become a victim. Her ability to execute revenge and get away with it in an act of literary justice furthers her position as the hero in the narrative. Furthermore, the characteristics attributed to her throughout the song – bravery, love, strength, pride, and righteousness – in contrast to those attributed to Emilio – deception, treachery, selfishness, ungratefulness, and mistreatment – leave no room for ambiguity as to who is the hero and who is the villain of the narrative. It is also worth noting that throughout the song Camelia is never valued according to any gendered standards, such as her sexual purity or her appearance: she is allowed “hero” status by the same ethical code as male *corrido* heroes without the acknowledgement of her femininity.

The cinematic representation of Camelia La Texana, specifically the 1976 film *Contrabando y traición*, illustrates Camelia in a completely different light. In contrast to the righteous “badass” depicted in the song, she seems to represent a renegotiated *Cine Fronterizo* version of Mexican

Golden Age Cinema's "bad woman" model with a twist, demonstrating the constricting nature of the female identities in national cinema in relation to their function as a lesson in national moral values, as well as the way these identities can be manipulated in the border imaginary to reflect the gender conditions of the region and time. Despite the fact that the *corrido*, released only a few years prior and taking place in the same region also features a narrative style that functions in the dissemination of national moral values, the role that cinema plays in the negotiation of a gendered *mexicanidad* altered the construction of Camelia's character. In *corridos*, women who feature the aforementioned positively-valued attributes are allowed the same "hero" status as their male counterparts without having to acknowledge, much less compensate for their position in the national gender hierarchy, whereas women on screen traditionally have not been able to escape the constraints of gendered *mexicanidad* as determined by the macho patriarchal ideal.

Corresponding to the changes made to Camelia's character to suit the constraints of women on screen from the original narrative, the plot of the film has been adjusted accordingly. In the *Contrabando y traición* movie, Camelia (Ana Luisa Peluffo) is depicted as the antagonist while Emilio Varela (Valentin Trujillo) is the protagonist, evidenced on the cover image of the film (see below). The cover displays Emilio Varela in dark sunglasses in the foreground as the centerpiece of the film, glorified with a big gun and a cigarette in his mouth, with the action (car explosion, boat chase, helicopter and mounds of cash) depicted as pertinent to him. The actor's name appears above the title of the film, indicating his starring role, whereas the name of the actress playing Camelia is below, despite the fact that she is equally if not better known as a notoriously sexual, breast-baring *Cabaretera* actress since the mid 1950's. Needless to say, this interpretation of "*Contrabando y traición*" is unarguably a male-centered narrative, at the expense of Camelia's role as protagonist.

Emilio's function as protagonist and Camelia's function as antagonist structurally depend on one another: each character's actions and characteristics are the antithesis of the other. In considering the functions they fulfill in relation to the attributes they feature, the negotiation of their identities can be read to reconstruct the gendered identities in this genre of film while serving to present a familiar yet problematized moral lesson.



Contrabando y traición, 1976

The plot is centered around the young and ambitious yet unrespected and hard-done-by Emilio Varela from his beginnings as a lowly informant, or “rat” for the police, as he moves up the crime world’s ladder, headed by Camelia la Texana: men’s club owner, cabaret dancer, and big cheese of the drug-smuggling industry of the borderlands. Emilio manipulates those around him using the information he gathered as a “rat” as he tries to make enough money to get out of his uncle’s house in an impoverished neighborhood and make a better life for himself and his fiancée, the humble, pure, self-sacrificing María – “*la dueña de mí vida*,” – hoping to leave his criminal life behind and run away with her to San Francisco. In order to escalate his rank within the cartel, Emilio seduces Camelia and she initiates a sexual relationship with him, which he uses to acquire power for his financial gain. Hiding his intentions (and his fiancée) from her, he becomes her lover and her right hand man, replacing her former right hand man and helping her to manage her business, smuggling drugs and murdering her drug-running competitors in a series of border crossings. At the execution of the final step in Emilio’s master-plan – leaving Camelia for María and running off to San Francisco – Camelia murders him out of jealousy to the super-diegetic sounds of Los Tigres del Norte’s “*Contrabando y traición*”.

As a male protagonist, Emilio is allowed to maintain his “good guy” status despite his adulterous, deceptive, corrupt, and violent behavior, as his actions are justified in the film by his “good intentions” in trying to overcome his lot and marry a good woman – the type of behavior permitted for a male protagonist only according to the gendered standards of *mexicanidad*. Emilio, being the protagonist, is allotted scenes that develop the background of his character through his relationships with his uncle and fiancée, revealing details that may seem trivial when presented in isolation, as they do not serve to move the plot forward. These details, when considered collectively in the construction

of the character, reveal the way that this seemingly *macho* character is subjected to the renegotiation of gendered *mexicanidad*, characteristic of the hybridity of the borderlands and *Cine Fronterizo*.

While developing his position as a “good guy” in a scene introducing his pure and well-intentioned relationship with María, Emilio discloses that “*ní siquiera terminé la primaria*” – he never even had the opportunity to finish elementary school. Similarly, in another scene Emilio reveals his sorrows to his alcoholic uncle and his childhood caregiver, lamenting his dissatisfaction with his position of poverty; his inability to secure a steady job; and his low-class home and neighborhood – stating that he wants something better for his life. In another scene, Emilio’s uncle admits that Emilio’s criminal tendencies are his fault: as his caregiver, the uncle set a bad example and neglected to teach him how to be a law-abiding citizen, therefore Emilio “learned how to be a criminal” from him. The development of Emilio’s past as such constructs his character as a victim of society: a boy that never stood a chance. His uncle suggests that the neighborhood isn’t too bad, and that Emilio’s problems may result from his hanging around with the “wrong crowd” – serving as an explicit warning against the criminal life that he knew all too well – though Emilio does not take his advice into account. Emilio, after having expressed to María that he was too proud to “wash dishes” for a living, he turned to the drug cartel as his only option to get ahead in life. His involvement in criminal activity, achieved through his relationship with Camelia, such as drug trafficking and gang-related murder, gave him the money and power he desired. Despite his newly acquired position of power through sexual exploitation, all Emilio really wanted to do was run away to the United States to marry María – the ultimate *marianista*. On the surface, Emilio would seem the perfect *macho* throughout the course of the film: he is active, assertive, physical, socially mobile, stubborn, and womanizing. But if this were the case, and Emilio was a perfect protagonist, why then must he die in the end?

Beyond simply complying with the narrative of the *corrido*, Emilio's death calls the film's structure into question – what is the literary function of his demise within the structure of the film's plot? How does this contribute to the construction of his character? According to the structures of classic Mexican films, following the tradition of Greek Tragedies, a protagonist's demise must be due to a tragic flaw, serving as redemption for a condemning action or characteristic – therefore prompting the audience to search for Emilio's detrimental error in the film. If he were indeed the perfect macho, then none of his actions or characteristics would have condemned him to death as redemption, as everything that he embodies is justified through the patriarchal construction of the Mexican man. How then, can Emilio be identified within the imaginary of the structures of gendered *mexicanidad*? To answer these questions, one must take into account the protagonist's function in relation to that of the antagonist, as the structural negotiations of their characters within the narrative depend on each other. Understanding the function of Emilio's death by Camelia's hand is to understand how Camelia, as the “bad guy” antagonist is allowed to kill him and get away with it.

On screen, Camelia has been attributed many features that were not present in her character as a *corrido* heroine, bringing her closer to the whore-archetype based bad woman of classic Mexican cinema. The most prominent of these features is that of her sexuality on display: as the national model for women's *mexicanidad* essentially judges her value according to her sexual behavior, this aspect of her character could not be overlooked in Mexican film the way it was in the *corrido*. She has been made a cabaret dancer in her own men's club, which is a drug-front for the crime empire of which she is the head. Several scenes in the film display Camelia, scantily-clad in sequined cabaret costumes, sexily bearing her “taboo” body parts such as her breasts and buttocks for the male gaze of

the diegetic and external audience (Mulvey). Without any action or dialogue to move the plot these scenes only serve to sexualize her character by displaying her body for male visual pleasure, much like the dance scenes from classic Mexican *Cabaretera* films. Because of her financial position as a drug lord, she is obviously not displaying her sexuality for out of financial necessity, though there is an evident link between her sexuality and her power. All the men under her control in the drug operation are entranced by her sexual allure. This is best exemplified by her right-hand man previous to Emilio's intervention who, completely enamored by Camelia, states that he is willing to comply with her every will at any cost, and that his life would have no purpose without her. This type of relationship that Camelia has with her employees reinforces the patriarchal conception of women in power: that a woman can only achieve power, particularly over men, through her sexuality, as propagated in classic Mexican cinema's models of "the bad woman." Superficially, Camelia may seem to fall perfectly into the traditional category of the whore-archetype based bad woman – just another daughter of La Malinche – though the end of the narrative problematizes her character as compliant to this model. If the bad woman of Mexican Golden Age cinema can only be redeemed through marriage and motherhood or death, how can Camelia escape without either? Parallel to the analysis of Emilio's character, the mechanics of Camelia's construction and function feature a renegotiation that deviates from the classic national gendered model to a degree that may not reject the patriarchal order, though it most certainly problematizes it. These two characters, when analyzed in sync with each other, present a subversive flip in the patriarchal order that may not be apparent due to their superficial features that seem to comply with the classic gendered models.

Despite their physical and superficial characteristics – Emilio as the serious, strong, womanizing macho and Camelia as the devilish, "man-eating" seductress – Camelia and Emilio's characters

present reimaginings that, while acknowledging these “referents of legitimacy,” hybridize and reverse the traditional gender roles. Beginning with Emilio, his superficial macho characteristics are juxtaposed with his situation: though he appears to exert power through agency, his macho strength is called into question when we consider that he is merely a victim of circumstance – much like the “bad woman” protagonists in classic *Cabaretera* films. Having been forced into a situation where he must resort to deviant activity, he uses *his* sexuality to gain power and social mobility by manipulating Camelia into an intimate relationship with him, parallel to the classic “bad women” who, being victims of circumstance, are forced into the sexual deviance that becomes their vehicle for power. Also like the bad woman, throughout all of Emilio’s deviant endeavors, all he truly wants is to legitimize his life through marriage with María – the perfect model of the virginal good woman. Finally, to address the question of his death at the end, it serves to consolidate his compliance with the classic “bad woman” model: Emilio, like the prostitutes and seductresses of Mexican Golden Age Cinema, must be redeemed at the end of their narrative through literary justice. Emilio’s murder by Camelia’s hand serves to redeem his adulterous betrayal through his tragic death.

Emilio, functioning as the renegotiated and hybridized macho-bad woman protagonist, requires his antagonist counterpart to fulfill their role as well. Camelia’s character, though literally a cabaret dancer, does not fit into her traditional role as a *cabaretera*: she serves as the necessary opposite to Emilio’s hybridized *cabaretera* character as set out in the classic model. Similar to Emilio’s macho superficial qualities, Camelia’s image is presented as an independent, man-eating bad woman who gains power through the exploitation of her sexuality, giving the impression of a perfect whore-archetype based bad woman model, though there is one fundamental feature that propagates her divergence from the bad women of classic Mexican film: agency. The bad women of classic film,

being barred from the ability to generate meaning, are victims of circumstances that force them into the sexual deviance that affords them independence and power – their positions are not consequences of choice. Camelia, on the other hand, was not forced by circumstance into a life of independence and sexual deviance: she chose it. Camelia therefore is able to generate meaning through her actions instead of objectively carrying the meaning that society appoints to her, which is a drastic change from any traditional female models in the history of Mexican film.

Another aspect of Camelia's construction that distances her from any classical model is her complete lack of sensitivity or 'motherly' qualities, supposedly innate characteristics of women, as articulated in classic Mexican film through the good woman's motherly devotion to her husband and children; as well as the bad woman's passion as a subconscious expression of her desire for marriage and motherhood. Single and sexually liberal, Camelia demonstrates none of the above. One of the film's first scenes demonstrates her strong resistance against supposedly essential female sensibilities: as Camelia poses as a mother using a car full of kidnapped children to smuggle drugs across the border into the United States. Upon the success of the endeavor, she orders her men to get those snot-nosed brats out of her sight, "*que ya no los aguanto,*" – because she can't put up with them any longer. On top of this display of her complete absence of innate motherly instincts, Camelia demonstrates indifference, even to the point of abuse towards the men under her command, exemplified in her relationship with her second-in-command before Emilio. Because he is head-over-heels in love with her, Camelia is able to manipulate him in a series of rejections and subsequent teasing in a classic abusive relationship. Upon admitting his jealousy and distrust towards Emilio, Camelia tells him that he has no right to be jealous, that "*no soy nada tuyo*" – that she's nothing close to being his, but to exploit his love to her advantage, she tells him "*que no lo tomes tan a pecho, que siempre hay*

esperanza”: not to take it to heart, that there is always hope. He receives insults in exchange for his incessant attempts to impress and protect her: she dismisses his care and praise, calling him her “ugliest guardian angel,” yet he never ceases to bend to her will. While he and her other employees fulfill Camelia’s need for protection, Emilio fulfills her sexual needs. Beyond these relationships, Camelia demonstrates no further need or desire for men. She is never shown to express a desire for a stable, traditional, heteronormative relationship with any man, much less for marriage or motherhood.

The agency, control, sexual liberation, and lack of innate maternal instincts displayed by Camelia places her far beyond the constraints of the bad woman: they place her in the realm of men, specifically the abusive *macho*: victimizer of all. Charles Ramírez Berg, in his book “Cinema of Solitude” theorizing gender in Mexican film from 1967-1983, states that:

“Today’s Mexican woman can have the sexual freedom until only recently accorded exclusively to the Mexican male, but the price is losing both her femininity and her humanity. To take full advantage of a sexually liberal life-style the way a man would, a Mexican woman needs to become more like a man: callous and manipulating, cold and unfeeling” (65).

This is precisely what has become of Camelia La Texana: as the necessary counterpart to Emilio’s hybridized character displaying superficial macho qualities while functioning as the tragic “bad woman” hero, Camelia correspondingly displays superficial “bad woman” qualities while functioning as the macho enemy. Like a macho, Camelia’s villain character is mean, cold, and controlling in her

relationships not only with men, but with women as well. In a scene in which María humbly approaches her in regards to her relationship with Emilio, Camelia shoots her down, insulting her femininity in stating that she is not “woman enough” for him – demonstrating how Camelia, as a macho, is presented as an enemy to all: men and women alike. Camelia’s subjective position of power therefore has indeed been constructed at the expense of her humanity: not only does she function as a bad woman, but a bad man as well.

Recalling Mexican film’s objective of disseminating national moral values, Berg suggests that the function of this new female character possibility serves as a lesson against subverting the traditional gender roles:

“What these films warn women against is the danger that they, now able to have the same sexual freedoms as men, risk not only the short-term shame of losing their virginity, but the long-term tragedy of losing their “womanhood” – that is, their female identity as stereotypically defined by patriarchy [...] if you act like men, there is the likelihood that instead of becoming *like* them, you will *become* them” (65).

Berg therefore suggests that the sexually liberated woman, in inserting herself into the realm of men, loses her female *mexicanidad*, as the price for this liberation is her identity within the constraints of the national imaginary. I would argue that Camelia, as a character constructed in the context of *Cine Fronterizo* indeed is portrayed as a mean-hearted, strong-willed, un-motherly, *macha*, though the borderlands provide a space for her construction to be hybridized, allowing her to transcend the gender binaries set forth by the national patriarchal order. As formerly mentioned, Camelia fulfills

more than just the gender-flipped role of a macho man – features such as objectifying herself in an exhibition of her sexuality for male visual pleasure as a means of empowerment serve to demonstrate that her character still has one foot in the classic bad woman model, displaying the hybridity of old and new Mexican cinema by rearranging her role as a woman in *Cine Fronterizo*.

Despite the new possibility presented in *Contrabando y traición* for the hybridization of national gendered identities that allow characters to feature qualities traditionally appointed only to the opposite sex – such as Camelia’s agency – the meaning that these new identities create and carry are equally as influenced by the far-reaching, oppressive hand of the patriarchal order. Camelia’s character, although gender-flipped within her function in the film’s structure, embodies that which is “evil” for both man and woman. The classic patriarchal whore/bad woman model is strongly acknowledged in her physical manifestation throughout the entire film, while her *machismo* serves as a means to justify the presence of a female with agency. Indeed, Camelia’s antagonist character complies with the narrative of the song by killing Emilio and getting away with it, though as the concluding structure in the film’s plot, this act is a materialization of Camelia’s *machismo*: in the patriarchal society, the macho (wo)man always wins. Her hybridization subjectively generated meaning in her plot-moving actions throughout the film, though the meaning, similar to Berg’s proposal, warns women against the evils of “acting like a man”: though Camelia “wins” in killing Emilio and escaping in the end, she is still portrayed throughout the film as holding an evil and undesirable position in society. Since the Golden Age of Mexican film, a woman simply cannot escape her essential maternal and self-sacrificing traits in displaying sexual liberty, agency, self-indulgence, and independence – the way a man can – if she is to maintain the virtue of “goodness.”

While Camelia's character, despite her deviations from traditional gender binaries, complies with the unfortunate constraints on a woman's "goodness" according to the national gendered pillar of patriarchy, *Cine Fronterizo* offers a more positive model for the rearrangement of women's *mexicanidad* who, in all her righteousness, manages to infiltrate the world of men without being attributed the negative characteristics that stigmatize empowered women: *Lola la trailera* (Lola the trucker), the good yet independent, sexy but not sexualized, crime-fighting defender of the underdog.

Lola the Trucker



Lola la trailera, 1983

Lola the trucker (Rosa Gloria Chagoyán), as the second focal point of my analysis, is a character introduced by a trilogy of films of which she is the protagonist: *Lola la trailera* (Lola the Trucker, 1983), *El secuestro de Lola* (The Kidnapping of Lola, 1985), and *El gran reto* (The Great Challenge, 1990). Though I will focus mainly on the first film of the trilogy, I will draw examples from the other two films as well in my analysis of Lola's construction. In Catherine Benamou's work addressing Rosa Gloria Chagoyán's position within media and the meaning conveyed by her film corpus, she presents a bang-on description of the actress that interprets Lola, capturing the essence of her character throughout the series:

“Chagoyán's unique combination of patriotism and social irreverence, her affection towards the deviant and the less fortunate, her skillful maintenance of feminine agency and independence while in character [is] reflected in dialogue, bodily action and focalization within [...] her brand of *cine fronterizo*” (173).

Lola's character demonstrates a positive and accessible model for the reimagining of female *mexicanidad* in *Cine Fronterizo* throughout the trilogy, as her character conceals nothing in explicit expressions of righteousness and empowerment for women. Beyond simply bending the patriarchal pillar of classic Mexican film, Lola directly confronts it before kicking its ass. Explicitly addressing the traditional constraints on women's national identities before subverting them, Lola leaves nothing to the imagination regarding the intent of this righteous and resistant heroine. Benamou goes on to argue how Chagoyán, in person and in character, breaks the mold for a new female model that

subverts the previously discussed “manhandled” models defining the Mexican woman through a nationalistic patriarchal lens:

“A productive role can be found for subaltern subjectivities, long silenced by, folklorized, or belittled by the state and corresponding cinematic discourses (de la Mora, 2006; Ramírez Berg, 1992), and mistreated and marginalized in the United States by exclusionary immigration policies and opportunistic agents of exploitation” (173).

In this section, I seek to draw specific examples from the films in question to exemplify how Lola the trucker explicitly challenges the classic models for women’s roles through directly addressing and subsequently subverting the patriarchal structure in the diegetic action and dialogue – all the while presenting a positive and desirable new hybrid model for the construction of a female *mexicanidad* in the borderlands. As a skilled trucker, virtuous crime-fighter, and honorable human being, every decision and action that Lola takes proves her to be equal to or better than the men whose world she manages to infiltrate. As opposed to Camelia la Texana, Lola’s border-constructed identity presents a positive role model for empowering women whose allure goes beyond that of simply exercising independence and agency: she displays competence and ability that equals or even exceeds that of the male characters; she represents the Mexican “everywoman” physically and socio-economically; and she maintains her femininity and female “goodness” while she’s at it. Additionally, I will explore the characteristics that problematize her seemingly perfect subversion of the patriarchal constraints for women’s *mexicanidad*. As there is significant overlap between the canons of female “goodness” and the structure of the virgin-based good woman, Lola’s construction can be seen as compliant with some aspects of the traditional national patriarchal values, leading one to question how far she is truly

able to resist the patriarchal pillar – like Canclini’s patrimonial monuments, *Cine Fronterizo*’s women on screen are subject to the hybridization of the classic and the modern, the center and periphery.

Lola comes from humble beginnings as the daughter of a single, trucker father (the mother’s absence remains unexplained), living in the northern borderlands of Mexico. Lola’s father was a proud man who had taught her how to drive his semi-trailer – the family heritage – though refused her offer to help him by doing so professionally, telling her “*pero tú eres mujer, y esto es trabajo para hombres*”: “but you are a woman, and this is men’s work,” – addressing the patriarchal gendering of work distribution at the earliest development of the characters. In the beginning of the film, her father learns that his employer at the trucking company had been hiding drugs on his trailer to smuggle them to the United States. He quits the company in a fit of rage, denouncing the criminal activity, stating his unwillingness to participate in drug trafficking, as he is an “honorable man.” He is subsequently mutilated and murdered by narco-thugs under the orders of his former boss, Don Leonceo – the inciting incident of the trilogy. Being left with only her godparents and her father’s semi-trailer, Lola exercises her agency early on in the film in a demonstration not only of her empowered femininity, but also of her working-class socio-economic position as being *del pueblo*: of the people. With her father gone and in need of income, Lola tells her godparents, her *Tía* and *Padrino*, that she aspires to be a trucker in a dialogue that explicitly expresses where she stands:

-Godmother: “But you, a trucker, among all those savages?”

-Lola: “But *Tía*, don’t forget that my father was a trucker.”

-Godmother: “I’m sorry my girl, but it’s dangerous work – and it’s for men.”

-Lola: “So what? I can do whatever a man can. And besides, I know how to drive a semi.”

This dialogue restates her father's earlier proclamation that would bar women from working as truckers, albeit becoming financially independent and entering the public sphere: traditionally limited to men and/or prostitutes, as discussed previously. Despite her godparents' concerns, Lola takes up trucking, though with her *Padrino* as her copilot as she didn't know how to change a tire or deal with mechanics, resisting the patriarchal constraints on women's spaces by literally and metaphorically taking the wheel in exercising her independence. In a similar dialogue shortly thereafter, Lola finds herself discussing employment terms with her father's former boss, Don Leonceo, in his hacienda. She is still not aware of his hand in her father's death. Despite the strictly professional relationship she and the crooked trucker/narco-trafficker share, as she and her *Padrino* casually converse with Don Leonceo, he refers to her as "*bonita*" – pretty girl, and caresses her face and arm during the dialogue, demonstrating how he objectifies Lola: perceiving her not as a worker but as a woman to be had. In the dialogue, Leonceo nonchalantly offers to marry Lola: "*todo esto puede ser tuyo, y nunca tendrás que trabajar*" – that all his riches "could be [hers]" so she "would never have to work again." Though at this time Lola considered him to be a good person, she turned him down, stating that "*prefiero ser trailera*" – "I'd rather be a trucker," in yet another demonstration of her strong-willed agency and independence and her identity as a working-class woman.

Though Lola's display of agency in exercising her choice to work as a trucker in itself presents a subversion to the patriarchal structure of classic Mexican film, her character goes beyond the mere execution of a choice: Lola proves to be as capable and competent as any trucker, if not excelling as she starts from the bottom, gaining skills and the respect of her peers throughout the narrative. Lola's truck-driving skills are demonstrated in many action scenes throughout the series, beginning in the first film when a man, who had previously made sexually lewd comments towards her in a truck-

stop, challenged her to a dangerous highway race by intimidating her on the road: honking and tailgating. While Lola's *Padrino* closed his eyes and prayed in fear, Lola confidently kept on truckin' until she outran the challenger, winning the race and proving her superiority over her male opponent.

As previously mentioned, Lola took on her *Padrino* as copilot at the beginning of the first film on the grounds that she didn't know how to change a tire – suggesting a lack in her trucking capabilities. Part-way through the first film, Lola indeed pops a tire, the situation that instigates her relationship with her later-to-be-boyfriend, Jorge, the undercover policeman posing as a trucker, as he pulls over his semi to change her tire – since her *Padrino* turned out to prove useless in the endeavor. Jorge performs this favor for a reluctant Lola in exchange for a date at the next truck-stop diner – the plot movement that inevitably involves Lola in crime-fighting as in this scene she reveals to Jorge that she knows he is an undercover cop and she becomes involved in the operation. When Lola arrives at the diner, she is the only female present except for the waitress. The dialogue that ensues presents yet another explicit subversion to the constricting patriarchal rule, while affirming Lola's self-identification as just another humble trucker:

Jorge: “This isn't an appropriate place for you – it's a *cantina* disguised as a diner”

Lola: “I'm a trucker, and I'm no different than the rest of them.”

Jorge: “But you're a woman.”

Lola: “So what? I can do whatever they can do.”

Jorge: “Except change a tire.”

Lola: “If you hadn't showed up to offer, I would have changed it on my own.”

Lola's raging independence, as stated in this dialogue, even in the face of romantic interest, eventually proves to be 100% true. In the third film, Lola is seen not only changing the tires of an old semi, but also joining a group of men in fixing it up: that she indeed does develop professionally and

eventually surpass the average skillset required of truckers – once again proving her professional merit.

Beyond the professional realm as a trucker, Lola also proves her true grit as a crime-fighter, not only by “holding her own” but also by saving Jorge on several occasions. Once the drug-lord trucker-boss Leonceo catches on to Jorge as an undercover cop, he sends a crooked highway patrol man to beat and kill him. Lola, trucking down the highway, witnesses the attack and scares away the patrol, saving Jorge and bringing him to safety. Now exposed to the criminal organization, Lola and Jorge hide out in a clandestine trailer-brothel until one of the prostitutes sells Jorge out to Don Leonceo, enabling him to kidnap Jorge and hold him hostage at his hacienda. Lola discovers who the traitor is and proceeds to instigate one of Chagoyan’s renown “girlfights” – complete with slapping, scratching, and hair pulling, screaming, wrestling and crawling on the ground. Lola inevitably emerges as the “disheveled victor,” able to extract the information regarding Jorge’s whereabouts “at the climax of the film’s [plot], as if to underscore the importance of [her] role in resolving the central conflict” (Benamou, 180). Then, in a demonstration of Lola’s toughness and crime-fighting savvy, she acquires a bus and a gun and continues to rescue Jorge from his captors in another high-speed car chase, at the conclusion of which she gets shot by the bad guys. Despite her wound, Lola follows Jorge’s instructions to prevent Don Leonceo from getting on his escape plane, reluctantly shooting him after he refuses to be talked down. Through her multiple rescues of Jorge, investigation into the criminal activity, and ability to stop the villain, Lola succeeds in proving that there is indeed nothing a man can do that she cannot. And besides, she can drive a semi.

Because Lola la trailera is intended to present a new, desirable, “good” model for women that will upset the patriarchal order, she is constructed with a set of undeniably “good” characteristics and values that, similar to Camelia la Texana’s undeniably *bad* characteristics, would cast no doubt on who is the truly righteous “good guy” in this series. For example, Lola cannot bear to see a person in need without helping them, free of any judgment on the “goodness” of others. This aspect of Lola’s character is demonstrated through her relationship with Amapola, the comic madam of a clandestine cabaret/brothel hidden in a semi-trailer; her equally comic, effeminate male assistant; and her “girls” – the prostitutes of the brothel. Their relationship began in the first film when Lola et. al. hid out in the brothel-trailer, a popular hang-out in the trucker community that her *Padrino* was well acquainted with. Jorge suggested that they hide out there because “it will be the last place Don Leonceo would look for [Lola],” indicating the assumed disparity between Lola’s moral set and that of the prostitutes. Regardless, upon arrival, Lola displayed no negative judgment of them, and was in fact kind and grateful towards them for taking her in. In the second film, the macho, upstanding police commander, interpreted by Emilio ‘El Indio’ Fernández, busts Amapola, along with her assistant and group of prostitutes, and had them held in jail. Lola goes to bail them all out on her own dollar, expressing her loyalty and charity as a friend as well as her own brand of justice in a dialogue with the Commander:

Lola: “They are my friends, Commander, and they’ve helped me out many times and now that they’re in trouble I want to reciprocate.”

Commander: “You’re a good girl, and it’s not worth getting wound up in their problems.”

Lola: “Come on Commander, don’t be mean, I know that beneath that tough-guy persona there is a heart of gold.”

Once the Commander allows Lola to bail Amapola and her girls out, he gives Lola back her bail money, telling her that he holds her in high esteem, and asks her to promise to keep those girls out of trouble. As a good girl always keeps her promise, later in the film the same trailer that was once

Amapola's famous brothel was renovated and restored as a casino trailer, with the former prostitutes working as dancers, waitresses, bartenders and card dealers. Aside from demonstrating Lola's humble and non-judgmental nature, these actions serve to establish Lola's caring and charitable character by helping those who are considered to be the dregs of society to improve their lot and leave criminality behind, perpetually defending the underdog.

Another strong example for her demonstration of non-judgmental charity is through the secondary character Pibe, a thirteen-year-old vagabond that she picked up hitchhiking on the highway. Despite Pibe's continual and redundant attempts to hit on Lola, she feeds him and adopts him as a second co-pilot on her adventures, providing him with a steady job and exhibiting her motherly instincts in caring for him, despite her *Padrino's* warnings against "boys like that." In the second film, Lola goes out of her way to rescue Pibe when she finds out through the grapevine that he had gotten involved in drugs. When she finally finds him, passed out and foaming at the mouth in a ditch full of child drug addicts, Lola cries for the first time in the series, showing no judgment towards his vice and poor decision making in a blatant display of motherly altruism, evoking the classic image of the suffering mother. Pibe's drug addiction, nearly causing his death, like the murder of her father at the hand of a powerful drug-lord, reinforces Lola's passion for fighting drug-traffickers that has been her *raison-d'être* throughout the series.

To further develop Lola's essential goodness, she is constructed in a way that doesn't allow for any negative interpretations on the actions she takes in her perpetual pursuit of justice. For example, as described above, her involvement in crime fighting, particularly in taking down Don Leoncio's drug empire, emerged out of her relationship with Jorge, as she participated in the operation through

seeking to rescue him. Though she was made aware that her father was murdered by Don Leonceo's command, Lola's was solely concerned with rescuing Jorge and seeking justice – never revenge. Lola's righteous intentions are exemplified in the final scene of the first film in which, after saving Jorge from Don Leonceo's kidnapping, she is instructed not to allow Leonceo to escape on his getaway plane. Lola runs towards him, gun in hand, forcefully instructing him to stop running and stay away from the plane. Despite her numerous warnings, Leonceo continued his attempt to escape, leaving Lola no other option but to shoot him, as she did so reluctantly. In this scene, it is made evident that Lola did not want to exert violence upon the villain, though in her passionate pursuit for justice, she was left with no alternative. Throughout the entire series, Lola is never seen to exert violence on any individual if it is not to a specific point, such as self-defense, defense of someone she cares for, or in the search for justice. This pursuit continues throughout the rest of the film series, as Lola dedicates herself to fighting evil drug-traffickers to attain justice. In the second film, after she manages to escape captivity under the new villain, *El Maestro*, Jorge warns her of the dangers of crime-fighting in a dialogue:

Jorge: "The men that are after us are not going to stop bothering you."

Lola: "I'm not afraid of them. I've sworn to fight *narcotráfico*, and that is what I'm going to do.

Jorge: "You're very brave, but it's better to leave it to the police."

Regardless, Lola is inevitably entangled in the situation between *El Maestro* and Jorge, therefore unable to escape the battle against narco-trafficking, willingly or otherwise. Lola, because of her crime-fighting capabilities, is assumed by *El Maestro* to be an undercover cop, and is therefore made a target by his giant, evil, semi-trailer war machine. Jorge's fellow police officers, therefore suggest to Lola that she be their human bait for taking down the villains, which she accepts, once again putting herself in danger in the pursuit of justice. With this act, she demonstrates her self-sacrificing nature for the sake of that which is good, further

developing the essential and undeniable goodness of her character in her construction as a desirable model for Mexican women's roles.

Another aspect of Lola the trucker's appeal as a model for national women's identity is that of her physical appearance and all its implications. Benamou suggests that actress "Chagoyán's desirability resides in her ability to proudly embody Mexico's everywoman, rather than beauty pageant 'perfection' other" (174). Her common clothing style – usually 'modern *ranchera*' in tight jeans, a relatively conservative sweatshirt or blouse, earrings, and "boots that are made for walkin'" – in conjunction with her natural appearance – "naturally buxom, hefty-hipped, yet slim-waisted, with a firm jaw, yet sporting a delicate smile, still coiffed in a cascade of dark curls" – lends to a look that can be widely identified with by a large group of Mexican women, unlike the slim, blonde, surgically-altered norm for more mainstream actresses at the time (174).

Her humble, attractive, everyday-sexy aesthetic attracts a plethora of unwanted male sexual attention in the diegesis – another facet of relatability for common women. Seeing as how Lola has infiltrated the world of men, she finds herself to be the only female present in a number of scenes. With her *Padrino* as "protection," she often ignores catcalls and lewd comments from the male truckers that she is surrounded by, though he eventually proves useless in this aspect as well, unable to defend Lola and deter this unwanted sexual attention. In a scene in which Lola is in a truck-stop restaurant with Jorge, she encounters the very same trucker that had harassed her previously in another truck-stop and instigated the instance of highway racing that I outlined earlier. He grabs Lola, insisting that she "deserves a prize" for out-trucking him earlier. As the third instance of harassment from the same man, Lola sharply responds: "*Yo te doy tu premio!*" – "I'll give you a prize!" slapping his face and

kneeing him in the chest. The trucker retaliates by hitting Lola and choking her, at which point Jorge steps in, instigating an all-out barfight, in which Lola throws punches and smashes bottles on heads like the rest of ‘em in defense of herself and Jorge, demonstrating her ability to defend herself from macho harassment, and that she won’t take shit from anyone – an empowering moment encouraging a radical revolt against a widely accepted reality for women in a patriarchal society. By physically and verbally defending herself against commonplace sexual harassment in the public sphere, Lola’s character also makes a statement against the patriarchal structure that restricts women to the private sphere through the threat of violation by men: not only can Lola, the Mexican “everywoman,” carry out a role outside of the home, but she also has the right and the ability to protest harassment and defend herself against the macho threat to her body and identity: just because she is a woman in a public space does not mean that she *is* public space.

Lola’s physical attractiveness, while serving to construct her as the empowering role model of the Mexican “everywoman,” may present a problematic aspect to her character when considered from the spectator’s perspective. While in the diegesis she repels all attacks on her sexual being, justifying her public position within the film’s narrative, her physical image and body is still being constructed for the pleasure of the male audience’s gaze, maintaining her popularity with male audiences despite the series’ emphatically female perspective. Although Lola’s outfits throughout the films are relatively conservative, she is always wearing either tight pants or a dress, which allow gratuitous views for male visual pleasure when she is, for example, climbing the trailer of a semi-truck, or wrestling on the ground with another woman in one of her infamous girlfight scenes. A few of her outfits throughout the series, such as what she is wearing on her first date with Jorge, is less than conservative for the norms of the time, bearing a significant amount of cleavage in a low-cut blouse.

Though this look is uncharacteristic for Lola throughout the films, simply googling “Lola la trailera” reveals a plethora of unofficial movie posters and pop-art that heavily sexualizes her image far beyond anything she displays in the films (see below). This sexualized reception of Lola demonstrates how, despite her character’s countless expressions of refusal to be sexualized within the diegesis, Lola la trailera’s sexy image is still constructed as an object for the gaze of male visual pleasure (Mulvey).



This sexualized aspect of Lola’s construction threatens to problematize her character’s identity as the patriarchy-breaking empowered woman, as it would appear to conform with the patriarchal structure’s value of women: if they are in public, they are public women, therefore objects to be used by men however they please. To further complicate this problem, Benamou suggests that it is counterproductive to insist that “a distinction should be made [...] between ‘progressive’ images of feminine resistance *versus* ‘conformist’ or ‘compromising’ (or even ‘repressive’) images of women

as sexual objects” (179). Instead, we should consider Lola as a hybridized character of the hybrid *Cine Fronterizo* genre, as she, much like Camelia, is constructed through the influences of the traditional roles of classic Mexican cinema while reimagined in a new and creative way, allowing for an identity that embodies aspects of the patriarchal pillar while effectively smashing it at the same time. Her sexual attractiveness, despite its audience reception, does not necessarily have to be “tantamount to sexual objectivity” (Benamou, 179).

Lola’s sexual attractiveness is not the only aspect of her character that demonstrates a construction influenced by the traditional “manhandled” models for women’s roles. There is a significant amount of overlap between the characteristics that construct Lola’s essential “goodness” and the national moral values determining what it means to be a “good woman” in the patriarchal lens. A prime example is that of her motherliness, as displayed in her relationship with Pibe, described above. Inherent motherly instincts are a characteristic that has been essential to the construction of “good women” throughout Mexican film, and beyond, as the archetypes for the identity of all women in the national imaginary. Though the young Lola does not have children of her own, her display of maternal instincts in conjunction with the direction of her relationship with Jorge – slowly yet “perfectly” progressing throughout the series – present her as a good mother waiting to happen. Lola also features many of the collateral characteristics of a *marianista* mother, such as her tendency towards self-sacrifice, suffering for others, and nonjudgmental altruism. These characteristics are made apparent in the film through Lola’s many actions, such as her willingness to take a bullet for Jorge; putting herself in danger as human bait for the sake of justice; weeping for Pibe the drug addict; and posting her own money as bail to rescue Amapola and her group of hookers. Despite

Lola's firmly anti-macho persona, her motherly attributes, while serving to illustrate her good nature as a human being, appear to function in conformity with the patriarchal values of Mexican society.

Furthermore, another aspect of Lola's character that problematizes her seemingly patriarchy-smashing persona can be read in comparison to the secondary protagonist, her boyfriend Jorge. Whereas Jorge is allowed to use excessive violence throughout the series in his crime fighting endeavors, sometimes unjustifiably instigating fights, gunning down masses of anonymous villains, or brutally beating his criminal opponents, Lola's use of violence is much more limited. The fights in which Lola is involved do not feature blood or graphic violence, as are those between the male characters, and they are always in defense of herself or one of the protagonists. She is only seen to shoot individual bad guys, unlike Jorge's mass shootings in fight scenes, and she only does so when they pose a direct threat to her on screen. The one exception to this is the scene where she guns down Don Leonceo at the end of the first film, as he did not present a direct threat to her at that moment. As previously explained, she shot Leonceo reluctantly, having been left no other choice after her efforts to talk him down proved unsuccessful. This contrast between Lola and Jorge's actions in fighting sequences can only be explained by the fact that female characters simply cannot employ violence with impunity while maintaining "good" status as males can and do in action films, as a good woman typically must be more passive than her male counterpart.

As we saw with *Camelia la Texana* in the cinematic adaptation of *Contrabando y traición*, Mexican national film does not allow for a protagonistic, "good guy" bad woman – if a female character is constructed with certain attributes such as sexual liberation, excessive violence, and selfishness (read: lacking self-sacrifice), she cannot function as a protagonist the way a male with these same features

could. Lola must therefore be attributed qualities that comply with the national patriarchal model of a good woman – especially to compensate for her freedom, agency, capability, and independence – so that she can be justified as a valid contemporary model for a reimagined women’s identity in *Cine Fronterizo*. Though Lola’s seemingly perfect and well-developed subversion of classic national women’s roles has been problematized through her conformity with some aspects of traditional women’s roles, such as sexual objectification, motherliness, self-sacrifice and (relative) non-violence, the audience must ask themselves: are these features necessarily tantamount to conformity? Regardless, the hybridized construction of Lola’s character presents a positive role model that manages to resist the abuses on women presented by machismo while maintaining her femininity, her *mexicanidad*, and her “goodness,” functioning as a desirable reimagining of a (still-) gendered national identity in *Cine Fronterizo*. Lola, much like Camelia, has therefore presented a primary female character that embodies the way that the patriarchal pillar has indeed been rearranged in the hybridization of female national identity and traditional women’s roles in the cinematic depiction of the borderlands.

Conclusions

As demonstrated through the analysis of Camelia and Lola in *Contrabando y traición* and *Lola la trailera*, each of these primary female characters displays a hybrid construction, though each with different results, embodying elements from different spatial and temporal spaces that have rearranged and reimagined the way women’s roles are portrayed on screen by producing new, meaning-making models for women in Mexican national cinema. As a reflection of the border *mestisaje* that shapes the discourse of Mexican-American, Chicano, and Mexican borderlands identity construction, *Cine*

Fronterizo allows for the reimaginings of these national identities, reconstructing and rearranging the pervasive structuring pillars of society: fatherland, family, and most importantly the patriarchy.

Camelia's villain character demonstrates the borderlands *mestisaje* between Mexican Golden Age Cinema's whore-based bad woman, in all her sexual devilishness; and the "manly" macho villain of classic *Cabareteras* in her selfish and cold-hearted victimization of everyone around her; as her "referents of legitimacy," all within the loosely-followed narrative of Los Tigres del Norte's "*Contrabando y traición*." On one hand, her undesirability as a model for women's roles, as Berg outlined in his theorizing of the macho woman, serves as a classic cinematic moral lesson for the spectator, therefore in the discussion of newly imagined *mexicanidad* as well: sure, a woman *can* exercise agency, independence, and sexual liberation, but at the cost of her femininity, her humanity, and her moral value – her "goodness" – why would she? On the other hand, an optimistic reading of her character would state that the new meaning produced by her hybrid construction offers a female model of *mexicanidad* in which a woman – regardless of how "bad" she may be – is able to subjectively create meaning for herself as opposed to the classic model that she draws from. The classic model limits her to the meaning imposed by her male counterparts, whereas the hybridized position at least allows her the choice that the patriarchal structure had formerly denied. Camelia therefore has managed to rearrange the patriarchal pillar through her new and hybridized character model, though in this case it is illustrated as a negative role model for female *mexicanidad*.

Contrarily, Lola provides national cinema with a very desirable role model for national female identity, presenting a character that hybridizes the sexual attractiveness expected of women on screen in that time with a particularly Mexican visual aesthetic; a very modern and very empowering display

of agency and capability; and all things “good” according to the classic model for a Mexican woman as her “referent of legitimacy.” Not only is she constructed with the ability to exercise agency that allows her to generate meaning, she also displays a high level of competency and capability in all her endeavors that provide a positive and empowering model of a Mexican woman. Despite her compliance with certain characteristics of the ‘manhandled’ model for good women, the new meaning she generates through the hybridity of these *marianista* characteristics with her righteous, resistant, take-no-shit, “I can do whatever a man does” essence prompts a reading into her character that can almost dismiss the former as demonstrations of her “goodness” because, as Benamou suggests in regards to her sexual attractiveness, must these characteristics be interpreted as being tantamount to submission to the patriarchal rule?

Lola and Camelia, being representative of the renegotiated constructions of female models in *Cine Fronterizo*, like *Cine Fronterizo* itself as a whole, contribute to the hybridized reimaginings of national identity constructions in the borderlands through the rearrangements of the traditional Mexican pillars of society: acknowledging the structural order of the fatherland, the family, and the patriarchy while rearranging the way they function in relation to each other and the characters within these border-crossing narratives. As a genre of film that participates in the precarious, reciprocally constructed discourse constructing a national identity for Mexicans in the borderlands; Mexican-Americans; and Mexican migrants in the United States; it reflects the diaspora’s fluid nature in hybridizing that which is consolidated and nationally defined as *mexicanidad* with that which is contemporary: spatially and temporally validating in the *fronterizo* context. As cinema has served as a national monument for Mexico since its height during the Golden Age, it is a valuable space for the investigation on the changes that national identity has experienced, particularly when

deterritorialized and appropriated by the popular classes, “open[ing] up original possibilities for experimentation and communication for democratizing uses” (Canclini, 228). Chicanos and those who identify as Mexican in the borderlands, as a community that is “hungry for symbols,” benefit from the democratization of culture as it allows them to join in the discussion of their own identity, which speaks for the importance of considering *Cine Fronterizo* to be a “worthy” form of cultural production in providing empowering narratives to a group that formerly lacked a cinema with which they could identify. The space for discussion opened up by these films has provided grounds for discussing the rearrangements of traditional moral values and the structural basis of *mexicanidad* through the analysis of on-screen gender relations in the borderlands, contributing valuable insight regarding the national imaginary that shapes border identities. This space also offers potential for future investigations into other aspects of these identities, such as the question of how race and *mestisaje* are reimagined in the perpetual hybridization in the *Cine Fronterizo* context, which would be beneficial for the understanding of these films, their audiences, and the reciprocal impact they have on one another.

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