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“I Am a Mother First”: Mexican Women Filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s and the
Representation of Motherhood

Isabel Arredondo

A thesis

in

The Mel Hoppenheim

School of Cinema

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Film Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2009

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ISBN: 978-0-494-63267-3
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ISBN: 978-0-494-63267-3

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ABSTRACT

“I Am a Mother First”: Mexican Women Filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s and
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Isabel Arredondo

This thesis examines images of mothers in classical and contemporary Mexican cinema. The purpose is to contrast the portrayals of mothers in melodramas produced during the ‘Golden Age’ of Mexican cinema (1940s to 1950s), a model continued until the 1970s, and in films made by the so-called ‘third-wave’ generation of Mexican women filmmakers (directors who made their first feature films after 1985). The main argument is that the films directed by third-wave directors propound a non-narcissistic type of feminine idealization and propose women characters who see themselves as individuals.

This thesis uses psychoanalytic theory and particularly the psychoanalytic discussions of motherhood developed within feminist theory and feminist approaches to film to examine the representation of motherhood. Kaja Silverman’s notion of narcissistic idealization and Kelly Oliver’s analysis of mothers’ depression are fundamental to differentiate classical and third-wave representations of mothers in Mexican cinema, especially from the point of view of Mexican women filmmakers who value their own identity as mothers.

The Introduction lays out the thesis’ form and focus. Chapter One contextualizes the professional and ideological position of Mexican women filmmakers of the new

generation. Chapter Two examines representations of mothers in classical Mexican melodramas. Chapter Three concentrates on discussing representations of mothers in films directed by third-wave filmmakers.

The main argument is that third-wave Mexican women filmmakers, while moving away from the maternal ideals predominant in classical Mexican films, do not discard feminine idealization altogether. Instead, they view idealization as a strategy of identity formation set outside of the dichotomy Virgin/Whore which informs traditional representations of motherhood in Mexican cinema.

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To my mother, who has given me the strength to face many challenges.

Introduction

Motherhood has been a thorny issue for scholars of Mexican film and Mexican women filmmakers alike. It would not be an exaggeration to say that images of motherhood have always been present in Mexican films and yet have not been critically studied from a feminist perspective. Examining Mexican films directed by women from the 1920s until the 1970s clearly shows that Mexican women filmmakers during this period are not interested in the topic of motherhood. Motherhood, however, becomes central to the narrative of women directors during the 1980s. Among the most important films that highlight motherhood are María Novaro's *Lola* (1989), Marisa Sistach's *Los pasos de Ana* (1989), Busi Cortés' *El secreto de Romelia* (1989), and Dana Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz* (1984) and *Angel de fuego* (Angel of fire 1991). The goal of this thesis is to examine the representation of motherhood in films made by third-wave Mexican women directors and to explain why these films contribute to an understanding of motherhood from a feminist perspective.

The idea for this thesis came from contrasting comments made by two filmmakers at a conference in Tijuana in 1990, the "Encuentro de Mujeres Cineastas y Videoastas Latinas" (Gathering of Latina Women Filmmakers and Videomakers). At one of the question-and-answer sessions, a question surfaced about the identities of the filmmakers in regard to motherhood. One of the filmmakers present, Marcela Fernández Violante, declared that she was first and foremost an artist and that her identity as a mother came second.¹ In contrast, a third-wave filmmaker, María Novaro, thought that motherhood was fundamental to her identity and thus that it came first.² The discussion between

Fernández Violante and Novaro led me to look for historical and social reasons that could explain why these filmmakers' identities contrasted so sharply. In particular, I searched for reasons within the filmmakers' education and their position within the Mexican film industry.

During my research, I also considered the representations of mothers in all the films made by Mexican women filmmakers. In the films of Fernández Violante or Matilde Landeta—another Mexican filmmaker who attended the conference and who shared Fernández Violante's views on motherhood—motherhood is a marginal identity for female characters. In contrast, in third-wave films such as *Elvira Luz Cruz, pena máxima*, *Lola*, *Los pasos de Ana*, *El secreto de Romelia* and *Ángel de fuego* motherhood is a key issue. I selected these and other films of the 'Third-generation' of Mexican female filmmakers because of the centrality that motherhood plays in them. Discussion of these films constitute the main corpus of this thesis, together with the analysis of other films that question traditional definitions of women's identities, such as Cortés' *Las Buenromero* (1979), *Un frágil retorno* (1980), *Hotel Villa Goerne* (1981), and *El lugar del corazón* (1984) and Novaro's *Una isla rodeada de agua* (1985). In evaluating these films, I became aware of an important element: the representation of motherhood in third-wave films makes implicit or explicit references to the representations of mothers in Mexican melodramas of the classical period, those made during the 1940s to 1950s. Third-wave films use classical melodramas as a jumping off point against which to propose an alternative way to understand motherhood. Given the contemporary films' reference to classical melodramas, I included widely known classical melodramas such as

El Indio Fernández's *María Candelaria* (1943), Fernando de Fuentes' *Doña Bárbara* (1943) and *Cuando los hijos se van* (1941) as part of my corpus.

Methodology

Three areas of study influenced this thesis. To approach the different positions Mexican women filmmakers take with regards to motherhood, I draw from the historiography of women filmmakers in Mexico. To tackle the representation of mothers in classical and contemporary Mexican films I use psychoanalytic theory and particularly the psychoanalytic discussions of motherhood developed within feminist theory and feminist approaches to film.

Gender became a category for analysis in the scholarship on Mexican film in the 1980s. One of the earliest articles that considers gender when studying Mexican women directors is Julianne Burton's "Inside the Mexican Film Industry: A Woman's Perspective" (1986). Burton's article features only one director: Marcela Fernández Violante. Examinations of Mexican women filmmakers' works appear in Paulo Antonio Paranaguá's "Pioneers: Women Filmmakers of Latin America" (1989) and in Luis Trelles' *Cine y mujer en América Latina: directoras de largo-metrajés de ficción* (1991).

Scholars have paid special attention to a group of women filmmakers who began directing during the 1980s. Within this scholarship we can distinguish feminist and non-feminist oriented historiographies. The former include all Mexican women directors without making a distinction about which ones contributed to a feminist perspective. This is the case of Jorge Ayala Blanco's "La mirada feminina" (1991), in which the Mexican scholar examines thirteen women directors working in industrial and independent

productions: María Elena de Velasco, Isela Vega, Lupita D'Alessio, Sonia Infante, Maricarmen de Lara, Marcela Fernández Violante, Busi Cortés, María Novaro, Marise Sistach, Adriana Contreras, Rebeca Becerril, Sonia Riquer, and Ximena Cuevas. By contrast, feminist oriented historiographies focus on what I call third-wave directors, mainly Busi Cortés, María Novaro, Dana Rotberg, Marisa Sistach, and Guita Schyfter. These directors are featured in Margara Millan's *Genero y representacion: Tres mujeres directoras de cine en Mexico* (1995) and *Derivas de un cine femenino* (1999), Elissa Rashkin's *Women Filmmakers in Mexico* (2001), and my own book of interviews, *Palabra de Mujer: Historia oral de las directoras de cine mexicanas 1988-1994* (2001). There are also important articles that highlight the contributions of third-wave directors, for instance Patricia Vega's "Las directoras de cine en Mexico" (1991), Joanne Hershfield and David Maciel's "Women and Gender Representation in the Contemporary Cinema of Mexico" (1999), Patricia Torres' two articles, "La investigacion sobre el cine de mujeres en Mexico" (1998) and "Imagenes filmicas de las mujeres en el cine mexicano contemporaneo" (2002), and Norma Iglesias Prieto's "Gazes and Cinematic Readings of Gender: Danzon and Its Relationship to Its Audience." My thesis also includes film critics' views of third-wave filmmakers published in Mexican magazines and newspapers.

None of the previously mentioned books or articles is dedicated to the study of motherhood in the work of contemporary Mexican women filmmakers. The only study that examines motherhood at length is Oscar Robles' dissertation "Identidades maternacionales en el cine de Maria Novaro" (Maternational Identities in Maria Novaro's Films, 2005). In his dissertation, Robles examines the relationship between the

representation of motherhood in Novaro's first three feature films and the construction of Mexican national identity. He relates images of mothers in *Lola*, *Danzón* (1991) and *El jardín del Edén* (1994) with the political change brought about by President Salinas' six years in office (sexenio). Robles points out that in Novaro's films, women's liberation expands, from the local context in *Lola*, to the regional context in *Danzón*, and finally to the international arena in *El jardín del Edén*. In the dissertation, the liberation of women in Novaro's three films is set in contrast to the patriarchal values that dominate the Golden Age films. Robles takes his conclusions further, arguing that Novaro's films document a change from a patriarchal to a non-patriarchal society; for Robles, Novaro's non-patriarchal films show that Mexico left patriarchal values behind during the Salinas' sexenio. While it is true that Novaro's films represent non-patriarchal values at the local, regional, and international level, one cannot so easily conclude that during the Salinas sexenio Mexico's patriarchal traditions disappeared.

My thesis and Robles' dissertation have points in common, but are significantly different. Both studies focus on the representation of motherhood, both contrast third-wave films with classical melodramas, and both find that Novaro's films portray non-patriarchal values. There are, however, important differences. My thesis includes three other Mexican women directors (Busi Cortés, Marisa Sistach, and Dana Rotberg)³ and, my intention differs from Robles'; I do not intend to show that Mexican society has left patriarchal values behind, but rather I examine the psychological processes involved in the representations of motherhood.

One of my most important goals is to find concepts that allow me to explore the representation of motherhood in classical and contemporary films in all its complexity,

particularly in regards to women's self identity. Robles and other film scholars and film critics discuss classical representations of mothers by using the dichotomy "good mother/bad mother" or "Virgin/Whore." This dichotomy emphasizes that classical representations of mothers are problematic because they restrict women's sexuality. While I agree that mothers' sexuality is impinged on in classical films, I find classical representations questionable for other reasons that have not been considered. For instance, classical melodramas limit women's individuation processes by punishing those who attempt to have an independent sense of self and who do not see themselves only in relation to their family. Also, classical melodramas engage the audience in a process of idealization of the mother figure that can lead to feelings of frustration. Since women in the audience do not behave like the idealized mothers in classical melodramas, they may feel imperfect, hate themselves or get depressed.

Having different goals, Robles' project and mine reach different conclusions. At the end of his study, Robles concludes that Mexico has changed in a dramatic way, by leaving behind patriarchal values. My study is less optimistic. While Novaro's films challenge and leave behind patriarchal values, I do not believe that Mexican society as a whole has done the same thing. The portrayal of motherhood in *Lola*, *Los pasos de Ana*, *Elvira Luz Cruz* and *Angel de fuego* was and is openly attacked by critics and scholars. Some film scholars reject the social and psychological problems related to motherhood in contemporary Mexico that these films address. David William Foster's unsympathetic analysis of *Lola* is a case in point. The film reviews of Rotberg's *Angel de fuego* that appeared in Mexican newspapers are another example. I object to their perspective because they reinforce the stereotypes of motherhood that the contemporary films are

trying to overcome. Finally, the most important difference between Robles' dissertation and my thesis is in approach. While Robles uses post-colonial theory, my thesis draws primarily on the psychoanalytic discussions of motherhood developed within feminist theory and feminist approaches to film.

The Treatment of Motherhood in Feminist Film Theory

In *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood and Genre* (1996), Lucy Fischer calls attention to the difficulty early feminism had with the issue of motherhood. Fisher writes: "As Maureen Turim has noted, early scholarship often 'implicitly or explicitly attacked motherhood . . . as a by-product of the attack on marriage as an institution.' Only later did feminist criticism valorize issues of "maternal creativity and power" (10). According to Fischer, motherhood was avoided because of its complicit support of marriage, a patriarchal institution. Andrea O'Reilly, an academic working at the Center for Feminist Research at York University, Toronto, brought motherhood to the forefront in the 2000s.⁴ Like Fischer, O'Reilly believes that 1970s feminist discourse avoided discussing motherhood; however, she explains it differently: in the 1970s, women's reproductive capacity was understood as a way in which women were oppressed. In her introduction to *Motherhood: Power and Oppression* (2005), O'Reilly explains that in the 1970s feminist theorists avoided talking about motherhood "Because women's reproductive capacity historically had been used to define and confine them, motherhood was rightly seen as the paramount source of oppression" (2). O'Reilly believes that women have been oppressed by means of their reproductive capacity, and her main goal is to find ways to empower them. Influenced by Adrienne Rich's ideas about motherhood in *Of Woman*

Born (1976), O'Reilly establishes a useful distinction between motherhood and mothering. The Canadian scholar writes:

The term "motherhood" refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled, and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word "mothering" refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centered, and potentially empowering to women (2005: 2).

O'Reilly believes that differentiating between motherhood and mothering leaves space for mothers to transgress societal limits.⁵

Feminist Film Criticism and the Representation of Motherhood

Feminism and feminist film theory in particular had a great impact on the ways in which I examine classical and contemporary representations of mothers in Mexican films. Despite the feminist reluctance to focus on motherhood, feminist film criticism during the 1970s and 1980s produced insightful analyses of classical Hollywood films, especially about the women's film genre and the subgenre of maternal melodramas. In the introduction to *Cinematernity*, Lucy Fischer summarizes the feminist discussion of motherhood and suggests that this discussion has revolved around three canonical texts (12-14). Several academics examined Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945): Joyce Nelson (1977), Pam Cook (1978), Albert J. LaValley (1980), Andrea Walsh (1984), Janet Walker (1982), Linda Williams (1988), Pamela Robertson (1990), and Mary Beth Haralovich (1992). Feminist film critics were also interested in King Vidor's *Stella*

Dallas (1937); Ann E. Kaplan and Linda Williams wrote about *Stella Dallas* (1990).⁶

Another film that drew critical attention was Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959);

Fischer edited a book on the articles written on Sirk's film called *Imitation of Life* (1991).

Representations of motherhood, however, are not exclusive to the woman's film and the melodrama. In *Cinematernity* Fischer examines the constructs of motherhood in other film genres and subgenres, from different periods, including the trick film, the silent melodrama, the horror film, the crime film, the comedy, the thriller, and she also includes other types of films, such as the postmodern film, and the non-fiction film. Fischer reaches the conclusion that the discourse on motherhood is as old as cinema itself. She expresses this idea by merging the words cinema and maternity in the title of her book, cinematernity.

Feminist scholars who wrote about psychoanalysis in mid-1980s, including Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Elisabeth Grosz, Teresa de Lauretis, Kelly Oliver, and Kaja Silverman questioned the way in which Freud and Lacan's views exclude the importance of society in their explanation of motherhood and femininity. Kristeva's psychoanalytic examination of the myth of the Virgin Mary in "Stabat Mater" (1986) allows me to account for the Catholic culture that underlies the representation of mothers in classical melodramas. My thesis also integrates Kristeva's notion of psychic space and abjection into the analysis of motherhood. Kristeva argues that the flattening or elimination of psychic space leads to depression. My analysis shows that a mother's psychic space is flattened in classical representations, while it is opened in third-wave films. Interestingly, it is only in third-wave narratives that mothers appear depressed.

Kaja Silverman made an important contribution to psychoanalytic theory and feminist film criticism with the *Threshold of the Visible World* (1996). In her book, Silverman considers the pitfalls of narcissistic idealization, most importantly the endless search for perfection. However, the North American scholar does not recommend renouncing idealization altogether; instead, she proposes to idealize in a non-narcissistic way, mainly by accepting the impossibility of reaching perfection. Silverman defends idealization because this process is a necessary preamble for love; Silverman believes that one can't love another person without idealizing him or her first. This thesis uses Silverman's differentiation between narcissistic and non-narcissistic idealization to set a contrast between classical and contemporary images of mothers. Classical films engage the audience in the narcissistic idealization of mothers, while contemporary films request that the audience idealizes mothers in non-narcissistic ways.

Another important contribution to psychoanalysis in the 1990s is Kelly Oliver's *The Colonization of Psychic Space* (2006). In her book, Oliver looks at the psychology of depressed mothers from a social perspective. Expanding Frantz Fanon's concept of colonization, Oliver proposes that mothers of all continents are colonized subjects and that their colonized status is at the root of mothers' depression. Oliver also proposes a new way to understand the causes of mothers' depression. The origin of mothers' depression has been traditionally linked to her psyche, to her as an individual. Oliver proposes to anchor mothers' depression in the social circumstances in which mothers live, particularly in society's abjection of mothers. My thesis examines the ways in which film critics and film scholars understand the roots of depression in their writings about *Lola*, *Elvira Luz Cruz*, and *Angel de fuego*. Oftentimes these writers locate depression in

the mother's psyche. My analysis of the above mentioned films tries to counter the film critics' and scholars views by linking the sources of mothers' depression to the social context in which mothers live.

Chapter One provides a history of the professional and educational conditions experienced by Mexican women filmmakers. This history is used as a backdrop for understanding the filmmakers' diverse views of their identities as mothers. Chapters Two and Three look at representations of mothers in classical and contemporary films, respectively. These two chapters highlight the contributions of contemporary Mexican women filmmakers to the understanding of motherhood.

Chapter Two examines the problems inherent in mainstream representations of mothers in classical melodramas. During the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, female characters were encouraged to follow the Virgin Mary as a model of femininity. To emphasize that the women portrayed in Mexican films of the 1940s and 1950s were expected to approach normative ideals by imitating the Virgin, I have created the term *ideal of Virgin-Motherhood*. This term calls attention to the fact that female characters were asked to mimic the Virgin by acting *virginally*—that is by showing that they are sexually pure—and also by acting *Virginally*—that is by imitating the Virgin's role as a sacrificing and mediating mother. The ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is problematic not only because it is unreachable—women's behavior can never match the Virgin's—but also because it recommends that women do not individuate, that they do not acquire a sense of self as an individual entity. My analysis of El Indio Fernández's *María Candelaria* illustrates the perils of trying to match the Virgin Mary, while my

examination of Fernando de Fuentes' *Doña Bárbara* shows the way in which classical films discourage women from seeing themselves as individuals.

Chapter 3 highlights the ways in which 1980s films contribute to a new understanding of motherhood. Third-wave films propose a non-narcissistic idealization of mothers and locate a mother's depression in the social, thus allowing for the development of a mother's psychic space. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to examining examples of mothers' depressions. For instance, Dana Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz* links the protagonist's depression to her status as a colonized subject within Mexico's neoliberal society. The first part of Chapter 3 also includes analysis of 1980s narratives in which women create their own psychic space, such as Cortés' *Las Buenromero* (1979), *Un frágil retorno* (1980), *Hotel Villa Goerne* (1981), and *El lugar del corazón* (1984), and Novaro's *Una isla rodeada de agua* (1985). The second part of Chapter 3 tackles the idealization of mothers in 1980s films. María Novaro's sympathetic portrayal of a depressed mother in *Lola* provides mothers with a non-narcissistic ideal.

This thesis contributes to the study of women's films by questioning the ways in which motherhood has been understood and by expanding the psychoanalytic study of films to areas beyond Hollywood films. My study contributes to the historiography of Mexican women filmmakers by arguing that an interest in reconsidering motherhood characterizes third-wave filmmakers. My thesis also proposes new concepts, such as the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood, through which we can better appreciate the complexity of classical representations of mothers. Finally, my project brings the contributions of contemporary Mexican women filmmakers to the forefront by showing the extent to

which their films challenged and continue to challenge mainstream representations of mothers.

¹ Fernández Violante said: “A Woman Is First a Creator and then the Rest.”

² In an interview in 1991 for the magazine *Siglo XXI*, Novaro said: “I am a mother first, others are fathers on fifth place.” The author of the article is not mentioned.

³ My analysis does not include Schyfter’s films because in her films ethnicity and not motherhood is the primary concern.

⁴ O’Reilly was a founding member of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM), an institution that publishes its own journal; she has created her own publishing house, Demeter Press, dedicated to issues of motherhood; and she participated in the organization of many national and international conferences around a variety of topics relating to motherhood.

⁵ O’Reilly has written *Mothers & Sons: Feminism, Masculinity, and the Struggle to Raise Our Sons* (2001), *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born* (2004), *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (2004), *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (2004), and *Rocking the Cradle: Thoughts on Feminism, Motherhood, and the Possibility of Empowered Mothering* (2006). O’Reilly has also worked in collaboration with other authors. In writing *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment, and Transformation* (2000), she worked with Andrea and Sharon Abbey, and in *Mothering, Law, Politics and Public Policy* (2004), she collaborated with Molly Ladd-Taylor. She also worked with a group of women, the Association for Research on Mothering, on *Mother Matters: Motherhood as Discourse and Practice: Essays from the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (2004) and *Mothering and Feminism* (2006).

⁶ In “The Case of the Missing Mother” Kaplan tackles an interesting point: mothers have been studied from the point of view of daughters. Kaplan argues that while patriarchy and psychoanalysis have ignored the mother all along, feminists have pretty much done the same thing. For that reason, Kaplan tries to look at the way in which *Stella Dallas* in the film of the same name is pushed aside by the narrative. At the beginning of the film, the spectator can see Stella’s desire, and she has a subject position that Kaplan describes as being able to make the narrative advance. Kaplan claims that the film makes the spectator learn that the mother’s desire has to be annihilated, transformed into a desire for the good of the child. This is what takes place in the final scene of the film, when Stella is made into an onscreen spectator by having to watch rather than be part of her daughter’s wedding. In “Something Else Besides a Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*”

(1990), Linda Williams situates herself in opposition to Mulvey when she says that it is easier to claim that there is no room for pleasure in the classical films than to "discover within these existing modes glimpses of a more 'authentic' (the term itself in indeed problematic) female subjectivity" (483). Williams believes that to look for glimpses of subjectivity "is a more fruitful avenue of approach, not only as a means of identifying t pleasure there is for women spectators within the classical narrative cinema, but also as a means of developing new representational strategies that will more fully speak to women audiences" (483).

Chapter 1: Mexican Women Filmmakers' Views of Motherhood: "A Woman Is First a Creator and then the Rest"

In 1990, Norma Iglesias and Rosalinda Fregoso organized the "Encuentro de Mujeres Cineastas y Videoastas Latinas" (Gathering of Latina Women Filmmakers and Videomakers) in Tijuana, a meeting attended by Latino and Mexican film and videomakers, as well as U.S. and Mexican scholars.⁷ The presentations and round-table discussions that took place during these meetings were recorded, compiled in proceedings, and published by the organizers in *Miradas de mujer: Encuentro de mujeres videoastas y cineastas chicanas y mexicanas* (1992)⁸. The Encuentro invited a diverse group of people: those who lived in the U.S. (Chicanas/os) and those who lived in Mexico; those who analyzed film (film critics and film scholars) and those who made it (video and film makers); those from an older generations (pioneer filmmakers Matilde Landeta and Marcela Fernández Violante) and those of a younger generation (contemporary filmmakers such as Marisa Sistach, María Novaro, and Maricarmen de Lara).

At one of the question-and-answer sessions in Tijuana, it was clear that not all the filmmakers shared the same notion of who they were in terms of their professional and private life. The older generation, which included Matilde Landeta and was headed by Marcela Fernández Violante, believed that they were filmmakers first and mothers

second. Fernández Violante said: “A woman professionally trained inside and outside the university has to show that she can do everything, and that family is second, because a woman is first a creator and then the rest” (Iglesias, 34).⁹ Fernández Violante viewed motherhood as an imposition that women had to overcome in order to direct. Her view, however, was not shared by members of the younger generation of filmmakers who had attended film schools. Novaro, for instance, avoided the binary opposition set up by Fernández Violante of filmmaker or mother; she saw herself as a filmmaker who was a mother. This view also appears in the biographical section added to the proceedings of the Tijuana conference. In it, filmmakers of the younger generation interweave issues related to their motherhood with their professional life as filmmakers. For instance, Novaro explains that she brought her four-year-old daughter, Lucero, to the shooting of *Danzón* and even included a role for her in the script so she could participate (Iglesias, 260). A similar impulse to integrate work and family appears in Sistach’s autobiography, in which the director includes the birth of her son Valdiri when talking about her experiences in the field (Iglesias, 267-268).

A comparison of the identities of filmmakers in relation to their role as mothers shows a sharp change of direction in the late 1980s; women of the younger generation are proud to be mother-filmmakers, whereas filmmakers of the previous generations view themselves as filmmakers first and mothers second.

This chapter addresses the question of why the filmmakers attending the Tijuana meeting held different views in regard to themselves as mothers. The filmmakers included are Landeta, Fernández Violante, Sistach, and Novaro, and also other young filmmakers who were not at the meeting, such as Busi Cortés and Dana Rotberg. Most

histories of women's filmmaking in Mexico (most importantly Elissa Rashkin's, Margara Millan's, Patricia Torres San Martın's, and Joanne Hersfield's) emphasize the connection between three generations: Landeta's, Fernandez Violante's, and the younger generation. In order to complement the work of these scholars, I intend to show the differences among these generations.

One way to look at their generational differences is to try to understand the discussion that took place at the question-and-answer session in Tijuana. In looking for an explanation, I do not attempt to show that one generation's view is better than another, but rather I look for the reasons why each generation of women created a distinct identity for themselves. In looking at the Mexican filmmakers, I assume that each generation had different experiences and that those experiences come through when they talk about their identities as mothers. My question is: what kind of experiences might these filmmakers have had that would explain their different identities?

My examination considers three factors. First, I look at the different periods in which they directed, paying especial attention to the kind of film industry they worked in. I am interested in finding how being a women filmmaker in the 1940s (Landeta), the 1970s (Fernandez Violante), and the late 1980s (Sistach, Novaro, Rotberg, Cortes) made different demands and how the education that women filmmakers had access to differed in these three historical periods. Secondly, I consider the filmmakers' social recognition. For instance, I ask the question: was Landeta recognized for her work in the 1940s in the same way in which contemporary filmmakers were celebrated in the late 1980s? Thirdly, I examine feminism in Mexico between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. To illustrate the shift in feminist ideas, I compare the Tijuana Congress to another conference that

took place ten years later. Also, I examine the differences between the 1980s film collective Cine-Mujer and the contemporary generation of filmmakers in issues such as rape, sexuality, and motherhood. Through the three factors I examine—the film industry, the filmmaker’s social recognition, and the evolution of feminism—I explain why for a filmmaker like Fernández Violante, to claim to be a mother first is threatening, while for Novaro it is not.

The Mexican Film Industry

The three generations of women present at the Tijuana meeting were directors either before the consolidation of the industry or at times when the industry was experiencing a bonanza. Landeta directed in the 1940s, during the bonanza created by the U.S. withdrawal from the production of films for the Latin American market in World War II; she is part of the first generation. Fernández Violante, who made her films during the nationalization of the film industry in the early 1970s, belongs to the second generation. The third generation of directors, Novaro, Sistach, Cortés, and Rotberg made films at a time when President Salinas’ overall privatization brought a bonanza to state cinema.

Matilde Landeta: Directing During the Golden Age

Studios began to consolidate in Mexico in the late 1930s and early 1940s. An important factor in the establishment of the studios was the participation of the U.S. during World War II. Before 1945, Latin American exhibitors asked the North American distributors for movies; by 1945, U.S. imports into Mexico constituted about half of the films released (86 out of the 152). From the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, however, Hollywood stopped making movies for the Latin American market, and consequently,

imports into the Mexican market dropped. U.S. distributors and exhibitors managed the drop in U.S. film production by paying Mexican producers in advance for making films for the Latin American market. Special concessions in film stock also helped; with this and the market conditions, Mexican production almost doubled, reaching 82 films per year (Mora, 35). Landeta made her three films, *Lola Casanova* (1948), *La negra Angustias* (1949), and *Trotacalles* (1951), during this bonanza period.

Education in the Studio System

Landeta directed within the studio system, and she learnt her trade within the film union. She joined the film union in the lower ranks. With the help of her actor brother, Landeta entered the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica (STIC) in 1933 and worked as a continuity person for twelve years.¹⁰ In the 1940s, education in filmmaking took place inside the unions, which were organized along the lines of a guild system. Within the unions' hierarchical structure, members started to work in low-level positions, such as continuity, and ostensibly attained the positions of assistant director and director as they gained expertise and experience. But many STIC members, especially women, remained in the same grade, in part because in the 1940's promotion was determined by the members in the grade above. When Landeta requested a promotion to assistant director, she met with resistance from the members in that grade. At that time the union was "closed to women working in anything other than make-up or wardrobe" (Arredondo 2001: 5). The union members justified their opposition to Landeta's request by arguing that directing was "unnatural" for women: "If directing was a female job, there would be more women in the world directing, but there are only a few crazy ones", they argued.¹¹

As Landeta herself maintained later, she fulfilled all the requirements for moving up the ranks: she had been a member of the union, she had seniority, and she had the skills (Burton-Carvajal, 67). Landeta considered herself qualified because she had worked in important films such as Fernando de Fuentes' *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* (1935) and *La familia Dressel* (1935) and Emilio Fernández's *Flor Silvestre* and *María Candelaria* (1943). Also, she had gained recognition for her skills: the Film Academy¹² had asked her to teach cinematographic techniques. Knowing that she was qualified and was recognized as such, Landeta brought the issue to the Ministry of Labor. In her letter to the Ministry, she described the tasks that an assistant director had to perform and asked if being a woman was an obstacle (Arredondo 2002, 194).¹³ The Ministry of Labor did not answer her letter, but with perseverance Landeta won the battle: between 1944 and 1948 she served as an assistant director in 65 films.

Landeta's case shows that while the guild system provided technical training for directing, it did not foster confidence. Despite having worked as an assistant director in quite a number of the "Golden Age's" most important films, Landeta doubted her skills. In 1989, looking back at her training, she confessed to Patricia Díaz in *My Filmmaking, My Life* that she had feared that she lacked the "voice of authority" needed for directing. This same doubt appears in her autobiography, *Matilde Landeta, hija de la Revolución*, in which she states that anxiety about not being able to command a crew made her get bald spots on her head (Burton 2002, 73). After fifteen years in the trade, Landeta worried that she would sound silly when she shouted "camera."¹⁴ This fear persisted despite the fact that she knew she had the skills to direct.

Directing

After her experience as an assistant director, Landeta did not face opposition to joining the rank of director. She directed three films: *Lola Casanova* (1948), *La negra Angustias* (1949), and *Trotacalles* (1951). But in her career, Landeta met with several obstacles, some within the union itself, others outside of it.

Once a director, union members sabotaged her work. Landeta described the process of shooting *Lola Casanova* (1948) as a never-ending battle, one in which “there were no reflectors for me, or the camera had broken down” (Arredondo 2002, 195). Once somebody stole a crucial roll of negative, and although the director of the laboratory told everybody to look for it and even closed the lab, the roll did not appear. Since by the time the negatives were lost the actors were no longer available, Landeta had to arrange the editing of *Lola Casanova* without the missing scenes, which affected the continuity of the film.

The monopolization of the Mexican film industry was another obstacle for Landeta. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the structure of financing favored the monopolization of the production, exhibition, and distribution (King, 54). In order to protect their interests, unions made iron-clad contracts with particular producers; the union members benefited from these contracts because they assured the members’ employment. The producers could make low-quality films for reduced markets and recuperate their investment quickly because they had stereotypical plots that had been successful before (Ruy Sánchez cited in King, 54). The highly monopolized Mexican film industry impeded Landeta’s progress. Producers were looking for films that had proved to have high returns, and Landeta’s ideas did not quite fit that scheme. Even

during the golden years of 1945-1950, Landeta couldn't find a producer to finance her films, and she was forced to create, with her brother, the production company TACMA films. Financing her own films was a costly enterprise; for *La negra Angustias*, Landeta "refinanced her house, her brother's house, sold her car and her brother's car, and asked for a loan from the Film Bank" (Arredondo 2002: 10). Financing became a recurrent problem; if the money was not recuperated, there was no more money to invest. Yet it was hard to recuperate the money given the patterns of exhibition and distribution within a monopolized film industry.

After securing her own financing for the production, Landeta faced the challenge of finding a distributor for her films. Mexican law stipulated that Mexican films had to be distributed by the company Películas Nacionales, which proved to be a problem for Landeta. A large part of Películas Nacionales was owned by the same producers who had not been interested in financing her films in the first place. Landeta complained that "Since they were at war with me, they did not give me a good date for the premiere, nor did they premier the film in the right theater" (Trelles, 223). *Lola Casanova* had to wait for a year to be exhibited, which meant that the capital invested in the film did not produce any benefit for an entire year; and when *Lola Casanova* premiered, it did so in a second-run theater.¹⁵ Within this closed-union context dominated by monopolies, Landeta was forced to stop directing. Not only was it difficult for her to find investors but within the 1950s monopolized industry she was not able to secure the exhibition and distribution of her films, which eventually led her to bankruptcy. Landeta later acknowledged that "I was too ingenuous to think that the goal was to make my own films. I had not taken into account that if you do not have the right distribution, the films

don't reach the audience" (Burton-Carvajal, 84). Some of the problems that Landeta faced, such as closed unions and a monopolized film industry, continued well into the late 1970s.

The third obstacle was the situation of the Mexican film industry during the post-World War II period. Filmmaker Busi Cortés correlates Landeta's chance to make films in 1948 and 1949 to the specific market conditions created during World War II, in which the Hollywood producers had the films for the Latin American market made in Mexico (Arredondo 2001: 60). Once the Hollywood industry recovered after 1950, Mexican production dropped, and consequently many film workers became unemployed.¹⁶ In John King's opinion, Mexican unions became very protective, developing into closed-shop unions (King, 53). For people like Landeta, this meant that chances to direct became especially hard to find. After her third film *Trotacalles* (1951), she did not direct for four decades.

Marcela Fernández Violante: Directing During Echeverría's Nationalized Industry in the 1970s

Marcela Fernández Violante worked in an environment that was very different from Landeta's; instead of the studio system, it was the state cinema. To understand what the position of state cinema director entails, it is important to understand that Mexico has a long tradition of using art as part of the national discourse. From the late 1920s until the 1970s, Mexico had a model of statehood that has been termed populist (García Canclini, "Políticas culturales y crisis socio-económica", 35). Under such a model, the state has the responsibility to facilitate the symbolic process through which the nation interprets

itself.¹⁷ Although Mexican film (“born” with the Mexican Revolution) already existed when state populism became Mexico’s cultural policy, it was not generally seen as an art form. The first changes in the status of film took place in 1961, when intellectuals formed the group “Nuevo Cine”¹⁸ and published a film journal of the same name. This was followed in the late 1960s by the publication of the first volumes of Emilio García Riera’s *Historia documental del cine (Documentary History of Film 1969)*, which symbolically expressed the need to document film art.

The new status of film as an art form created new responsibilities for Mexico’s populist government, such as education. During the 1960s, filmmakers studied abroad, Paul Leduc in France, Sergio Olhovich in Moscow, Juan Manuel Torres in Prague, and Guita Schifter in London. The idea of creating a film school in Mexico was proposed in 1961, in the first issue of the journal *Nuevo Cine* (Rashkin, 61), and materialized in 1963, when Mexico’s first film school, Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) was created within the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico’s public university system. In its first years, the CUEC emphasized film theory and international film history. By the end of the sixties, however, the role of the state expanded from providing education about film as art, to training filmmakers who would work on state productions. In 1975, the government negotiated with the unions to create a school within the state’s studios, the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC), to train its own professionals. Initially, the unions only allowed CCC to train some branches of professionals: producers, directors, and scriptwriters.¹⁹ The link between the CCC and the state was very clear for the students, who received their training at the state’s main studios, Estudios Churubusco. Parallel to the creation of the CCC, during the 1970s, the

CUEC expanded its film studies curriculum to include production.²⁰ By the 1970s, film had become one of the arts.

Historians of Mexican film use sexenios (presidential years in office) as reference points, because each government has taken a different stance toward the film industry. The presidential term of Luís Echeverría (1970-1976) is known for its support to the film industry. In response to the deepening crisis of the Mexican film industry during the 1950s and 1960s, when stereotypical commercial films were the main fare, and in keeping with Mexico's tendency towards nationalization at this time, Echeverría nationalized the film industry.

All sectors of the film industry were nationalized. Production was nationalized through the purchase of studios (Studios America) and the creation of three production houses (Conacine, Conacite I, and Conacite II). Distribution was nationalized by the purchase of companies to distribute to all territories: internationally (Pelmex), in the U.S. (Azteca Films), and nationally (Películas Nacionales).²¹ The acquisition of a part of COTSA, the company that owned half the exhibition market, was a big step towards the nationalization of exhibition.

Echeverría's presidency is also known for the establishment of state cinema. During the 1940s and 1950s, the state's main role in relation to film was to monitor one of Mexico's main industries, acting as a regulator whose mission was to censor offensive representations of the nation. During Echeverría's time, the state's role shifted to sole sponsor of films, giving filmmakers the opportunity to work without having to search for funding. Films from Echeverría's state cinema were geared toward small, specialized audiences and were primarily judged by their contribution to film art and not by box-

office returns. The ability of films to recover their investment was not the first goal, which made people like Novaro feel that during the Echeverría administration, cinema was artificially sustained (Perales, 37).

Fernández Violante's Education

Fernández Violante was an exceptional case in that she graduated from CUEC's first generation and also had the experience of working inside the union during the 1970s and 1980s, while other graduates only found work outside of the union.

Once film students graduated, they entered a professional world that in many respects was very different from the one that Landeta had worked in in the 1940s. The most significant difference was that graduates were excluded from working in the film industry, because they had not gone through the union's ranks and thus were not union members. Students made their own films, the first being Esther Morales' short *Pulquería La Rosita* in 1964 at CUEC. These films, however, could not be shown commercially because Mexican law required that films exhibited in commercial theaters be made by union members. Since students did not belong to the unions, they could not make films within the industry. Alfredo Joskowicz, a student who graduated in 1970, remembers that he and his classmates "never expected to go into the industry; we had the romantic idea of making 'auteur cinema,'" also called "independent cinema." (Arredondo 2001: 50)

However, graduates such as Joskowicz did look for loop-holes to access commercial exhibition of their films. Joskowicz produced *El cambio* (The Change, 1971) in 35mm with the university as a sponsor and without union members. Later, he negotiated with the union and paid a "displacement fee", an amount equivalent to the salary of the union director that he had not hired. Payment of the fee allowed him to show his film at Cannes

in 1973. Yet he still could not release his film commercially, because *El cambio*'s copyright belonged to a non-profit institution, UNAM, and it could not be sold. Without commercial exhibition, Joskowicz could not recuperate his investment and consequently could not continue making films.

Other graduates, although few, were invited to be union directors. Marcela Fernández Violante was invited to join the film union after making the very controversial film *De todos modos Juan te llamas* (1974) with UNAM as a sponsor. *De todos modos* denounced the brutal way in which the government dealt with the Cristero Rebellion (1927-1929), a community-based movement with religious overtones. Once accepted into the union, Fernández Violante directed three films—*Cananea* (1976), *Misterio* (1980), and *El niño raramuri* (1981)—with the state's production houses CONACINE and CONACITE II. Unlike Landeta, who did not direct for an extended period of time, Fernández Violante managed to continue her work as director. She directed *Nocturno amor que te vas* (1987), *Acosada (De piel de víbora)* (2002), the episode "De cuerpo presente" in *Enredando sombras* (1998), *Golpe de suerte* (1992), and *Acosada* (2002).

That Fernández Violante was able to make her films does not mean that she did not encounter difficulties. According to Busi Cortés, she had to work with a "difficult generation":

It is to Marcela's credit that she was able to make pictures along with directors like Felipe Cazals, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Arturo Ripstein and Jorge Fons. It was a truly difficult generation because they boasted of being "machos" and they even said that they gave

Marcela the projects that they didn't want--which is not true, because Marcela knew how to make those projects hers (Arredondo 2008, 60)

Although Fernández Violante went to film school, she studied with macho directors and did not experience the same sense of camaraderie with other women that the later generation did. As a whole, her experience as a woman director has more in common with Landeta's than with the later generation's. In *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, Elissa Rashkin lists fifteen other CUEC graduates who worked at the margins of the film industry during 1960-1980 (247-249).

The Third Generation: Sistach, Novaro, Schyfter, Cortés, and Rotberg

Echeverría's nationalization was slowly reversed in the following two presidential terms. Globalization, which brought a progressive liberalization of the economy, put an end to nationalization in all areas of the economy. Over a fifteen-year period, the film industry was gradually privatized; the state ended its participation in the private sector of the industry and significantly reduced its involvement in the distribution and exhibition of the public sector, liquidating or privatizing most of its companies.²² The Mexican Film Institute web site refers to this period as "The Difficult Years." Most histories of film in Mexico agree that the poor leadership of Margarita López Portillo, in charge of cinema during the López-Portillo presidential term (1976-1982), in addition to an overall privatization of the industry, had very negative effects.

Education at the Film Schools

Most students at the CUEC and CCC had a positive experience with their education.

²³ Filmmaker Busi Cortés ended her 1997 presentation at the LASA meeting in Guadalajara by saying: “I would like to end by repeating that in my case, as in that of my colleagues, without the film schools we wouldn’t have been able to do much at all. The experience afforded us by the film schools has been fundamental to our ability to enter the system of film production” (Arredondo 2001: 11).

Film schools prepared women for the technological changes that took place at the end of the 20th century. According to Alfredo Joskowicz, director of the CCC and CUEC,²⁴ “The film school graduates . . . have craftsmanship, up-to-the-minute skills, and a new way of thinking that was not the old, commercial, bottom-line thinking that had sustained the entire Mexican film industry” (Arredondo 2001: 40). Novaro concurs with Joskowicz when she says that graduates are bringing up-to-date technology to the making of films (Perales, 37).

Studying at the CCC and CUEC in the 1960s and 1970s gave women graduates confidence. The curriculum of the mid-1970s schools aimed at educating “estudiantes integrals,” a term used to describe students who received training in all the skills related to filmmaking.²⁵ The curriculum was designed to prepare students for the professional conditions of the film industry in the 1970s, in which, given the unions’ closed shop, the most logical place for graduates to find work was television. Since television crews tend to be smaller than film crews, students were trained in several skills so they could handle several tasks. CCC graduate and director Eva López-Sánchez pointed out to me that at the film school, students don’t “select from the get-go,” whereas in the union “from the

beginning, you have to be much more decided and say, “I want to do production, for instance” (Arredondo 2001: 181). During class exercises, rotation was implemented as a way to assure that the student’s education was well-rounded. For instance, students could choose the role they wanted in their own project but took turns performing other roles in their classmates’ projects.²⁶ López-Sánchez considers switching jobs “a very good idea because it allows you to try out other areas: production, filming, assistant directing, sound engineer, etc., and at the end, you can choose what you want to be” (Arredondo 2001: 181).

Besides giving students perspective on the different jobs involved in filmmaking, rotation increased students’ confidence. From a gender-specific perspective, film schools provided a horizontal structure of learning that was advantageous for women. The film school environment allowed women graduates to feel that, at least inside the class, they were equal to their male partners. Because of the recognition that filmmakers like Cortés gave to film schools and because of the importance of film schools in building women’s self-assurance, I have chosen to refer to this generation of women filmmakers as the generation of the film schools.²⁷ I would even go so far as to say that one of the reasons that Mexico had more women directors at that time than any other Latin American country was because of Mexico’s film education system.

The film schools also gave women filmmakers the feeling that they were a group and helped them establish professional relationships that continued beyond graduation. The generation of the film schools worked with other women directors, many of whom were their classmates. For instance, CCC and CUEC graduates Busi Cortés, Marisa Sistach,

Olga Cáceres, Consuelo Garrido, and Dora Guerra worked as a team at UTEC between 1983 and 1984.

By contrast, Matilde Landeta did not experience this camaraderie and support, even during the early part of her career when Adela Siqueiro was directing. In 1989, Patricia Díaz, a CCC graduating student, made a film on Landeta as her thesis. Díaz's intent with her film, *My Filmmaking, My Life*, was to establish Landeta as a women's film pioneer and to relate her work to other filmmakers who had entered or were entering the industry. Díaz also interviewed Fernández Violante and Novaro. Although Díaz does not explain why she picked them and not others, it seems logical to assume that Díaz selected these women because she was interested in women's issues and because these were the filmmakers who had worked or were working in industrial filmmaking.

In a scene in *My Filmmaking, My Life*, Patricia Díaz interviews Novaro and Landeta at the same time. Novaro compares the working conditions of her generation to those of Landeta and emphasizes the differences: while they both worked for the industry, they did so under different conditions. Novaro, referring to her generation said "There was a lot of solidarity and a lot of collective thought and support," and "although you still felt lonely working for the commercial theater, we had arrived at that together."

Women's experiences during their education had an impact on their identities. A comparison between Landeta and Fernández Violante on the one hand, and López-Sánchez and Novaro on the other, suggests that whereas the first were not given self-assurance while learning, the second were encouraged to develop trust in their abilities. Also, both groups experienced different environments in regard to working with other

women: while Landeta and Fernández Violante worked in isolation, the younger generation worked as a group or at least knew that they were not the only ones.

Working as Assistant Directors for a Union Director

Almost all members of the third generation of filmmakers worked at one time or another as assistant directors. The director paid a “loss of wages” fee to the union so that the graduates could work as his script supervisors or assistant directors.²⁸ Dana Rotberg worked for Felipe Cazals in *Los motivos de Luz* (1985), *Las inocentes* (1986-1988), *El tres de copas* (1986), and *La furia de un dios* (1987) and she also worked as Cazals’ assistant director in a number of hour-long programs for Channel 13. Rotberg describes her job as a cross between an assistant director and an assistant producer. Conditions were not easy; although she was on the payroll, she was the first person that they did not pay when money was short.²⁹ Marisa Sistach worked as script coordinator with Felipe Cazals in five 35mm films for the union STPC and as assistant director for Jorge Fons in a film about the life and work of Mexican painter Diego Rivera, *Diego Rivera, vida y obra* (UTECA, 1986). María Novaro worked as assistant director for Alberto Cortés in *Amor a la vuelta de la esquina* (1985). Cortés participated as an assistant director to Alfredo Joskowicz and Felipe Cazals on the televised series *Historia de la educación* (*The History of Education*).

Cine-Mujer

In addition to working for television or for union directors, graduates often did their own personal work elsewhere. In *Los pasos de Ana* (*Ana’s Steps*), Sistach alludes to this by making Ana use her video camera to keep a journal of her family and her thoughts.

During the last part of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, students from various backgrounds participated in film collectives. Important for the history of women's filmmaking was the film collective Cine-Mujer, of which Sistach was a member.

Integrated by 11 active members, Cine-Mujer was founded in the mid 1970s and lasted for a decade. The typical collective production had a small budget, was done in 16mm or video among friends who worked for free, and did not have theatrical release. Cine-Mujer productions were released in university forums where political content was an important concern. The main goal of Cine-Mujer productions was to open up a discussion about women's issues at cultural centers and universities. Common topics raised by the film collective were: discrimination at the work place, unequal access to resources and positions of power, and women's bodies in public, especially in regard to rape and sexual liberation.³⁰

Working for Television

Television, unregulated by unions, was the only place where graduates could direct their own films. Most histories of women's filmmaking in Mexico ignore the very interesting work that women filmmakers did for television. Television was also important because women filmmakers had the opportunity to work as a team with their fellow graduates from film schools.

Sistach's *Los pasos de Ana* gives us a close idea of what the life of graduates was like in the early 1980s. In *Los pasos de Ana* the protagonist works as an assistant director for a television program. Sistach, who co-wrote and co-directed the program "Gilberto Owen, el recuerdo olvidado," makes reference to her own experience by making her character Ana work in the same television program she did.³¹

Depending on when students graduated, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, they worked on different television programs. These programs allowed varying degrees of creativity on the part of the director. The first televised programs that women filmmakers participated in were those of Telesecundaria. Airing for the first time in 1968 as part of an open channel, Telesecundaria brought televised secondary education to rural areas that only had primary schools. Guita Schyfter was one of the filmmakers working on these programs. She had studied film in England, but at Telesecundaria, her responsibilities were simply to film the class that the teacher was imparting. The programs were transmitted almost immediately to all the Telesecundaria schools across Mexico through channel 11. From 1979 to 1982 there was another television venue, the private production house called Arte y Difusión, at which Schyfter and Cortés worked.

The most challenging work in television was done at the government-funded production house called Unidad de Televisión Educativa y Cultural (UTECE). Created within the Department of Public Education, UTECE is another manifestation of the state's sense of responsibility to educate its citizens. Just as the state felt the responsibility of educating filmmakers at the CCC, it also felt the responsibility of disseminating knowledge about Mexico's various cultures through the public television channels. Although UTECE was created in 1979, most graduates participated later, during the years 1983-1985, when Ignacio Durán Loera was the director of UTECE's teaching division.³² During Durán's tenure, UTECE produced 2,000 programs, integrated into series with between 52 and 104 programs each and aired in the evenings on public channels 11 and 13.³³

During that period, the word “culture” was understood broadly; it included traditional notions of culture such as popular culture and high art. The series *Grandes maestros del arte popular*, for example, dealt with the traditions and material culture of the folk or pueblo. *Los nuestros* (“Our Artist”) was about avant-garde artists, and *Los que hicieron nuestro cine* (The People Who Made Our Cinema) was about filmmakers of the past. Schyfter’s programs exemplify UTEC’s broad cultural perspective; she directed programs about plastic artists Rufino Tamayo and Vicente Rojo, writer Luis Cardoza y Aragón, theater director Héctor Mendoza, and wrestler Rodolfo “Cavernario” Galindo. UTEC’s series also included literature, which was the subject of *Los libros tienen la palabra* (Books Have Their Say), a series focused on Mexican writers of the XIX and XX centuries. Together with José Buil, Sistach made “Gilberto Owen, el recuerdo olvidado” (“Gilberto Owen; the Forgotten Memory” 1985), a program about a forgotten poet from Sinaloa.

Other UTEC series reflected the new interests of the 1980s, such as ethnicity (*Mexico plural*) and gender (*De la vida de las mujeres*). Between 1983 and 1984, Busi Cortés, Marisa Sistach, Olga Cáceres, Consuelo Garrido, and Dora Guerra participated in the making of 30 half-hour chapters of the series that explored the contemporary lives of women in Mexico. According to Cortés, “When planning *De la vida de las mujeres*, we proposed making an entertainment series, directed at the female audience, that wouldn’t necessarily be didactic or treat subjects directly related to education” (*In Our Own*, 99). Through comedy, tragedy, and melodrama, these filmmakers brought up important issues for women such as sexual relations, birth control, abortion, widowhood, and retirement.

The ties between film schools and UTEC were especially strong because many graduates worked at UTEC with their old classmates; for instance, Sistach worked with her classmate Buil. Some women directors took advantage of UTEC's opportunity to work with other women, such as the group that participated in *De la vida de las mujeres* (On Women's Lives).³⁴ For women filmmakers, UTEC was the training ground in which they could practice the skills they needed to become industrial directors.³⁵ At UTEC, graduates produced programs in video (1-inch and 3/4-inch) that were shot with advanced technology and in a film production style. Unlike Telesecundaria programs, UTEC programs were shot on location, many times with actors, and using a director of photography.

UTEC filmmakers were sometimes able to use characters or themes they had developed for a television series as material for their later feature films. For instance, Busi Cortés, in her film *El secreto de Romelia* (Romelia's Secret, 1989), based the character Doña Romelia on the female characters she had developed for the series "Nicolas' Wife" and "The Seamstress of Aguascalientes" (Arredondo 2001: 82). And she based Romelia's grandchildren on the script she wrote and directed for the half-hour comedy "The Rumba Dancer Girls," in which three young sisters escape their provincial home to start an artistic life dancing rumba in Mexico City (Arredondo 2001: 82). Sistach also used her experience at UTEC in her first feature film. Having participated in a series called *Los Barrios* that looked at the development of neighborhoods in Mexico City, she later brought up the need to preserve Mexico's cultural patrimony when portraying a deteriorated Ulises Theater in *Los pasos de Ana*.³⁶ Unfortunately, UTEC was

closed in the mid-1980s, and state cinema directors had to look for jobs elsewhere.³⁷

However, the importance of UTEC as a bridge into the film industry remains.

The opportunities for women to direct films opened up suddenly in the late 1980s. In a 1989 interview that appears in Patricia Díaz' *My Filmmaking, My Life*, Novaro refers to her generation's experience during the 1980s: "We made films any way we could and showed them wherever we could. We thought that's how it would always be."³⁸ But things did change during Salinas' presidential term.

Entering the Film Industry in the Late 1980s

The idea that the state is responsible for facilitating the symbolic process of the nation reappears during Carlos Salinas de Gortari's presidential term (1988-1994). The impetus for the creation of state film schools during the Echeverría years and of UTEC in the early 1980's was also instrumental in the creation of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) in 1988.³⁹ We can trace this connection by looking at the ideological thread that connects UTEC's goal of making and compiling videos about Mexican cultures and IMCINE's aim of supporting "cinematographic activities that promoted national integration and cultural decentralization" (7). We can also trace this connection by looking at the affiliations of these institutions: UTEC was under the auspices of the Department of Education, and in 1988 IMCINE was moved to the same department.⁴⁰ In December, at the very beginning of the sexenio, Salinas' government created an arts council, the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA), and put IMCINE under its auspices. The change, long sought by the film community, symbolically represented a new emphasis on the cultural mission of state cinema. Some of the people that had worked towards the government's involvement in culture in the

early 1980s also participated in the late 1980s. For instance, Ignacio Durán, former director of UTEC's teaching division, became the director of IMCINE in 1988, and he dedicated himself to the larger project of developing state cinema during Salinas' presidential term.

As director of IMCINE, Durán was able to negotiate the inclusion of non-union directors in state cinema productions. In 1989, during a time of privatization, unions had lost contracts and bargaining power and were under unfavorable conditions. Wanting more contracts for union members, the unions negotiated with IMCINE's director and began to allow non-union directors to direct films that were going to be commercially distributed on an individual basis. Through negotiations, what was an exception in the 1970s became common practice in the 1990s.⁴¹ Of course, the success of IMCINE during the Salinas administration would not have been possible without the sexenio's economical stability⁴² and the revenues from the privatization of many state-owned industries. The stability and the revenues resulted in large amounts of funding being set aside to produce an unprecedented number of state-sponsored films.

The model of state cinema characteristic of Salinas' sexenio differed from Echeverría's: Salinas' took place within a process of privatization and free market economy, not nationalization, and Salinas' involved the state as co-sponsor, not sole sponsor, of Mexican filmmaking. Consequently, the third generation of filmmakers had to take more responsibility and secure other sponsors. At a press conference after the release of *Intimidad* (Intimacy) in 1991, Rotérg mentioned:

Right now we have very specific conditions that allow for the production of high quality films in big numbers. On the one hand, the

state co-participation is very important. On the other, the participation of young filmmakers in state films brings new perspectives into the industry.”⁴³

Rotberg related state co-sponsorship to the production of a greater number of films and linked that increase to the opportunities young filmmakers had to make their own films. Rotberg was subtly referring to the fact that, since the state during Echeverría’s sexenio provided full funding for productions, only a few directors were able to direct. By contrast, during Salinas’ sexenio, the state provided partial funding, which allowed more filmmakers to direct, including those who had graduated from film schools.

In another interview from the same year, Rotberg described in depth the participation of the state:

[In this sexenio, the state] does not solve the entire problem of production, but rather it helps with the production. The state enters as a co-producer, which I believe is very important because that forces the director to be a co-producer, and thus he or she becomes responsible for the final product. This means that we begin to at least remotely approach the idea that this is a business, that we either recover the investment or die (De la Vega 1991, 31).⁴⁴

State co-sponsorship transferred some of the responsibilities to filmmakers, who after 1988 needed to find funds for their own productions.⁴⁵

One of the first sources filmmakers applied to was the Fondo de Fomento a la Calidad Cinematográfica (FFCC). Created in 1986 as a way to join forces to rescue

Mexican cinema, the FFCC gathered representatives of the film institute, the unions, and the private sector—including producers, distributors, and exhibitors.⁴⁶ According to Cortés, “The FFCC was looking for new projects that, with very economical forms of production, could raise the level of quality in cinema. They were very anxious not to make experimental films: they wanted movies they could show in commercial theaters, and not just in the film clubs.” (Arredondo 2001: 101). Cortés’ comment shows the growing importance given during Salinas’ era to recovering the investment and also the emphasis on moving away from experimental filmmaking.

In 1988, the funding process involved the following sequence: directors would first apply to the FFCC, and selected scripts would receive a loan of approximately 30% of total funding; with that loan secured, IMCINE would join in with more than 50%. As the co-producer with the highest contribution, IMCINE had the right to give final decisions on questions regarding the production of the film.⁴⁷ Thus, while the government did not openly protect production as in the past, it continued its involvement by sharing financial responsibility with other investors. For these reasons, the role of the state under Salinas has been described as that of a broker, combining private and public funds in a mixed system.⁴⁸

Overall, in Salinas’ mixed system women had more opportunities to direct than in either the Golden Age studio system or Echeverría’s state cinema. Mexican cultural policy in general and state support for cinema in particular indirectly encouraged women’s production of 35mm films. Due in part to the incorporation of women in the media and to the international recognition of the work of Mexican women filmmakers,

women filmmakers began to be seen as the creators of a national identity from a women's perspective.

The New Rules of the Game

In order to participate in Salinas' state cinema, women filmmakers had to adapt to new requirements, which included adapting their films to broader audiences, directing professional actors, working with union members, and participating in production. For instance, Cortés, the first of the filmmakers to direct a feature, intended to make *El secreto de Romelia* under the old rules: in 16 mm, with friends and colleagues as her film crew, and designed for film club circles. In 1988, however, new opportunities emerged. Since she could meet the FFCC's two requirements of having work that demonstrated filmmaking skills (she had made two shorts, two medium-length films, and several television programs) and having a written script, she applied to the FFCC competition. When her project was funded, she discovered she had to make some changes. The FFCC told her, "Yes, you are going to do it, but in 35 mm and according to the rules of 35 mm" (Arredondo 2001: 80). One of the rules of 35 mm, Cortés found out, was that films had to be adapted to the audiences attending theaters in the late 1980s. Cortés knew that the FFCC did not support the experimental films made in film schools, but she miscalculated the visual literacy of Mexican audiences accustomed to viewing North American movies with very simple structures (Arredondo 2001: 80). In *El secreto de Romelia*, Cortés used a circular narrative and a series of flash backs that she was criticized for because "the average audience couldn't follow it" (Arredondo 2001: 107).

Like Cortés, Sistach, Rotberg, and Novaro also had to adapt to the audiences of commercial theaters. Sistach explained to me:

Overnight, the movie club circuit collapsed and that change affected *Los pasos de Ana*'s distribution. Although I intended it for a young audience, primarily college students, the film had to be shown in a movie theater, and the result was terrible. People expect other things in commercial theaters (. . .) I realize that the movie is difficult for a broad audience, that it's a bit slow, but they could have prepared the audience in the publicity for the film. But that's not the way it turned out. When *Los pasos de Ana* came out, there was no advertising, as also happened with *Ángel de fuego* (Angel of Fire) by Dana Rotberg (personal interview 16) ⁴⁹

Sistach felt that IMCINE should have better prepared the audiences to handle the change in cinematic styles that the generation of the film schools was bringing. In time, the gap between audiences and filmmakers shrank. In an interview with Patricia Díaz, Novaro mentioned: "Gradually, we began to see things from a different perspective. We realized how important it was to make films for an audience." (*My Filmmaking, My Life*). In time, Novaro became accustomed to making 35 mm films for commercial release.

Directing Actors

Some of the "new rules" filmmakers had to adapt to for the state cinema pattern were more difficult than others. One of the more difficult ones for women directors was the need to hire professional actors. For Novaro, who had used actors with little experience in *Lola*, the transition to directing famous professional actors was not easy. For her film *Danzón*, she cast María Rojo, Mexico's most popular actress, as Julia, and Tito

Vasconcelos, an actor of renown in the theater world, as Julia's best friend. Novaro worried that someone with a lot of experience would not listen to her, and for that reason, she was at first hesitant about Vasconcelos: "I felt very insecure and thought that he wouldn't let me direct him. I was afraid. I imagined that he already had the character in his hands—that he was himself the character of Susy, which meant that the character was farther away from me because I didn't know him" (Arredondo 2001: 159). This did not turn out to be the case, and Novaro appreciated the way in which Vasconcelos let himself be directed.

In the case of Cortés second feature, *Serpientes y escaleras*, the fear was well-founded. Cortés chose Hector Bonilla to play the role of Gregorio and was not happy with the way he played his role: "I had written a much more subtle character, but the actor who played the role, Héctor Bonilla, came up with a very different idea of the character and I couldn't control him" (Arredondo 2001: 108-109). The problems with actors were sometimes unexpected: Cortés had trouble convincing the well-known television actress Dolores Beristáin to accept the role she had written for her. As she found out later, Beristáin thought that Cortés' production was not a serious one because it was made with a small budget (Arredondo 2001:109). Thus, being a state film director involved directing professional actors, which meant dealing with famous personalities and sometime getting into power struggles. Directing large crews also involved dealing with power.

Large Union Crews

The new rules involved working with unions. Graduates entering the industry in 1989 had several reasons to want to avoid unions. One was the crew's size: union crews

tended to be large because unions decided the number of crewmembers that were needed for each production. According to several people with whom I have talked informally, it was not uncommon for union organizers to decide that a large number of workers were needed. Their large size made crews expensive, and filmmakers, with budgets under \$300,000 in the late 1980s, couldn't afford them. Also, union workers, when compared to graduates from the film schools, had a reputation for not being well trained. In *Exposición y análisis de la problemática actual en la industria cinematográfica* (1994), Patricia Millet, director of the Cámara Nacional de la Industria Cinematográfica y del Videograma (CANCACINE), a private institution that included all who worked in the film industry (including union members), wrote that unions needed to change with the times (57). Millet's comment that "It is necessary that the salaries reflect the levels of productivity and utility of the workers" (57) suggests that the workers were overpaid. Furthermore, Millet recommended that "The working sector [the unions] emphasize the training of its members" (57), thus voicing a concern shared by many people whom I interviewed.

While both male and female state directors shared a concern about large crews, the unions' gender politics were especially problematic for female directors. Union crews were mostly male and were not used to being directed by women. Eva López-Sánchez told me: "When I was already a director and made *Dama de noche*, the line producer—who was also the boss of the union section—told me, 'This is the first time in my life I've worked with a woman director.' It was the first time in 35 or 40 years that he had worked with a female director!" (Arredondo 2001: 171). This line producer's experience was not uncommon; in the early 1990s union members were not used to being directed by a

woman. While López-Sánchez describes her experience in terms that do not suggest tension, other female directors such as Novaro felt uncomfortable. She remembers that when filming *Azul celeste*, “The electricians would look at me . . . as if I were mentally retarded. For them, a woman directing was just like a child directing. It’s as if they were saying, ‘How could she possibly direct? She doesn’t know how to order people around, she doesn’t know how to demand things’” (Arredondo 2001: 137). Novaro’s reflection shows that union members were used to specific directing styles.

Although for several female filmmakers, directing union members was a challenging and uncomfortable task, that wasn’t always the case. Dana Rotberg has a slightly different take in her views on unions. Rotberg views unions as traditionally male institutions and feels that they need to change with the times (*El Herald*, February 23, 1991: 1D, 6D). However, after working with both graduates and union members in the making of *Intimidación*, she concluded that union workers were more committed than graduates. In Rotberg’s opinion, graduates saw themselves as artists and not workers (Vega 1990 *En la escuela*). Implicit in her view is a class issue: graduates tend to be upper middle class, whereas most union workers who are technicians have a working-class background. Rotberg’s position is not new; Patricia Vega’s review “In the Schools One Doesn’t Learn to Make Films” (*En la escuela no se aprende a hacer cine*) makes reference to the fact that Rotberg left the CCC before finishing her thesis, in her third year (1985), preferring to learn the trade by working with a union director (De la Vega Alfaro, “Interview with Dana Rotberg,” manuscript 1991: 12).

Production Paths

To enter the union in 1989, members of the third generation took different production paths. One option was to produce a film outside of the industry and then find a way to transition into the industry after the film was made. Sistach, committed to making openly feminist films, preferred to remain within the film-club circuit. She founded a cooperative with friends and shot *Los pasos de Ana* with few resources, in 16 mm and with non-professional actors. However, the film eventually appeared in commercial theaters via the following sequence of events. Peter Schumann, one of the organizers of the 1991 Berlin Film Festival, wanted to bring the film to a retrospective on Young Mexican Cinema to be held at in the festival. However, since there were no 35mm copies available in 1990, Schumann negotiated with IMCINE to finance the transfer to 35 mm, in exchange for which the Film Institute became a co-producer in the film. Sistach was able to finish editing her film by selling the exhibit rights to Mexico, Germany, and the Netherlands.⁵⁰ However, it was not until 1993 that *Los pasos de Ana* was shown in Mexico.⁵¹ Sistach's experience shows the limits imposed by industrial filmmaking: while making her film, Sistach was able to make decisions based on what she wanted to say, but with the collapse of the film-club circuit and the entrance into the industry, issues such as audience sophistication and commercial success weighed more heavily in her decisions.

Another option available to the third generation of filmmakers was to use private producers. Dana Rotberg made *Intimidad* (1989) with a non-traditional private producer (a term used in Mexico in the late 1980s to refer to private producers interested in investing in art films). León Constantiner, owner of Producciones Metrópolis, wanted to

produce a high-quality film that would entertain the upper middle class and at the same time be of interest to people who did not like to read subtitles.⁵² So, rather than investing \$1,000,000 in cheap labor as traditional private producers did, Constantiner spent \$450,000 on the hiring of highly-qualified personnel and the purchase of film rights to a script that had already enjoyed great theatrical success: *Intimidad*, written by the well-known writer Hugo Hiriart. He paid a fee to the union to compensate for using Rotberg, a non-union director, employed Leonardo García Tsao, a teacher and film critic from the CCC, to adapt the screenplay, and then hired Carlos Marcovich, a creative and highly-trained cinematographer. Rotberg found that working for a private producer had its advantages, such as being able to direct without having to raise funds for the film, but it also had its limitations: she complained that her role as director was not taken into consideration after she finished the first cut (Vega, 90). *Intimidad* foretells the problems that will come with the privatization of culture in the 2000s; in working within a private producer scheme, directors lose decision-making power. And women directors often complain that they are made to include sex scenes that are not called for in the script.

A third production path was to create a cooperative and participate in an international co-production. In making her opera prima *Lola* (1989), Novaro looked for a production style that would allow her the freedom to address women's issues. She was able to film in 35mm without large union crews by joining a co-operative. Novaro and her working team, mainly a small group of CUEC graduates, joined the Cooperative José Revueltas. Since cooperatives are labor associations similar to unions, the producers were able to legally make the film without using union members. The small crew made production expenses affordable, given that the budget of the film, \$300,000, was rather small.

Novaro's ability to control the decision-making in *Lola* was predicated on the way she secured the funding. She received \$150,000 from Televisión Española through Quinto Centenario, a program in support of Latin American cinema in celebration of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. In exchange for the funding, Television Española held a portion of the distribution rights. In an interview with Conchita Perales, Novaro explained that \$150,000 allowed her to begin *Lola*: "In all truth, the production funds from Spanish Television were not extra money. The money allowed me to begin making the film . . . The film was ready, but up until then, nobody had shown any support, not even with a 'maybe,' nothing (Perales 39).⁵³ Novaro felt comfortable with this international co-production, which in her view did not interfere with her decision-making power: "Unlike a normal co-production, in which the co-producers are involved in making decisions about the film, [in the case of *Lola* and *Danzón*] we in Mexico were able to manage the money Televisión Española gave us, very freely, through the private company Macondo. Because they weren't done as formal co-productions, both productions were under my control, within what the money permitted. In both cases I felt good" (Arredondo 2001: 139). Because of the support from Televisión Española, IMCINE, through CONACITE II, entered afterwards as co-producer (Perales, 37). The third investor was a non-traditional producer, Jorge Sánchez, who worked with Novaro as part of her team. She took care of making the film, while he negotiated its funding, distribution, and exhibition. This production scheme worked well for Novaro, who was able to explore the themes that interested her with a small crew and in a pleasant environment.

The fourth production option was to have a film school as a sponsor. For her first film, Cortés was able to finish the script with a soft loan from the FFCC but did not have

the funds to begin shooting. Then in 1988, as a teacher at the CCC, she came up with the idea of having the film school be a co-producer. The status of the CCC as an institution under Estudios Churubusco, the state studios, facilitated her task. She also asked individuals and institutions to donate what they could to the production, including actor Pedro Armendariz, who worked almost for free. Cortés made use of school discounts in film stock and other film material and used students as workers. For shooting her film, Cortés combined paid workers from Section 49 of the film union STIC with CCC second-year students, who worked for free. This considerably reduced the production cost. After the success of Cortés' experiment, the film school established a contest for opera primas; the student who won the contest would be able to direct his or her first feature film within the school. With the school's support, Cortés had discovered a legal loop-hole by which students could produce low-budget but high-quality films.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the mix of private or semi-private capital with state funding worked well for women interested in raising gender issues in film. In general, gender issues were not as censored as political ones. However, as IMCINE's role as a funding institution diminished during the early 2000s, support of the arts became more privatized, and there has been a shift toward profit-making as the primary concern, making it more difficult for women directors to raise issues of gender. From the perspective of the 2000s, state funding is key to the creation of feminist films, and small productions are an ideal way to shoot these films.

Different Professional Experiences

The history of women filmmakers presented above shows that opportunities for the women filmmakers at the Tijuana meeting improved towards the end of the twentieth

century, especially in regard to their learning environment, their work experience, and their opportunities for directing.

Film schools provided more opportunities for women to learn than guilds did. As *My Filmmaking*, *My Life* and *Matilde Landeta hija de la Revolución* show, the vertically organized guild system in which Landeta learnt during the “Golden Age” years did not foster her self-assurance. She also experienced discrimination when attempting to join the rank of assistant director. With the advent of film schools, women had a horizontally organized environment where they could learn skills and gain confidence and also meet other women who would later become collaborators.

Within these three generations, women also had different professional experiences. Some women, such as the ones who made films in Cine-Mujer, had worked independently at the margins of the industry and had shown their films in university forums or film clubs. Others, such as state filmmakers, had worked on films to be shown at commercial theaters. According to Cortés, Sistach, Rotberg and Novaro, once they entered into the industry, they had to adapt their filmmaking to large audiences. People who worked for film clubs or commercial theaters had very different experiences. Because of the large amounts of capital needed to make films, state filmmakers had to work in a very competitive environment (Iglesias and Fregoso: 26).

The professional experiences of the filmmakers came through in their views of the unions. Unions were important for Landeta because she learned in a guild system, and she produced her films within the studio system. Fernández Violante’s experience was mixed because while she did attend film school, her professional career, which was much longer, was with unions. By contrast, the third generation was very involved in film

schools, where they established lasting professional relationships with their colleagues. They preferred to avoid unions. These different views were brought up at the Tijuana conference. Fernández Violante complained that contemporary filmmakers who had made feature films had not joined the union: “Why María Novaro is not part of the union? Why Dana Rotberg isn’t either? Why Busi Cortés is not part of the union?” (33).⁵⁴ According to Novaro, union workers were underpaid, and in many instances their sexism made it hard to work with them (Iglesias and Fregoso: 27-28). She said: “Studios and unions have been crushing us down for a while. This structure has had to ease down, opening and letting a new generation of filmmakers in, some of which were women” (27).⁵⁵ Fernández Violante responded to Novaro’s attack on union workers by addressing their frustration; they might have been waiting for 50 or 60 years to become a director, only to see the job given to a film school graduate who has not waited his or her turn (32). Fernández Violante invited the younger filmmakers to join in and fight sexism from within (33), but the younger filmmakers were not willing to follow her advice, and militancy in the union remained one of their differences. Because of discrimination, the third generation preferred to work with their colleagues or with small union crews.

The commercial cinema of the Golden Age did not provide as many possibilities for women to direct as the state cinema did. According to Landeta, her only option, given the monopolized film industry of the 1940s, was to make her films independently and then re-enter the commercial circuit, which proved to be difficult. The second and third generations worked within a state cinema system, where they had more opportunities than within the studio system. Fernández Violante gained her reputation during Echeverría’s state cinema in the first part of the 1970s. State cinema allowed her to join

the union and later on the commercial circuit. The third generation directed films at the state-sponsored UTEC in the early 1980s and also within Salinas' mixed system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rotberg believes that the third generation profited from a state cinema system even more than Fernández Violante's generation. This could explain in part why despite the considerable number of women who graduated from the CUEC in Fernández Violante's generation, only she was able to direct. In 1989, the third generation had four possible ways to produce their films: by making a small independent production (Sistach), by working with an independent producer (Rotberg), by creating a cooperative and participating in a co-production (Novaro), or by working with a combination of commercial and school funds (Cortés). In the 1940s, Landeta only had one option, as opposed to the four options in 1989. By comparing the learning and work environments and the opportunities to direct, we can conclude that the third generation had more stable and less discriminating learning and working experiences than the first and second generations.

Different Experience of Success

The first, second, and third generations received very different social recognition. It took thirty years for academics, film critics, and audiences to recognize Landeta's work, while Fernández Violante gained the union's recognition after she made her first long feature film, *De todos modos Juan te llamas*. The success of the third generation was unprecedented, not only for Mexican women's filmmaking but for Mexican films in general.

One of the first events recognizing women's work took place in 1987. Filmmaker, actress, and producer Angeles Necochea, a Cine-Mujer member who had made *Vida de*

ángel (1982), organized what today is considered Mexico's first meeting about films made by women: "Cocina de imágenes" (Image Kitchen).⁵⁶ Necoechea gathered critics and filmmakers from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean for this televised round-table discussion and also organized, concurrently, a film festival at Mexico City's Cineteca Nacional. In an interview I conducted with Busi Cortés, she mentioned that she was picked to be part of this televised program with other Mexican colleagues such as María Novaro and Maricarmen de Lara. What Cortés remembered most vividly was that in 1987, making a 35 mm film was a dream, not a possibility:

María Novaro astonished me when she said that she would love to make 35mm films for movie theaters and with the unions. My mouth hung open in surprise and I said, "Look at her. Boy, is she brave!" At that time, we were making 16mm films for the film clubs and I said, "How will we ever make big movies, movies like the Americans and the Europeans make? Impossible (Arredondo 2001, 94).

Despite her doubts, two years later, Cortés did make her own "big movie", *El secreto de Romelia*, and so did other filmmakers. María Novaro made *Lola*, in the same year as Cortés' opera prima, 1989. Also in 1989, Marisa Sistach made *Los pasos de Ana*, a 16 mm film that was later blown up to 35 mm, and one year later Dana Rotberg made *Intimidad*.

In 1970s Mexico, filmmaking, and especially filmmaking within the industry, was considered a male-dominated arena. Sistach summarized the situation by saying: "For a woman in Mexico, in a medium dominated by men—as is the world of filmmaking—. . .

becoming a film director is practically a dream.”⁵⁷ Given the film industry’s bad reputation on issues of equality, the entrance of four women into the industry gave Mexico and the international film community a sense of achievement. Mexican journalists, followed by international scholars and critics, expressed their satisfaction with Mexico’s move towards equality in filmmaking.

Mexican newspapers carefully followed the trail of films directed by women as they appeared in film festivals and won awards. For instance, *Lola* won awards nationally and internationally. In Mexico, *Lola* won a Heraldo for Best Opera Prima; two Diosas de Plata, for Best Opera Prima and Best Supporting Actress (Martha Navarro) (1990); and the Mexican equivalent of four Oscars in the Ariel competition of July 1990: for Best Opera Prima (María Novaro), Best Screenplay (María and Beatriz Novaro), Best Supporting Actress (Martha Navarro), and Best Supporting Actor (Roberto Sosa) (1990). *Lola* also received several international awards: the Coral Prize at the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana for Best Opera Prima (1989); Best Opera Prima from the Asociación de Cronistas de Espectáculos, New York (1990); the Mano de Bronce for Best Opera Prima at the New York International Latino Film Festival (1990); and the Encouragement Award at the Berlin International Film Festival (1991).

With the debut of four women filmmakers in the early 1990s, Mexico became known for its women filmmakers. Representatives from international film festivals came to the Muestra de Cine Mexicano in Guadalajara, the most important showcase of Mexican films, with the specific mission of selecting films made by women to bring over to other festivals. By 1991, the popularity of Mexican women filmmakers had spread

internationally and *Los pasos de Ana*, *Lola*, and *Intimidad* were showcased at Berlin's International Film Festival.

In the early 1990s, some films by Mexican women filmmakers, such as Novaro's *Danzón*, became international hits. Among other prizes, *Danzón* won the Diva Award for Best Director at the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana (1991); a Silver Hugo for Best Actress (María Rojo) at the Chicago International Film Festival; and a Mano de Bronce for Best Film at the New York International Latino Film Festival. *Danzón*'s greatest achievement was to be selected to go to the Director's Fortnight at the Cannes International Film Festival, where the demand was so high that three additional screenings were added to the four originally scheduled so that more people could see the film. *Danzón*'s success at Cannes had an impact on the Mexican press: it was the first Mexican film in twenty years to go to Cannes! The pride the Mexicans felt is reflected in the 107 film reviews that appeared in 1991 in Mexican newspapers. For instance, a reporter from *La Afición* proclaimed that "Danzón, from Mexico, Saves the Honor of Latin Cinema at Cannes."⁵⁸ Yet it is *Danzón*'s distribution which gives a real sense of the film's accomplishments. At a time when international distribution was rare, *Danzón* was distributed internationally for theatrical, television, and home video release. It was sold to Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Japan, and the United States for screening in theaters—something quite unusual, as the majority of Mexican films are sold only for video or television release.

The conference at Tijuana took place in 1990—that is, in the midst of the third generation's boom. Panelists and audience were divided about whether filmmakers and

video-makers should be considered within the same group. Pioneer filmmaker Landeta, wanting to compensate for the lesser recognition that video-makers receive, was in favor of considering filmmakers and video-makers within one group; she argued that “the only thing that we should consider is that we are all women who produce images” (Iglesias, 31).⁵⁹ Novaro took a different position, not directly opposite to Landeta’s, but with a different concern. While she agreed that video-makers did deserve acknowledgment, she nevertheless felt that they should be considered a separate group on the grounds that video-makers and filmmakers had two very different professional experiences.

The third generation’s national and international success stimulated an interest in compiling a history of Mexican women’s filmmaking. Before the 1980s, few people were aware that Mexico had had women film pioneers. In the late 1980s, as women filmmakers emerged, critics and academics conducted historical research to create a past for the younger generation. Thus, the study of contemporary filmmakers and the recovery of the work of silent or classical filmmakers took place almost concurrently.

This search for origins can be traced by looking at Mexican newspapers. In 1989, Enrique Feliciano entitled his review of Novaro’s *Lola* “The Fourth Female Director Is Being Born.”⁶⁰ The review’s title shows that in the national imagination of 1989, which Feliciano exemplified, there were only four women who had directed films in Mexico. In 1990, only one year later, well-known film critic Patricia Vega presented a history of women filmmakers at the Tijuana meeting; on Vega’s list, Novaro was director number twelve.⁶¹ Filmmakers from the silent and early sound period such as Mimi Derba, Candida Beltrán, Adela Sequeyro, and Eva Limiñana had already been included in a history of women’s filmmaking in Mexico that went back to 1917.

The research about pioneer women filmmakers began by incorporating the filmmakers who had remained a part of the cinematic community and continued by recovering those who had separated from the community or whose work was incomplete or lost. In 1987, Landeta's films were shown in a cycle dedicated to the author in Italy, and she was granted a diploma at Havana's 1987 International Film Festival. National recognition by the Mexico City National University and the Mexican cinematic community followed the next year.⁶² The recovery of Adela Sequeyro's work came after the interest in Landeta was well underway and included the restoration of her films. Although Sequeyro (1901-1992) was still alive in the 1980's, she had separated herself from the world of cinema, and her films were lost or incomplete. The earliest research on Sequeyro dates from 1987, when Marcela Fernández Violante published an interview with her; however, it is not until the 1990s that significant research on and restoration of Sequeyro's work took place, highlighted by the publication of a monograph on Sequeyro by Patricia Torres San Martín and Eduardo de la Vega (1997).⁶³

In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Kelly Oliver proposes that society's views have a great impact in the way individuals construct their identities. If that is the case, individuals who experience discrimination at work and whose work is not socially recognized will create identities for themselves that differ from those who experience less discrimination and receive more recognition.

Shifts within Mexican Feminism

The third factor that may explain the differences between Fernández Violante's perspective and Novaro's is the shifts within the feminist movement. In *Watching Rape*, Sara Projansky describes U.S. feminism between 1970 and 1990. According to

Projansky, there was a homogeneous feminist impulse in the 1970s that lasted until the 1980s. The Mexican feminist film movement shared similarities with what Projansky describes. During the 1970s there was a homogenous movement in Mexican film that lasted until the 1980s. The best representative of this feminist film movement is the work of the collective Cine-Mujer. Mexican film scholars have different opinions about the film collective.⁶⁴ Margara Millán and Patricia Vega agree in setting the mid-1980s as the end of feminist filmmaking. For Vega these films ended in 1987, when the last of Cine-Mujer's films were completed; for Millán the turning point was 1986, when collectively-made films with clearly political feminist views addressing social conditions gave way to more subjective films, which she labels feminine (1999:123). Drawing from both scholars, we can say that in the Mexican context, the homogenous movement lasted until 1986.

There are different ways to understand what happened after the homogenous 1970s movement. What is clear is that feminist views about women's experience changed. A comparison between two congresses separated by twelve years shows the differences. At Tijuana in 1990, it was believed that women had a basically similar life experience, an experience that contrasted with a masculine one. The session titles emphasized this assumption by using the singular "woman": "Woman's Film," "Woman's Film Today," "Popular Culture and Woman's Film," "Film and Video, The Feminine Experience," "The Quotidian Life and Woman's Film."⁶⁵ Viewing women as sharing a similar experience encouraged the assumption that women share a common aesthetic, referred to in the sessions as a "feminine aesthetic."⁶⁶

In 2002, Patricia Torres organized the “Encuentro de Mujeres y Cine en América Latina,” in Guadalajara. Latin American filmmakers and national and foreign academics attended this conference, and the proceedings were published in *Mujeres y cine en América Latina* (2004). At the conference, there was an emphasis on the plurality of feminist positions. In her welcoming speech, Torres insisted that the meeting was designed with the idea of inclusion (11) and plurality of positions (12). She explained that the group of women invited to the meeting held different political positions (i.e., attendance was not restricted to filmmakers with a feminist position⁶⁷) but shared a common practice. The notion of a common practice lay beneath the organization of the sessions and the selection of speakers. Sessions were divided according to genres: documentary, fiction, and experimental cinema. The speakers included women who were not filmmakers—such as scriptwriter Melanie Dimantes and producer Berta Navarro—but who had been involved in the process of making films. Patricia Torres mentioned in her inaugural speech that “They had tried to establish links between the history of cinema and contemporary film practices.”⁶⁸

The conference in Guadalajara was organized to acknowledge diversity among women. The title of the session “Ruptures, Encounters and Diversity in Languages and Narratives” affirms this by making every word plural. The concept of the plurality of feminine experience made the idea of a feminine aesthetic unacceptable. Mexican academic Julia Tuñón made several attempts to encourage panelists and audience to elaborate on the idea of a feminist aesthetic as a viable concept, but despite Tuñón’s repeated efforts, the audience did not respond to her suggestion. Their silence can be interpreted as a sign that by 2002, the idea of a feminist aesthetic could no longer be used

to study the work of women filmmakers. The two congresses at Tijuana and Guadalajara demonstrate that feminism shifts. In 1990 feminism was seen as singular; by 2000 it was plural.

The notion of a second and third wave has also been used to talk about the shifts in feminism in general and in Mexican women's filmmaking in particular. In *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (2006), Sergio de la Mora refers to María Novaro as a third-wave filmmaker. Drawing from Mora, we can presume that if Novaro is a third-wave filmmaker, Cine Mujer, Landeta, and Fernández Violante are second-wave filmmakers. Thus, using Margar Millán and Patricia Vega's chronology, which dates the end of the Collective's activity at around 1986-7, we can establish the mid-1980s as the end of second-wave feminism in Mexico. The Tijuana conference showed a mix of second- and third-wave feminism, especially around the issue of motherhood. By 2002, third wavers had gained ground, which explains why Guadalajara was organized around the notion of women and profession. The use of the plural, the emphasis on diversity, and the silence that followed Tuñón's question about a feminist aesthetic, mark the presence of third-wave ideas.

Third-Wave Views

Third-wave filmmakers held views that second-wave feminist filmmakers looked on with suspicion and which created heated discussions. Whether filmmakers need to create heroic, uplifting female characters or not was a point of friction that appeared in the discussions about Novaro's first feature, *Lola* (1989). In this film, the main character becomes so depressed that she feels that she can't take care of her daughter and leaves her in the care of her grandmother. After a visit to the beach, Lola's depression lessens

and she goes back to Mexico City to pick up her daughter. *Lola* ends with a long shot in which the two walk side by side. The final shot does not promise that Lola will overcome her depression; rather, it suggests that she is in for a long struggle.⁶⁹ Novaro commented that some Mexican feminists didn't like the ending:

A certain sector of feminist critique disagrees with the way *Lola* ends and thinks it should be different. It seems strange to me that this feminist criticism is in agreement with a segment of the male audience that is bothered when Lola starts to cry and can't control herself. For a man, it would have been much easier to watch a movie in which the woman is abandoned but lifts herself up, works, and deals with things. If the woman lifts herself up, he bears no responsibility nor does he have to consider certain issues. However, when you let that woman be destroyed by some guy's selfishness, then the men get awfully irritated. To make Lola reason and overcome her abandonment is to make it easy for everyone: for women, because it gives them a model character to emulate, and for men, because then they don't have to deal with the conflict (Arredondo 2001:136-137).

Relying on heroic female characters, in Novaro's view, can lead to an easy comfortable position that shares striking resemblances to the patriarchal view that feminism intended to counter. Novaro prefers the challenge of characters that open up questions and make women reconsider their own notions.

Whether films have to focus exclusively on women's issues was the second point of friction. This issue was raised at the Tijuana Encuentro in relation to Sistach's first feature. In *Los pasos de Ana* (1989), the protagonist is a film school graduate who works as an assistant director on a television show and is a divorced mother of two. Ana's closest friend in the film is Carlos, a homosexual who listens to her and helps her find work. According to Sistach, feminists argued that "Ana is never seen in the company of other women" and that "She exists in a man's world with no women to help her." To which Sistach responded: "It is certainly true that in Mexico women are surrounded by many other women. But that doesn't mean I was interested in bringing a woman surrounded by other women to the screen. I was interested in creating a homosexual character" (Arredondo, unpublished interview with Sistach, 14). Novaro had a similar interest; in *Danzón*, Julia's best friend is Susy (Tito Vasconcelos), a gay artist who dances at a night-club.

Whether or not female characters should have romantic feelings was the third significant point of friction. In Sistach's discussion of *Los pasos de Ana* at Tijuana, the audience also remarked on Ana's romanticism. Ana is assigned to cover the life and work of a deceased and forgotten Mexican poet, Gilberto Owen. While doing her research, Ana interviews Owen's old love, Clementina Otero, and reads the poems that Owen dedicated to her. While reading the poems, Ana feels regret for not having had a person in her life who could write those poems for her. Towards the end of *Los pasos*, there is a scene in which Ana reads to herself the poems Owen wrote for Otero. The scene shows Ana reading the poems with one hand and recording herself with her video camera with the other, expressing Ana's longing for a romantic past she does not have.

Ana's longing, according to Sistach, was negatively received: "It is something the American feminist audience finds strange, almost disgusting. It is something, we might say, that is somewhat hard for them to 'swallow'" (Sistach, 14). In the interview I conducted with Sistach, she did not explain why she included the scene that provoked a negative reaction. Novaro, however, whose main character Lola was also attacked on the same grounds, did address her reasons for creating romantic feelings in Lola. Novaro explained:

Some feminists were bothered by the fact that Lola's crisis is related to the emptiness that she feels when she finds herself without a partner. I think that I'm very sincere; I'm not judging her, I'm speaking about what I have observed in the lives of a great many women. Being abandoned creates a very serious emotional problem for us and I reflected on this in the movie, with much pain. Maybe one would want things to be otherwise. I simply told it as I've experienced it and seen it happen around me. I could have changed the story of Lola's depression, but I think that rather than mythologize that emotional emptiness, it's very important to reflect on it. I don't think it works for us women to wish to be what we aren't, but rather, to look at what is happening to us and to transform ourselves from there (Arredondo 2001, 135).

While Novaro does not defend the idea that women should have romantic feelings, in the previous quote she explains that women are raised with romantic ideas, and thus when

their partner leaves them, they feel abandoned. According to the disputes that I have outlined, there was a set of presuppositions among the feminists in the audience. They expected films with uplifting female characters whose support came from other female friends and whose life was not ruled by love. Third-wave filmmakers reacted to the criticisms outlined above by separating themselves from those who spoke in the name of feminism.

Opting Out of Feminism

Between 1989 and 2001, Busi Cortés, María Novaro, Dana Rotberg, Marisa Sistach, and Guita Schyfter, individually and at different times, declared to the press that they did not make their films with the intention of creating feminist films. When *El secreto de Romelia* was released, Cortés clearly presented it as a film unrelated to feminism. The filmmaker told the press at the premiere: “I find shocking to talk about feminist films, I put my films in the category of films made by women.”⁷⁰ Two days after her comment, newspaper reviews referred to Cortés films as “Feminine Cinema,”⁷¹ a term that is often used to describe the films from women directors from Cortés’ generation. As with *El secreto de Romelia*, when *Lola* was first released in 1989, newspaper reviews used the label “feminine” to describe the film.⁷² Unlike Cortés, Novaro chose to avoid rather than directly confront the term feminist. She presented *Lola* as a film for an audience of women, “a contemporary and vital approach to move and make women feel.”⁷³ Sistach’s *Los pasos de Ana* was shown at Tijuana in 1990. For Sistach, it was her break-up with feminism. She explained to me that “At the conference in Tijuana about a half-dozen people stood up and said that the movie [*Los pasos de Ana*] was sexist and *machista*. And the worst of it was that they were filmmakers!” Sistach concluded: “If *Los pasos de*

Ana is sexist and *machista*, then I don't want anything to do with feminism any more” (Arredondo, unpublished interview, 14). Rotberg’s negative reaction to feminism dates from 1990. In an interview, Rotberg told me that she had a negative experience at Berlin’s International Film Festival when discussing *Intimidad* (Intimacy 1990)⁷⁴ with the audience: “All the German feminists went for my throat, those hard bitches! They asked me why had I made a movie in which the female characters . . . I said, ‘Hell, I didn’t invent the female characters of this world’” (Arredondo 2001: 181). After her experience in Berlin, and perhaps influenced by it, Rotberg was outspoken about her differences with feminism. When a year later she talked about her second feature, *Angel de Fuego* (Angel of Fire, 1991), which was shown at Cannes, she told the press: “I Do not Intend to Show a Feminist Thematic in My films,”⁷⁵ a statement that positions her work outside of feminism.

The first signs of Novaro’s positioning herself outside of feminism appeared in a 1992 interview, after she had participated in a question-and-answer session about *Danzón* at the Berlin festival. In the interview with Robert Ellsworth, Novaro mentioned a confrontation with a woman in the audience whom she identified as a feminist. According to Novaro,, the woman felt sorry for Julia, *Danzón*’s main character, because men whistled at her. Novaro told her that it was a cultural difference: “When men whistle at me on the street, it makes me feel good. That's just the way men and women relate in my country. It's nice to know you can attract such attention" (Ellsworth, 1992). Novaro’s answer shows that she disagreed with the comment made by the feminist in the audience and felt that the woman’s notion of feminism did not take into account cultural

differences. After the 1992 Berlin festival, Novaro's uneasiness deepened, and it was exacerbated by the press's labeling of her films.

Following *Danzon's* exhibition at Cannes, the film was a big success in Europe and North America, and the international press wrote about it in newspapers and magazines. The titles of the reviews—"The Feminist Vision of Maria Novaro" (Bald, 1991), "A Melodious Variation On Feminist Awareness" (Maslin, 1992), "Mexican Comedy Danzon Offers Feminist Message With Light Touch" (Benerstein 1992), and "Danzon' Steps to Feminist Beat" (Maslin, 1992)—show that the international press associated Novaro's second feature with feminism. It appears that the insistence by foreign reviewers on Novaro's feminism influenced the national press, which up until then had considered the film feminine. In the early 1990s, the term feminist had been used only detrimentally, as in Leal's "María Novaro is an Unbolt Shameless Feminist and Anti-machist."⁷⁶ In 1991, Mexican reviews had used the term feminine in a positive way for *Lola* (Vega 1990, García Tsao 1991, Virgen 1991) and *Danzón* (Celin 1991, Carrera 1991). By contrast, after 1992, national reviews used the term feminist in a positive way. According to an anonymous reviewer, Novaro's third feature had a "Profound Feminist Vision" (1993).⁷⁷ Foreign critics' insistent alignment of Novaro's work with feminism may have pushed her towards an estrangement from feminism. By 1994, Novaro clearly positioned herself outside of feminism when she stated: "I Am not a Feminist Director" (ANSA 1994).

In general, newspaper reviews and scholarly works approach Guita Schyfter's films from the perspective of ethnicity and not gender, and for that reason I did not discuss her relation to feminism. Her third feature, however, is a comedy about a film festival that is

pertinent to my discussion. In *Las caras de la luna* (*The Faces of the Moon*, 2001), a partially autobiographic film, Schyfter recreates an international film festival in the 1990s, the Third Annual Latin American Film Festival. The main characters are five Latin American and U.S. women who are the jurors in a section dedicated to women's films. One of them, Joan (Geraldine Chaplin), is a U.S. feminist and film theoretician who is always dressed in black. In the film, Joan stands for cultural imperialism; she believes and acts as if she knows Latin America's reality. The film, however, establishes a comparison with the other Latin American judges to show that Joan's knowledge is deficient. According to *Las caras de la luna*'s narrative, the knowledge that counts is that of Julia, an Uruguayan militant who had to spend years in jail, and of Josh, an Argentinean who lost her family during the military dictatorship. If we can infer Schyfter's view of feminism from her portrayal of Joan, we can conclude that North American feminist academics make inconsequential theories about people whom they can't comprehend, a point that is reinforced by Joan's votes. Joan judges films based on her choice of a lover (she is a lesbian in love with one of the woman filmmakers) and not on the value of the films themselves. Joan's lack of ethics and insight allows us to say that Schyfter—as Cortés, Sistach, Rotberg and Novaro had done before her—positions herself outside of feminism. This opting out of feminism does not necessarily mean that the generation of the film schools were not interested in the advancement of women issues. Rather, it should be interpreted as a sign that the way in which women's issues are approached and understood has evolved.

Conclusion

In the sections above, I have shown that women filmmakers in Mexico have gained power and respect, including the creation of a new field of study: women's filmmaking. Compared to the first and second generation, the third generation has been able to attain more power and social respect. I have also described the shifts within Mexican feminist thought. After 1986 women filmmakers of the third generation proposed revisions. Since North American feminism apparently experienced a similar shift within feminism, following Mora I have called the third generation filmmakers third wavers. Third wavers have revised several issues important to feminism, such as rape, and are interested in reconsidering the concept of motherhood.

For over two decades, feminist scholars have shown that patriarchy has debased the figure of the mother. In the by now classical article "Something Else Besides a Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*," Linda Williams refers to the figure of the mother as "debased," emphasizing that mothers are treated dismissively. In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Oliver makes a similar claim but targets society. Oliver believes that the culture at large devalues maternity by reducing it to repellant animality (2001: 50). In Kristevian terms, we can say that society, maternal melodramas, and the woman's film present the mother as an abject other.

Having gained a more respected place in society, filmmakers are in a better position to present their experiences as mothers in a positive light. In other words, they can invest emotionally in a part of their identity that society has derided. Pride about motherhood is a distinctive trait of third-wave Mexican filmmakers and can be explained by looking at their enhanced social status. Third wavers learnt strong technical skills in film schools,

where they also acquired self-confidence. With confidence, technical skills, and the film boom of Salinas' state cinema, these filmmakers made internationally renowned films. Such recognition provided them with a safer environment in which to view themselves as mothers and to explore the issue of motherhood. The different experiences in education, professional life, and recognition that Mexican woman filmmakers encountered over the last few decades, together with the changing feminist ideas they lived with, explain why second- and third-wave filmmakers held different attitudes toward motherhood at the Tijuana conference in 1990.

⁷ The "Encuentro" was part of a series entitled Mexico-U. S. Cruzando Fronteras (Crossing Borders).

⁸ The proceedings of the Encuentro, including round-table discussions and audience interventions, were edited by Norma Iglesias and Rosalinda Fregoso.

⁹ "Una mujer preparada profesionalmente dentro y fuera de la universidad tiene que demostrar que puede hacerlo todo y que la familia pasa a segundo término, porque primero que nada se es creadora y después se es lo demás" (Iglesias and Fregoso 34).

¹⁰ In 1945 there was a split within the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica (STPC). Following that split, two unions were created. STIC specialized in shorts and television and STPC in long feature films.

¹¹ In an interview, Landeta reproduced for me the conversation with members of the union. Wanting to convince union members that she was qualified Landeta asked them: "Do you consider that I have the talent that it takes?" The union members answered: "Of course." Landeta added: "Am I intelligent? . . . Do I know about film?" and they said "Huh, and a lot!" (Arredondo 2002, 1995).

¹² The Film Academy was a film school created within the film union STIC that lasted for two years, 1943-1945.

¹³ During an interview I conducted with Landeta in 1995, she mentioned: "I knew that I was a great film technician, because the Film Academy considered me so" and added that what kept her from getting promoted was "Being a woman" (Arredondo 2002: 9).

¹⁴ Landeta told Díaz: “I wanted to direct but I had one more step to take to be in command of the crew so I wouldn’t sound silly when I shouted: “camera”. I needed to speak with authority. I needed to be an assistant director.” *My Filmmaking, My Life* (1990).

¹⁵ Landeta complained to me: “My poor film was born in a non premier theater” (Arredondo 2002: 10).

¹⁶ According to John King, “The Golden Age of Mexican cinema, in decline since the end of the Second World War, had ended by the early 1950s” (129).

¹⁷ As Elissa Rashkin points out, the state’s interest in promoting filmmaking and building up a state apparatus was not altogether altruistic. Rashkin argues that Echeverría created a state-supported film industry as a way to win back the urban educated middle class, which held him responsible for the massacre of Tlatelolco in October 2, 1968. At this time Echeverría was secretary of the interior (64-65). Also, for a detailed description of the state system that emphasizes its pitfalls, see Maciel, “Cinema and the State in Contemporary Mexico” (*Mexico’s Cinema*, 193-197).

¹⁸ The group Nuevo Cine was integrated, among others, by Emilio García Riera, José de la Colina, Salvador Elizondo, Carlos Monsiváis, and Rafael Corkidi.

¹⁹ Years later, when Alfredo Joskowicz became the CCC’s director, he opened the school to other specialties.

²⁰ For detailed information on CUEC’S classes and early organization see: *1974-1980 Centro de Estudios Universitarios, UNAM*.

²¹ The state was unable to nationalize Películas Nacionales because of the size of the company and the amount of filmic material it owned. However, the state was able to buy 10% of the shares, making Películas Nacionales a semi-private company.

²² In 1991, the distributor Películas Nacionales went bankrupt and was liquidated, and the theater chain COTSA followed a similar path.

²³ The exception was Dana Rotberg, who left the CCC because she preferred to learn in a union setting, working as an assistant director.

²⁴ Joskowicz was CUEC’s academic secretary from 1971 to 1976, CCC director from 1977 to 1982, and CUEC director in 1989.

²⁵ In a curriculum description of a 1970s pamphlet made by the CCC.

²⁶ López-Sánchez had said that each student in the class chose first the task they prefer to take when filming their own exercise: “From the first year, the director is a student; the movies are by the students. In the first exercise, the people studying to be cinematographers are in charge of their filming, and the ones studying to be directors have to direct classmates”(Arredondo 2001: 180).

²⁷ As I argued in the introduction to *Palabra de Mujer*, a comparison of contemporary Cuban and Mexican women film directors shows that Mexican directors educated in film schools felt more confident about their skills than Cuban directors did. The latter had learned in a guild system that was vertically organized.

²⁸ Hiring someone who did not belong to the union, however, doubled the expense, because the producer had to pay compensation to the union equal to the worker who wasn't hired, plus the salary of the non-union worker.

²⁹ De la Vega Alfaro, unpublished interview (1991: 13).

³⁰ According to Millán, “Un tanto aparte de la política de izquierda, las feministas generaron su propia acción política y militante: se organizaron en grupos de estudio, de apoyo y de acción política; se plantearon la educación y el apoyo a la mujer obrera y popular, la información sexual y la lucha por la despenalización del aborto, las exigencias políticas de igualdad económica salarial e igualdad de oportunidades en el trabajo, la crítica de la mujer como objeto sexual, su papel en una sociedad consumista” (Millán 96: 114).

³¹ Owen wrote *La llama fría* (1925) and *La novela como nube* (1928).

³² When interviewed in 2001, Durán felt that with his work at UTEC, he had helped build Mexico's cultural patrimony, because today UTEC's series are available to the public in Mexico's libraries, and they are aired at programs of the Instituto Latinoamericano de Comunicación Educativa (ILCE).

³³ Durán told me: “The point was to collect a minimum amount of material that the public channels could rely on” (“Queríamos reunir una cantidad mínima de material con la que pudieran contra los canales públicos” Arredondo, personal interview, 5/23/01: 2).

³⁴ Although working for educational TV was one of the best options, it also had its limits. Cortés mentions that a group including the three scriptwriters (Alicia Molina, Pepe Buil, and Carmen Cortés) wanted to go a step further from the series and make a miniseries, a short television drama in a few episodes (Arredondo 2001: 100). They wanted to adapt Rosario Castellanos's *Balún Canán* for channel 13. The plan was to make seven episodes of 55-plus minutes apiece and shoot it in various locations in Chiapas. Imevisión—the state-run television channel—bought the screenplays, but they ended up not producing

the miniseries because they considered the budget too high. The miniseries project shows the graduates' ambitions to move to forms of filmmaking closer to the long-feature film that they had learned in school. Television channels, even the educational ones, however, could not afford shooting on location or hiring actors for a short period of time; series, much longer in duration, were more profitable for actors (Arredondo 2001: 100).

³⁵ Juan Guerrero shares a similar idea when he says: "Los egresados emplearon los modos de producción de cine que habían aprendido en las escuelas. "Maryse Sistach: Los pasos de Ana." (*El Nacional*: Sección espectáculos, July 16, 1990: 21).

³⁶ Sistach said: "I had to shoot Ana and Clementina's visit to the theater in three hours, because that was how long they had rented the location, and the result was an awfully bad sequence. Even though it wasn't the image I was looking for, it did allow me to explore a topic that was important to me. I wanted to speak about what happens to people in a country with no memory, of the time that passes, of the culture that is lost, of the forgetfulness. Mexico is a country that hasn't managed to preserve many of its architectural marvels. For instance, the neighborhood built in the forties that you knew in 1960 or 1980, has been devastated by aluminum and concrete. In spite of having such strong cultural roots, Mexico has no memory of them, which prevents the country from having an identity."

³⁷ There was a short interval between one and the other; UTEC was closed by a political scheme against Juan José Bremer (administrator in charge of Fine Arts, under whose umbrella was UTEC). Bremer was accused and made responsible for introducing inflammatory materials against the wife of the president in one of the magazines he was responsible for.

³⁸ Se hacía cine "como se podía" y también "teníamos la impresión de que así iba a ser siempre".

³⁹ IMCINE was created in 1983 but did not began to participate in the production of films until 1988.

⁴⁰ Before 1988, IMCINE, in charge of organizing the public sector and coordinating the private and public sectors, had to respond to a board for radio, television and cinematography, the Dirección General de Radio, Televisión y Cinematografía (RTC), which was in charge of censorship.

⁴¹ For Rashkin, "The proactive policies of IMCINE under Ignacio Durán had replaced the torpor of the 1980s with a vibrant cinema." (215). Maciel describes Durán as an able administrator, although he criticizes the legal reform and liquidation of COTSA, which was carried out under Durán's administration. According to Maciel, "The state justifications were that the private sector would be more efficient in management and the

sale would produce important revenues.” In practice, however, “The profits from the sale of COTSA, like the great majority of the other state-owned companies, benefited only the elites and not the sectors intended.” (1999: 215-216).

⁴² State filmmaking is deeply affected by Mexico’s economic conditions. Since a big part of the production costs are paid in dollars, a devaluation of the peso often results in the state’s suspending the production of films. The revitalization of filmmaking during Salinas’ sexenio cannot solely be based on strategic planning; the stability of the peso was a decisive factor, too. Between 1988 and 1994 there were no major crises, which meant a steady flow of income for the production of films. Jonathan Heath, who studied Mexican economical crises, worked out an index of the crises (7). According to Heath’s index, once the economy recovered from a severe crisis during October 1987-January 1988 in De la Madrid’s sexenio, most of the sexenio was stable, with only short moderate crises in March 1990 and March-April 1994. There was a severe crisis in November 1994, but it did not affect filmmaking during Salinas’ sexenio, because it took place in the last month of the sexenio.

⁴³ “Lo que pasa ahora es que hay condiciones muy específicas que permiten que el buen cine se haga en cantidades más considerables. La coparticipación estatal es muy importante. Por otro lado, la intervención de cineastas jóvenes en la cinematografía nacional proporciona perspectivas distintas a la industria” (Piña Jarillo 1991).

⁴⁴ En este sexenio el estado: "no te resuelve tu problema de producción sino que te ayuda a resolverlo, se te propone como un coproductor, que creo que es un punto fundamental porque el que hace que el director se haga coproductor y por lo tanto responsable de su producto, eso significa que empezamos a acercarnos remotamente a la idea de que eso es un asunto de negocios, que o se recupera lana o se muere" (De la Vega 1991).

⁴⁵ It was common at this time for directors to fund their own production houses, contributing with their own work instead of money. Busi Cortés created her own production house, which contributed 15% towards the production costs. Cortés calculated that the work of the Producciones Romelia’s team (her work as director, the work of Carmen Cortés, Alicia Molina, and herself on the script, and that of Gina Terán as the executive producer) was worth 15% of the production costs (Arredondo 2001: 43).

⁴⁶ Producers, distributors, and exhibitors were represented by CANACINE and organized under the Association of Producers and Distributor (APDPM).

⁴⁷ IMCINE could grant “financial support to private producers, cooperatives and other national and international institutions” and could legally enter as an associate participant or co-producer or could buy the rights to the film before it was made (Millet 53).

⁴⁸ According to Rashkin, who cites Pérez-Turrent's description of state policy during Salinas' sexenio, the state's "policy was not so much outright sponsorship as brokering of partnerships between a range of private investors and governmental agencies" (13).

⁴⁹ In an a newspaper review written in 1993, the year *Los pasos* was released in Mexico, Julieta Velasco mentions that IMCINE did not launch a publicity campaign of the film ("Los pasos de Ana," *El Nacional*: Sección carteleras, April 4, 1993). The same issue is brought by Jesús Ortega Mendoza ("Los pasos de Ana," *El Universal*: Sección universo joven, March 13, 1993: 3) and also by Tomás Pérez Turrent, ("Los pasos de Ana," *El Universal*, February 2, 1994: 1,3). Rafael Aviña goes so far as to say that IMCINE boycotted the film ("Los Pasos de Ana, de Maryse Sistach," *unomásuno*, 1995: 13).

⁵⁰ Patricia Vega, "Concluye en Guadalajara la VI Muestra de Cine Mexicanò," (*La Jornada*: Sección cultura, March 13, 1991: 41).

⁵¹ Tomás Pérez Turrent believed that *Los pasos* could not be easily exhibited commercially because of the quality of the final copy. Since *Los pasos* had been blow up from a video master, the quality of the 35 mm final print was not on a par with other films being exhibited in commercial theaters in 1991 ("Ana, divorciada y con dos hijos, vive la duda," *El Universal*: March 14: 1,2).

⁵² At this time in Mexico, foreign film had to be subtitled, not dubbed.

⁵³ Conchita Perales, "Entrevista con María Novaro III," *El Nacional*, July 1991: 36, 37, 38, 39.

⁵⁴ "¿Por qué no está María Novaro?, ¿por qué no está Dana Rotberg? ¿por qué no está Busi Cortés?" (Iglesias and Fregoso: 33).

⁵⁵ "Dentro de esta enorme estructura, existen estrudios y sindicatos que nos han aplastado durante buen rato. Esta estructura ha tenido que ceder, abriéndose y permitiendo el acceso a una nueva generación de realizadores, que incluye algunas mujeres" (Iglesias and Fregoso: 27).

⁵⁶ Patricia Torres refers to Cocina de Imágenes as the first meeting in which filmmakers and critics came together to discuss their work (Iglesias and Fregoso 76).

⁵⁷ Unpublished interview with Sistach 6.

⁵⁸ "Danzón, de Mexico, salva el honor del cine latino en Cannes."

⁵⁹ "Creo que lo único que debemos decir es que somos mujeres productoras de imágenes".

⁶⁰ “Surge la 4ª directora de películas.”

⁶¹ Iglesias and Fragoso, 92-102.

⁶² For more details, see Millán 1999: 99.

⁶³ Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro and Patricia Torres San Martín, *Adela Sequeyro* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara-Universidad de Veracruz, 1977)

⁶⁴ Some scholars consider Cine-Mujer part of women’s work but do not ascribe the collective a seminal role (Vega, Millán 1999). In Vega’s opinion, for instance, the collective’s feminist films illustrate a temporary radicalization of thought, “A feminist parenthesis” in women’s work (Iglesias and Fregoso: 96). Millán defends a similar position when she explains that Cine-Mujer was part of an overall radicalization of the cultural and political atmosphere of Mexico from the late 60s to the mid-80s (1999: 111-123).

⁶⁵ In Spanish, “Cine de mujer,” “El cine de mujer hoy,” “Cultura popular y cine de mujer.”

⁶⁶ Carlos Monsiváis and Mágina Millán debated the dangers (Monsiváis) and possibilities (Millán) of using the notion of a feminine aesthetic (Iglesias and Fregoso 192-193).

⁶⁷ Torres said “En ningún momento este encuentro se diseñó con el ánimo de proclamar que el cine realizado por mujeres es determinante de una visión feminista” (Torres 2002: 11).

⁶⁸ “Se intentó establecer vínculos entre la historia del cine y la práctica fílmica actual” (Torres, 2002: 11).

⁶⁹ Novaro told me: “I had even written a much harsher ending for the movie but it seemed too strong to me and I changed it to one that allowed you a glimpse of hope, an opening in the sky” (Arredondo 2001: 131). At another unrecorded interview, Novaro was more specific and said that in the first scripts Lola committed suicide.

⁷⁰ Cortés said: “Me choca el cine feminista; el mío es de mujeres” (Espinosa 1989).

⁷¹ Rubén Hernández entitles his review: “Feminine Cinema Takes Its Place,” (“El cine femenino toma su lugar” *El Nacional*, March 14, 1989).

⁷² For Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Lola* is a feminine portrait. “<<Lola>>: retrato femenino de una estudiante del CUEC,” (*El Universal*, February 10, 1991).

⁷³ “Un enfoque actual y supervital que duela y conmueva a las mujeres”. Patricia Vega, “En *Lola*, quiero desmitificar la maternidad: María Novaro,” (*La Jornada*, January 11, 1989).

⁷⁴ *Intimidad* and *Los pasos* were shown at La V Muestra de Cine Mexicano in Guadalajara in 1991. According to José Vera, the audience liked *Intimidad* (“Júbilo en la premier de *Intimidad*,” *El Nacional*: Sección espectáculos, 1991: 5). *Intimidad* had been shown the previous year in San Sebastián and Huelva and was taken to Berlín’s Film Festival together with *Lola* and *Los pasos de Ana* in 1991.

⁷⁵ Macarena Quiroz Arroyo, “No Pretendo Mostrar una Temática Feminista en mis Películas, Dice la Realizadora Dana Rotberg” (*Excélsior*, November 19, 1992).

⁷⁶ “María Novaro es descarada feminista y antimachista.”

⁷⁷ Anonymous, “Profunda visión feminista a “El jardín del Edén,” (*Novedades*, nd, 1993: 14).

Chapter 2: Recovering Sara García's Excessive Love: Contemporary Views of Classical Melodramas

Among the many preoccupations evident in the films of contemporary Mexican female filmmakers, I have chosen to focus on the issue of gender identity. My main question is: What does it mean to be a Mexican woman in these films? These films show that generational differences are important and that mothers and daughters may have different ideas about their female identities. As their filmmakers have pointed out at roundtable discussions and in interviews I have had with them, these films also present contemporary female characters that are created as a response to female characters of the Mexican classical period. Thus, for these filmmakers, questions of gender identity need to be set in an historical context. It is therefore important to answer the question: What does it mean to be a woman in the classical period of Mexican film? My discussion of this latter question will be based on the existing literature on Mexican cinema. In this regard, another important issue is: How has this scholarship analyzed representations of women in the history of Mexican cinema? And a follow-up question, of course, is: Are there other ways in which to approach the representations of women in classical Mexican films? Since Mexico is a Catholic country, I will bring into the discussion works such as Marina Warner's study of the Virgin Mary across six centuries and Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the myth of the Virgin Mary from a psychoanalytical point of view.⁷⁸

In this chapter, I will begin by reviewing the categories that scholars in cultural studies and film have used to talk about stereotypical representations of women in classical Mexican culture. This overview will provide the basis for reconsidering what it

means to be a woman in Mexican films of the classical period (1940s-1950s) and even through 1972.⁷⁹ Feminist film critics examining U.S. and Mexican films have used the dichotomy virgin/whore to call attention to the fact that women are asked at the same time to be sexual and pure. I agree with the contradiction feminist film critics point out; however, I will not be using the virgin/whore dichotomy in my analysis. Instead, my examination of classical films will target another issue that I consider of essential importance: the ways in which classical representations of mothers set limits on mothers' ability to see themselves as anything other than a mother. I want to call attention to the fact that in classical films the identity of "mother" is forced on any woman who had children. For instance, in "Negative Examples: Un-Virgin-like "Devora-hombres," I show the way in which the main character, Doña Barbara, is condemned because she takes on an identity as owner of an hacienda, discarding her identity as mother.

Another important issue when studying female stereotypes has to do with the role that Catholic culture plays in defining femininity in Mexican life; Catholicism needs to be discussed rather than simply assumed. Morals and agency in Mexico are strictly related to Catholic beliefs that articulate a specific notion of femininity best exemplified in the myth of the Virgin Mary, a myth that changes over time. My intention is to focus on the figure of the Virgin in Mexican culture and its role in creating female stereotypes in classical Mexican cinema. Fundamental for this discussion is a spatial and temporal reconsideration of the ways in which the story of the Virgin Mary has been constructed in Catholic countries. In order to trace the myth of the Virgin Mary in Mexico and to explain its influence on women's roles in Mexican society, I will consider a number of films from the 1940s to 1972. My study, however, does not look for literal

representations of the Virgin Mary in filmic narratives but rather describes the way in which the myth of the Virgin is used in Mexican classical cinema as a model for performances that establish femininity. In order to avoid understanding gender as a category of essence, I use Judith Butler's notion of performance, which treats gender as an action by a non-established ever-changing subject. According to Butler "Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be doing to pre-exist the deed"(Butler, 25). Following Butler's notion, I look for the myth of Mary in instances in which female characters create a gender identity for themselves by acting like the Virgin, by imitating her behavior.

The importance of acting like the Virgin has already been pointed out by Charles Ramírez-Berg in relation to classical Mexican cinema. He explains: "women are expected to be not only virginal, but Virgin-like, emulating the Virgin de Guadalupe, the spiritual patroness of Mexico" (23).⁸⁰ Ramírez-Berg's distinction between *virginal* and *Virginal* emphasizes that Mexican society expects women to not only abstain from sex but also to act like the Virgin. What, however, is involved in acting like the Virgin?

When analyzing classical films, I draw on Marina Warner's lengthy study of the Virgin to specify what it means to act like the Virgin. Warner points out a surprising fact: the story of Mary that most Catholics of today believe in is not actually in the Bible. The New Testament has but a few lines about the mother of Jesus. Warner contends that Catholics have built on these few lines to construct and reconstruct the story of Mary for more than 2,000 years. In chronological order, Mary has been viewed as virgin, queen, bride, mother, and intercessor. I am more interested in the story of Mary as mother, because this is the model that more frequently appears in Mexican classical melodramas.

To underline that in the Mexican context of the 1940s-1950s films, female characters try to approach normative ideals by imitating the Virgin, I have created the term “Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood”. This term calls attention to the fact that women are encouraged to mimic the Virgin, not only by acting *virginally*, that is by showing that they are sexually pure, but also by acting *Virginally*, that is by imitating the Virgin’s role as a sacrificing and mediating mother. With the hyphen between the word *Virgin* and *Motherhood*, I emphasize that this ideal is based on the assumption prevailing in Mexican melodramas that womanhood and motherhood are one and the same. This is then the ideal for all female characters, not just for those who play the role of mothers.⁸¹

Another important issue in the discussion of Virginity is what motivates women to act like the Virgin. Following Julia Kristeva’s analysis of the construct of the Virgin, I see Virginity as more than just a means to control sexual anxieties; by acting like the Virgin, female characters can, like the Virgin, have a place by the side of the Savior.⁸² In other words, by subjecting themselves to acting like the Virgin, women may negotiate a place for themselves in society. This negotiation, in my view, is made through what Kaja Silverman calls idealization. In the second part of *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996), Silverman emphasizes the importance of combining cultural notions with psychoanalysis and proposes an alternative way to think about normative ideals. One of Silverman’s contributions is the way in which she conceives the relationship between individuals and society. Normative ideals are often times thought of as ideals that are forced upon individuals, restricting or nullifying their freedom. Silverman, by contrast, gives individuals a certain degree of choice. She combines Lacan’s notion of the gaze with his idea of mimicry to explain that individuals choose to copy (to mimic) certain

ideals in order to fit into specific groups. Idealization for Silverman, then, is an essential and unavoidable component of socialization. Through Silverman's idea of idealization, we can see the Virgin Mary as an image that stands for an ideal way of being a mother. Some women may choose to mimic Mary in order to belong to the group that creates normative ideals in Catholic countries such as Mexico; others may not.

In this chapter, I use five films to trace the narrative of Virginity as a social performance of motherhood. These films illustrate the birth and death of a normative ideal. In the first film, made in the 1940s, characters are encouraged to copy the Virgin's mothering behavior; in the last film, made during the 1970s, other characters laugh at those who attempt to mimic Virginity. Although the presence of Virginal qualities in filmic representations of Mexican women appears before the 1940s, it is during the classical period of Mexican cinema that the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is fully articulated, specifically in the film *María Candelaria* (1943). The model of the Virgin can also be found in melodramas that do not make a direct reference to the Virgin, such as *Una familia de tantas* (1948). However, it is actress Sara García's excess in playing the sacrificing mother in *Cuando los hijos se van* (1941) that makes the Ideal live for thirty years. Another significant film of this period is *Doña Bárbara* (1943), which exemplifies what the Ideal is not. *Doña Bárbara* shows the limitations that the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood imposes on women's process of individuation. I view *Mecánica nacional* (1972), in which Sara García dies on screen, as the film that marks the moment in which the Ideal is symbolically declared obsolete in Mexican culture.

The last section of this chapter summarizes the views Mexican women filmmakers have of the women in classical melodramas. Third-wave filmmakers see classical films as

a resource for studying Mexicanness, as a repository of Mexican emotions. Several contemporary filmmakers made their films as a response to classical melodramas. In *Danzón*, for instance, María Novaro humorously critiques the exaggerated idealization prevalent in classical films, and in *Angel de fuego* Dana Rotberg questions the high price women have to pay when they follow religious ideals. Finally, there is also one contemporary filmmaker who found some aspects of mothers in classical melodramas interesting. In *Los pasos de Ana* Marisa Sistach, proposes that her protagonist has the same love for her children as classical icon Sara García.

Before looking at classical films, however, I will discuss how scholars have interpreted representations of women in classical Mexican melodramas. My approach differs from those of other scholars and takes their analyses in new directions.

Scholarly Approaches to Classical Cinema

In reviewing the literature on the classical period in Mexican cinema, it is clear that most scholars approach the representation of women through the notion of stereotype and that the discussion of stereotype in U.S.-based scholarship is influenced by Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950).⁸³ In his book, which went through over 60 editions, Paz proposes two dominant stereotypes for Mexican women: La Malinche, a historical figure also known as Doña Marina, who acted as an interpreter of XVI-century Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the most loved Virgin in Mexico. In the chapter "The Sons of La Malinche", Paz understands La Malinche in sexual terms, as a fallen woman, whore, and traitor, and the Virgin of Guadalupe as a loving and nurturing mother.

In the 1960s the Chicano movement emerged, and in the 1970s Chicana feminist scholars contended that Paz's association of female sexuality with betrayal was a reinforcement of the machismo they experienced in their communities. Cordelia Candelaria, in "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype" was one of the earliest to raise her voice against Paz's interpretation of La Malinche. In 1981, coinciding with the Mexican publication of Paz's revision of *Labyrinth*, Norma Alarcón attacked Paz's view of Malintzin for its historical inaccuracy, a critique that was further developed by Cherrié Moraga in 1986 and by Alarcón again in 1989.⁸⁴ Using historical accounts of the Conquest to support their arguments, these scholars proposed that Malintzin, who had been sold as a slave before Cortés arrived, used her translating skills to gain power. For them, Malintzin was not a traitor.

The debate about La Malinche led by Chicana feminist scholars in the field of literature had an effect of the way in which Paz's theories were discussed in U.S.-based scholarship on Mexican film. References to Paz, whether positive or negative, are mentioned in the most important studies on female stereotypes written during the 1980s and 1990s, beginning with Carl J. Mora's 1985 study. The legacy of Chicana scholars is felt in the 1990s, when Paz's female dyad is understood as part of a sexist discourse on female sexuality in Mexico. For instance, in *Cinema of Solitude* (1992), Charles Ramírez Berg distances himself from Paz's discourse when he comments that "Because of her [La Malinche], Paz and others have argued, feminine sexual pleasure is linked in the Mexican consciousness not only with prostitution but with national betrayal" (24). From this perspective, women are not by nature traitors; rather, female sexuality has been historically associated with treachery. In their analyses of Mexican film, feminist film

scholars have thus fought to challenge the negative associations attached to female sexuality. In “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema” (1994), for example, film scholar Ana López associates the female body with life and energy. To counter the restrictions of the melodramas of the classical period, López values images of women who are able to express their sexuality, such as the previously vilified rumbera, and laments images that glorify women’s repression, such as “good-mothers” or “bad-women”. Feminist film scholars have also fought to place the figure of La Malinche in historical context. In her study of images of women in classical melodramas, film scholar Joanne Hershfield draws on Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* to argue that Malintzin’s sexual relationship with Cortés had strategic and military explanations rather than emotional ones (1996, 20), and she also includes a sociological study of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. After 2000, ironically the 50th anniversary of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the debate about Paz’s stereotypes in Mexican film studies seems to unwind; Paz becomes a marginal reference in the discussion of Mexican female stereotypes, as in the works of Elissa Rashkin (2001) and Susan Dever (2003).

In contrast to U.S. scholarship, film scholarship based in Mexico generally does use the notion of stereotype as its more important critical tool but rarely refers to Paz’s dyad. In *La aventura del cine mexicano* (1968), a study that went through seven editions between 1968 and 1993, Jorge Ayala Blanco distinguishes between two types: mothers, studied as part of “La familia,” and prostitutes, studied as part of “La prostituta.” The latter stereotype includes the rumba dancer, the B-girls, and the vamp (such as the character played by María Félix in *Doña Bárbara* (112). Ayala Blanco critiques the rigid

morality and restrictive nature of the stereotypes of the classical period. For him, the prostitute, whom he considers the flip-side of the maternal woman, was created to reestablish the familial equilibrium threatened by asexual mothers (108). While it is important to note that the stereotypes are used to impose moral values that restrict female sexuality, it is just as important, although often not as mentioned, that classical stereotypes restrict women's agency and their capacity to have wishes and make choices. Feminist film studies in the U.S., such as Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*" (1999), and Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987) brought the issue of desire into the discussion of 1940s classical Hollywood films.

In her 1975 essay, Mulvey uses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to claim that in the classical Hollywood system, female characters are the objects of desire for the male gaze.⁸⁵ Mulvey's notion of object comes from classical psychoanalysis. Object-relation psychoanalysis, which developed during the 1930s and was widely used in the 1970s, went back to biology's study of the organism and its surroundings in order to discuss human relations. Object-relation theorists are interested in different issues relating to objects; Freud, for example, focused on the way in which instincts are directed towards objects (Laplanche-Pontalis, 278). He distinguished between an object, its source, and its aim and used words such as object cathexis, object-choice, object-love, and object-tie to describe the subject's attachment to objects (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 1921). Freud rarely used the word desire, and if he did, it was in relation to the fulfillment of unconscious wishes (Laplante Pontalis, 481-3). Working

within object-relation theory but in a different direction, Melanie Klein places the emphasis on the relation between object and subject; she is interested in the way in which the subject constitutes his or her objects, as well as the way in which the objects shape the actions of the subject (Laplante and Pontalis, 278). During the 1970s there was a shift in psychoanalysis away from the emphasis on instincts. Psychoanalytic approaches to film theory in the 1980s used the notion of object mostly in relation to the Lacanian notion of desire, based on lack. For example, in *The Desire to Desire*, Doane uses Freudian theory, but through Lacan's notion of lack and thus away from Freud's interest in instincts.

Doane is less interested in learning about female instincts than in understanding the conscious wishes of women and their representation in cinema. Although I disagree with Doane's conclusion that female spectators cannot desire because they identify too closely with the images projected on the screen, I find Doane's notion of desire useful to study female stereotypes of the classical Mexican period. If desire is defined as the capacity to want objects and the ability to work towards the fulfillment of desire, is desire at all present in female stereotypes? Do all the characters representing the stereotypes have the ability to desire or only some of them? And also, what values are attached to female characters who desire? And, ultimately, what conclusions in regard to femininity and desire can we arrive at from analyzing the characters of the films?

Doane and Mulvey question Metz's non-gender-specific way of understanding cinematic spectatorship, which assumes that it does not change according to sex; both maintain that spectatorship is not sexually indifferent because males and females go through different identificatory processes. In an attempt to understand women's identificatory processes, Doane turns to film magazines contemporary to the 1940s films

that she studies. In these magazines, women are considered the biggest consumers of women films and of products related to these films, and it is assumed that films are made for them.

In my view, a discussion of what Doane calls desire, closely related to the notion of agency, needs to be integrated in the debate on female stereotypes in the classical period of Mexican cinema. I will discuss the work of Ana María López because although it is an exception among the Mexican scholars, her work brings the notion of desire into the debate of women's agency.

Desire

In *Tears and Desire* López proposes a taxonomy of the most common spaces that appear in Mexican classical melodramas and organizes them according to female desire. In López's topography, the center is inhabited by those female characters who do not have sexual desires, while at the margins live those female characters who do; the further away from the center, the more desires a person has. López uses specific actresses to discuss these spaces; for example, in the central space of the patriarchal home live "madrecitas queridas" (beloved mothers), asexual women who suffer and sacrifice themselves, best represented by actress Sara García (153-154). According to López, the "malas mujeres" (bad women), typically played by actress María Félix, share the same central space as the beloved mothers because they also are asexual. In López's spatialization of desire, women who become prostitutes because of economic hardship live one step away from the center (156). Beyond them live "rumberas," women who dance in cabarets. López considers rumba dancers (often portrayed by Ninón Sevilla), as

the female characters most closely associated with desire, because they “project a virulent form of desire into the screen” (158).

The first question that López’s topography raises is: What definition of desire is she using? Does her notion of desire include agency? Doane’s notion of desire involves the capacity to want people or things, also known in psychoanalytic terms as the capacity to have objects. My conclusion is that López does not take the notion of desire far enough, because by desire she seems to refer only to being sexually uninhibited, a notion that does not take agency into consideration. Under psychoanalytic and feminist notions of desire, for example, the rumbera is locked, almost exclusively, into the position of having her body desired, a position that undermines her agency. The bad woman, by contrast, is a type of woman who actively desires. In fact, what makes the bad woman bad is precisely that she desires. The prohibition of female agency is representative of the classical period of Mexican cinema and is best illustrated by a film such as José Díaz Morales’ *Señora tentación*.

The Ideal within the Stereotypes in *Señora tentación* (The Temptress, 1947)

When analyzing the stereotypes of the classical melodrama, most scholars have examined films directed by El Indio Fernández or Fernando de Fuentes. However, unlike the better-known films by Fernández, *Señora tentación* offers a more articulated representation of female stereotypes. In this film the three female characters live in clearly demarcated spaces to which the protagonist, the musician Andrés (David Silva), has access. Andrés lives with pianist Blanca (Susana Guizar), works with rumbera Trini (Ninón Sevilla) in a cabaret, and falls in love with diva Hortensia (Hilda Sour), a famous South American couplé singer and musical entrepreneur who stays in expensive hotels.

Blanca, who stays most of the time at home playing the piano, represents an asexual woman. Her name, which in Spanish means white and thus is connected to purity, and her blindness, which can be read as a sign of her inability to “see” sex, reinforce the idea that she is a character who abstains from sexual relations. Blanca does not pursue desires of her own but rather sacrifices them to Andrés’ desires, giving the money she has saved for an eye operation to Andrés so he can publish his songs.

The rumbera Trini is presented as a character with excessive sexuality: when performing at the center of the stage, she offers her body as a sexual spectacle. Trini’s tight top covers her breasts but leaves her belly exposed; her long satin skirt with shiny embroidery opens on the side so that the musicians who accompany her—and by extension the men in the audience—can enjoy her long legs that end elegantly in delicate high-heeled shoes. López proposes that rumberas like Trini are women who desire. Yet, despite her magnificent sexualized performance, Trini can’t be considered a character who desires.

In *Señora tentación*, Trini is depicted in a stage that Freud calls narcissism. During what has been termed his “first period,” Freud approached human psychological development from an object-relation perspective, looking at the ability of men and women to develop objects of desire. In “On Narcissism” (1914), “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915), and “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921), Freud saw the ability to have objects in developmental terms, suggesting that having objects is an ability that humans develop as they mature. In “On Narcissism,” for instance, Freud described narcissism as “the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say,

strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities" (73). Freud postulated that good-looking women are in love with their own bodies and that the energy invested in loving their own bodies impedes their ability to love men. Freud concluded that women who do not have true objects are not fully mature; they are at a narcissistic stage because their development is halted.⁸⁶

Other object-relation analysts contemporary to Freud, among them Melanie Klein, have rightly questioned Freud's idea that women's psychic development gets halted at a narcissistic stage.⁸⁷ While agreeing with Klein, I still find it useful to bring "On Narcissism" into a discussion of Trini's desire in *Señora tentación*. Trini's character fits well with the concept of Freudian narcissism because she does not have what object relation theorists like Freud consider objects. Her love for Andrés is presented as filial rather than erotic. For instance, when Andrés decides to leave Blanca and follow Hortensia on a tour, Trini goes with him to accompany him as a friend. To emphasize her non-sexual, childish nature, Trini speaks with the voice of a child and acts with the naïve personality of a young girl.⁸⁸

Trini also appears as a narcissistic in a second way. Despite the constant flashing of Trini's sexual body, what we see is not Trini's desire, but the desire of others, the musicians, for Trini's body. Moreover, the inclusion of the musicians in the shot of her body is arranged to suggest a similar desire on the part of the audience. Trini's desire, as it appears in *Señora tentación*, is very close to what Freud calls narcissistic love in that Trini does not seem to have any other object of desire except her own body.

Trini's narcissism is in sharp contrast with Hortensia's desire. At the hotel, Hortensia has multiple desires of her own: she wants Andrés, she wants her elegant and luxurious

lifestyle, and most significantly, she wants her career as a musical entrepreneur. Interestingly, female desire, when it exists, as in the case of Hortensia, is hardly recognizable as such, because it is negatively represented. The title of the film already hints at the attraction-repulsion that Hortensia's desire produces. The film is called *Lady Temptation* because Hortensia, the Temptress, uses her direct look and seductive voice to lure Andrés. At the same time, Hortensia's irresistible look is linked to danger, evil intentions, and harmfulness and is thus portrayed as repulsive.

In *Señora tentación* the desire of the good-wife and the bad-woman is remarkably different, while the desire of the rumbera is clearly narcissistic. If we organize the stereotypes according to a topography of desire, the center would be occupied by the good-wife who does not desire anything for herself; slightly off-center we would find the narcissistic desire of the rumbera, and further still would be the bad-woman, a woman who has objects of desire. In my reading of the classical stereotypes, I have emphasized a polarity, whose opposing ends are a woman who minimally desires and a woman who fully desires. The graded polarity is organized around female desire, a desire that I have defined in psychoanalytic terms as the ability to have objects. Implicit in my definition of desire is the idea that desire cannot be restricted to sexual desire. I have also drawn a relationship between female desire and compensation. Females who abstain from personal desire, such as Blanca, get rewards; they are praised for their self-effacement and sacrifice. Those who do not, such as Hortensia, are not compensated, but rather are punished with death.

From Types to Ideals

My analysis of *Señora tentación* is a stepping-stone to proposing a new approach to the study of female stereotypes in classical melodramas. The discussion of female stereotypes has generally focused on creating a taxonomy of stereotypes, often stressing the differences between them. The emphasis on what distinguishes one stereotype from another turns the discussion away from what I see as central: the fact that the stereotypes support one and the same system of values. Each stereotype repeats, in negative or positive aspects, the same set of ideas, the same ideology. There are, however, exceptions: Ayala Blanco, for instance, considers the prostitute to be the flip-side of the good-mother. For him, prostitutes are created to “reestablish the equilibrium threatened by asexual mothers” (108). López also argues that good-mothers and bad-women have a similar function. In particular, she notes that both stereotypes support patriarchy: bad-women reject “the surface accoutrements of the patriarchal family” but only “in order to re-inscribe the need for the standard family with great force” (156). Thus, bad-women reinforce the same values as good-mothers; they all support patriarchy. I propose adding the notion of an ideal to Ayala Blanco and López’s idea that all the stereotypes support patriarchy. In the *Threshold to the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman approaches the relationship between individuals in specific societies and their images through the notion of ideal image. Silverman uses the term ideal in a similar sense to Freud’s ideal ego. Roughly speaking, the ideal ego is a mental image of the ego that has been idealized, that has been made, so to speak, beautiful. Silverman gives the notion of ideal image a corporality that is more Lacanian than Freudian. In Lacan’s explanation of psychological development, Freud’s ideal ego, which for the most part is considered a mental image,

gains corporality; it becomes the image of the child who, helped by his mother, recognizes his image reflected in the mirror. According to Silverman's interpretation of Lacan, this image is ideal because when seeing her or his body reflected in the mirror, the child experiences a corporeal cohesion that his or her body does not provide. Silverman proposes that the search for that first ideal image continues through adult life; we attempt to get the same feeling of cohesion by surrounding ourselves by ideal images that imitate what we want to be like. Stereotypes of classical Mexican melodramas can be understood as the ideal images that the society creates. The different female stereotypes refer to one ideal image. A bad-woman is an image that is far from emulating the ideal and for that reason is negatively invested with ideality (beauty). Similarly, a good-wife is an image that emulates the ideal and consequently is positively invested with ideality. Other stereotypes, such as the rumbera and cabaretera, are a combination of emulation (in the beauty of their bodies) and distance (in their overt sexuality) and thus are images that are neither completely emotionally invested nor totally rejected. In the specific context of Mexico, the ideal image that all the other images refer to is the Virgin Mary; she is the feminine model or ideal image that organizes the complex system of all the stereotypes.

The Ideal of Virgin Motherhood

Film scholars have pointed out the importance of the Virgin in the Mexican melodramas of the classical period; their studies, however, focus more on the Virgin of Guadalupe than on the Virgin Mary. Mora (1985), Ramírez-Berg (1992), and Hershfield (1996) choose the Virgen de Guadalupe because they consider her a symbol of Mexicanness. Mora writes, "The Mexican cinema created an ideal of motherhood unmistakably inspired by the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe" (229).⁸⁹ I propose that the

Guadalupe Virgin says little about mothering and ideals of femininity in Mexico. In my view, the Mexican Virgin reflects other aspects of the Virgin Mary: its role as an intercessor, as someone you can ask favors from, and also, and perhaps more importantly, for its ethnic connotation. The indigenous Virgin of Guadalupe stands primarily for the Mexican nation, for Mexicanness, whether in Aztecs dances performed at her basilica in Mexico City (Tepeyac) or in the art of the Chicanas in the United States.⁹⁰

In the 1910s, film viewing in Mexico was dominated by foreign films. In that context, the silent film *Tepeyac* (José Manuel Ramos, 1917) represented an effort by the amateur filmmaker and actors to bring a national symbol into film. *Tepeyac* is structured as a narrative containing a story within a story. The film begins with a scene of Guadalupe Flores (Pilar Cota) reading. After receiving the news that the boat in which her fiancé is traveling has capsized, Guadalupe begins to read the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a way to calm her anxiety. As she is reading, however, she falls asleep, and the film then portrays what she has been reading: the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepeyac. When the story of the apparition is over, the film returns to Guadalupe Flores, who awakes from her reverie to receive the good news that her fiancé is alive. When he returns, he and Guadalupe go to the basilica to pay homage to the Virgin. The film includes documentary footage of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the early 1910s.

In *Tepeyac*, the Virgin of Guadalupe is not associated with models of femininity or motherhood. She serves a wish-fulfillment purpose, interceding so that Guadalupe can have her fiancé back safely. On a more general level, *Tepeyac* also brings to film what is arguably Mexico's most important national symbol and set of religious practices. Since I

am interested in models of femininity and motherhood, I will not use the model of the Virgin of Guadalupe as Paz, Hershfield, and Ramírez-Berg have done.⁹¹

For my discussion of feminine stereotypes, the Virgin Mary is a more appropriate model of motherhood and femininity, and her representation within the transnational culture of Catholicism is a more appropriate framework of discourse. The construct of the Virgin Mary plays an important role in the education of middle- and upper-class girls attending Catholic schools, and she is also a central figure in Sunday mass. While I agree that it is important to study Mexico's cultural specificity (as Paz, Hershfield, and Ramírez-Berg do), it is equally important to look at Mexico's Catholic culture.⁹² Mexico is an important contributor to Catholic culture and through its films has exported Catholicism to other Spanish-speaking countries, especially during the classical period.

Motherhood and the Cult of the Virgin Mary

Mexico has a long tradition of questioning Catholicism, which began with its Independence in 1821. The Constitutions of 1857 and 1917 do have articles that restrict the power of Catholicism in Mexico. Unlike other Hispanic countries in which the Catholic Church has had close ties with the government, Mexico has positioned itself in the post-revolutionary era as anti-clerical, especially in the case of General Calles, who implemented the anti-religious articles of the Constitution of 1917.

A discussion of the role of religion in Mexico needs to consider the role of society in determining patterns of motherhood. In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Kelly Oliver suggests that maternal depression results from societal abjection. Could Oliver's argument apply to Mexico? Doesn't the cult of the Virgin Mary provide Mexican society with lovable images of mothers? At first glance, one would say that motherhood is

celebrated in Mexico and would conclude that Oliver's idea of abjected mothers does not apply in the Mexican context. After all, one of the most important, if not the most important, holiday in Mexico is December 12, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It is arguably even more important than Independence Day or the celebration of the Mexican Revolution. Although Mexico has a tradition of anticlericalism, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and even Mother's Day, are important celebrations in Mexico. Furthermore, machismo supports rather than undermines the cult of the Virgin. Men from all social classes, from drug dealers to leftist politicians, pay homage to local Virgins and wear medals with their images. Films show a similar idealization of motherhood through the figure of the Virgin. In her 1985 article, "Something Else Besides a Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*," Linda Williams contends that "The device of devaluing and debasing the actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood is typical of the woman's film in general and the sub-genre of the maternal melodrama in particular" (2000: 479). The contradiction that Williams points out is prevalent in Mexico's relationship to mothers and the Virgin. While mothers are devalued, the institution of Motherhood, represented by the Virgin Mary, is sanctified.

Discourse on the Virgin Mary as Mother

Julia Kristeva and Marina Warner study the cult of the Virgin Mary from a gender-specific perspective.⁹³ In *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), Warner's most important point is that the story of the Virgin as it appears in the Catholic cult of Mary is not referenced in the Bible. The New Testament does not give details of the Virgin's birth, childhood, or death. There is only a marginal reference to the Virgin as the mother of Jesus in Paul, probably written in 57 AD, but there is no real

discussion of concepts such as the Assumption or even the Immaculate Conception.⁹⁴ For the most part, the beliefs that appear in the cult of the Virgin Mary were created and discussed outside the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church and only became dogma many years, even centuries, later, with some theological points debated well into the mid-twentieth century. Warner's research covers two millennia, from before the first century through to the late twentieth century. This long time frame allows her to demonstrate that the myth changed over time. Initially, for instance, the similarity between the Virgin and Jesus was emphasized, while later on, during the Middle Ages, the idea that the Virgin was a Queen was highlighted. Later still, the Franciscans made the Virgin into a more human figure, linked to motherhood (172). From her analysis of the representation of the Virgin over twenty centuries, Warner concludes that Mary was used to represent different ideas at different times. *Alone of All Her Sex* is thematically and chronologically organized: Warner compiles literary and apocryphal works on the Virgin, most of them written by men, to date and thematically organize the changing myth of Mary. Although several aspects of Mary might overlap, and an aspect of Mary might be developed over several periods, Warner proposes that in chronological order, Mary was seen as virgin, queen, bride, mother, and intercessor. Warner dedicates six chapters to the aspect of the Virgin as mother. For my analysis, the most important chapters are "Let It Be" (the cult of Mary at the crib and the development of the culture of domestic idealism), "Mater Dolorosa" (the Virgin as mourning mother), and "The Immaculate Conception" (the Virgin as the only human without original sin).

In *Alone of All Her Sex*, Warner uses the myth of Mary as a springboard for studying notions of motherhood and femininity. Warner is not interested in the historical Mary but

in the Virgin Mary as myth. According to her, "A myth of such dimension is not simply a story, or a collection of stories, but a magic mirror like the Lady of Shalott's, reflecting a people and the beliefs they produce, recount, hold" (xxiii). Warner considers the myth a reflection of society, not imposed by an outside force but created by the society itself. We can infer that for her, the myth of Mary has regulatory functions, "governing" Catholic culture but at the same time having its origin from within it.

Warner dedicates the chapter "Let It Be" (177-191) to an explanation of the creation of the myth of Mary as mother. Warner begins by describing Greek thought, in particular that of Plato and Aristotle, as deeply misogynist, which meshed well with the biblical view of women as subordinate, treacherous, and wicked. According to Warner, "Although the ancient prejudice is of course heartily denied in ecclesiastical circles now, it continues to underpin the Christian ideal of woman. The legends of the Bible are translated into ethics; myths become morals; stories precepts" (179). For Warner, up until the thirteenth century, the Virgin was not thought of as a woman; she was in a completely separate category. This idea is expressed in the title of her book, *Alone of All Her Sex*, which emphasizes that the Virgin Mary was considered an exception to all the wickedness associated with the female sex in the Bible.

An example of the way biblical legends are translated into ethics is the transformation of the Virgin Mary into a humble mother during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. To explain this change, Warner shows that the notion of the Virgin Mary was modified in order to serve the needs of the incipient thirteenth-century bourgeoisie. The transition from feudalism to a bourgeoisie society based on commerce allowed women to stay at home. Thus arose the need, according to Warner, to idealize the

new situation of middle-class women who did not work outside in the fields. Fundamental to this change were, according to Warner, the ideas of the founder of the Franciscans, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). The doctrine of this radical brand of Christianity, which emphasized poverty and humility, had an impact on the cult of Mary, eventually removing her regalia as Queen and transforming her into a housewife. Yet Warner is critical of this change. She points out that these new ideals for women appear to be Christian but are only selectively so (184-186). In analyzing a fourteenth-century enamel plaque at the Garden Museum in Boston that portrays the Virgin and Christian virtues, she notes:

Of the theological virtues only charity is present (faith and hope omitted); of the cardinal, only prudence (not fortitude, justice or temperance). Humility, patience, obedience, compassion, purity, truth, praise, all take their place around Mary (185).

Warner arrives at the conclusion that self-assertive Christian virtues, such as fortitude and justice, are forgotten, while self-effacing ones take first place in representing the Virgin and the new ideals for women. One of the implications of Warner's analysis is that Francis' emphasis on humility and obedience was used from the fourteenth century on to reinforce the ideal of women's submissiveness.

While Warner clearly states that she wants to stay away from Freudian and Jungian analysis (xxiv), Kristeva uses a Freudian psychoanalytic approach to study the myth of Mary.⁹⁵ Coinciding with her own pregnancy and maternity in 1976, Kristeva wrote two articles about the Virgin as mother, "Stabat Mater" and "Motherhood According to

Giovanni Bellini.” In these articles Kristeva analyzes the cult of the Virgin Mary in painting (“Motherhood According to ...”) and music (“Stabat Mater”) as part of an aesthetic discourse on motherhood. In so doing, Kristeva departs from the idea that there have been only two discourses on motherhood—science and religion—suggesting that both have been unable to discuss the topic so as to combine its semiotic and symbolic components. In Kristeva’s opinion, the semiotic aspect of motherhood (a pre-symbolic, pre-verbal, pre-oedipal stage governed by bodily drives) has indeed been left out of the discourse on maternity. In “Stabat Mater” Kristeva uses her own experience as a mother to introduce an account of motherhood from a semiotic perspective. By using typographical differences, Kristeva underscores the separate, but coexisting, semiotic and symbolic accounts of motherhood: the semiotic account is represented in bold characters, visually standing out from the sections dedicated to the symbolic account. “Stabat Mater” contributes to the missing discourse on motherhood by including the pregnant female body (the semiotic representation of the mother).⁹⁶ Just as important is the analysis that Kristeva makes of the symbolic account of motherhood.

In the sections dedicated to the world of Law and Culture, Kristeva stresses that the Virgin has entered the symbolic realm only recently. The Vatican, as representative of the symbolic power of the Catholic Church, made the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption dogma in 1854 and 1950, respectively. Quite interestingly, Pius XII declared the Virgin a Queen as late as 1954, and the Virgin was made the Mother of the Church only in 1964.

Kristeva uses a psychoanalytic approach to the myth of the Virgin in part because she is interested in studying the way in which the construct of the Virgin, mainly in her

aspect as mother, has been created to satisfy the psychological needs of men and women. Countering scholars who interpret Mariology, the cult of the Virgin, as important mainly to women, Kristeva maintains that the Virgin is an image significant for both males and females.⁹⁷ Because she uses a psychoanalytic approach based on Freud, Kristeva assumes that the image of the Virgin will affect both sexes differently. In “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini”, Kristeva analyzes the Virgins painted by Bellini to show that the Virgin is a displacement of the painter’s love for his mother. According to Kristeva, this displacement is not exclusive to the painter; other men, including the Church Fathers, use the Virgin for the same purpose, to avow and disavow primary narcissism (the attachment to and identification with the maternal body). Kristeva situates the image of the Virgin within Freud’s most famous scenario, the Oedipal complex, and tries to explain the ways in which the Virgin brings back and tries to resolve issues pertaining to the relationship of men with their mothers. On the one hand, the myth of the Virgin, commonly represented with a child in her arms, perpetuates the desire for the inseparability of the mother and the child. On the other hand, the myth of Mary disavows primary narcissism by taking the Virgin’s sex and bodily function out of the equation. According to Kristeva, men have access to the heart and breast of the Virgin, but they are saved from sex. Engaging in primary narcissism, then, does not have negative consequences because the Virgin is a figure that was already constructed without sex. In other words, the Virgin stands for the inseparability of the mother and child, but in a safe way that can be accepted by society.

The Virgin plays a different role for women. Following Freud’s postulates, Kristeva assumes that women undergo a different psychological development in relation to the

maternal figure. While men have to completely separate from their mothers, women do not have to separate as much, because in many instances they will also be mothers.⁹⁸

Starting from this difference, Kristeva postulates that for women, Mary is a model of motherhood; women become "good mothers" by imitating the Virgin.

Countering scholars who see the construct of the Virgin exclusively as a vehicle to exercise social control over women, Kristeva points out that women can also benefit from the figure of the Virgin. Kristeva's comments make more sense when seen as a development of Warner's idea of the way in which women are seen in the Bible. If the Bible, as Warner maintains, discriminates against women, and if the Franciscan notion of the Virgin as a Mother allowed women to gain a place in society by acting like the Virgin, then we can conclude along with Kristeva that the construct of the Virgin as mother gives women the opportunity to move away from abjection. Kristeva bases her notion of abjection on Mary Douglas' idea of defilement in *Purity and Danger* (1966). As an anthropologist, Douglas studied the notion of the unclean among various cultures. She found that defilement is a common notion, although cultures differ in what they consider unclean. Kristeva uses Douglas' idea of defilement to create the term abjection and maintains that patriarchal societies abject the female body on the grounds that it is unclean. To me, Kristeva's idea of abjection due to uncleanness is similar to Warner's idea of abjection due to wickedness, although the former is expressed as a somatic reaction and the latter as an intellectual concept. For Kristeva, the idea of the uncleanness of the female body is used to argue that the female body, with its presumed lack of order, cannot be accepted in the Symbolic. We can see an example of what Kristeva is saying in the position of women in the Catholic Church (although Kristeva's claim is larger).

Women cannot be ordained as priests (part of the world of the Symbolic and Law) because they are “unclean.” Breast milk and tears are bodily fluids associated with the semiotic, which Kristeva associates with abjection. However, in the case of the Virgin, the association with abjection does not apply. The Virgin, especially in her aspect of mother of Jesus, is a construct that belongs to the Symbolic; Jesus is King, and Mary is his bride, the Queen. The representation of the Virgin as a Queen shows that the Virgin has been given a position of power, as the mother of Jesus, within society.⁹⁹ Kristeva maintains that through Mary’s entrance into the Symbolic, the feminine associated with the semiotic gains new, more positive meaning. For instance, in the case of the Mater Dolorosa or the Virgin of Milk, the Virgin’s tears and milk are not abjected but rather associated with nurturance. In symbolically nurturing the Catholic Church, such fluids lose their threatening aspects. Kristeva concludes that the Virgin facilitates the entrance of the female body, otherwise abject, into the symbolic, and adds that by imitating the Virgin, women can also enter the symbolic. Kristeva acknowledges, however, the limitations of such identification: if women do not follow the Virgin’s example, they become “fallen” women; they fall from the symbolic order. In conclusion, the Virgin is an ambivalent sign that can be used as a means of access to the symbolic but also as a means of social control. Although the figure of the Virgin gives new meaning to the semiotic, it does not completely get rid of the association of the semiotic with the abject. From this perspective, women’s access to power is limited to their following the Virgin’s example.

Drawing from Kristeva’s view of the role of the Virgin within Catholic culture, I propose that the different stereotypes for women in classical Mexican melodramas refer

to the social pressure to act like the Virgin. If they comply with the pressure, women gain access into the symbolic, and if they don't, they fall from the symbolic order. *María Candelaria* is one who decided to comply.

***María Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández, 1943): A Lesson in Acting Virgin-like**

María Candelaria is, in a way, a “guided tour” of acting Virgin-like.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, the film’s narrative is structured as a learning process. At the beginning of the film, *María Candelaria* (Dolores del Río) acts chastely, gazing down in the presence of strangers. Her model is the Virgin Mary, displayed in a portrait in the house. Yet, as the daughter of a prostitute, she has not been taught Virginité. In the middle of the film, she walks into the church (a patriarchal space par excellence in Mexico) and learns to emulate the Virgin. As the film ends, through sacrifice and death, this campesino woman from Xochimilco becomes the Virgin herself.

María Candelaria suggests the parallel between the protagonist and the Virgin in its title, which literally means “Virgin, Virgin.” “*María*” alludes to the Queen of Virgins, Mary; “*Candelaria*” refers to a very respected Virgin: la Virgen de la Candelaria, a dark-skinned Virgin who carries baby Jesus in one hand and a candle in the other.¹⁰¹ *María Candelaria*’s emulation of the Virgin is best represented in a sequence inside the church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores.¹⁰² Before this sequence takes place, *María* and her fiancé, Lorenzo Rafael (Pedro Armendariz), walk towards the church to get married. As the priest is meeting them, the police arrive to arrest Lorenzo, who has been accused of

stealing a wedding dress from the overseer's shop. After the police have taken Lorenzo away, the priest asks María into the church.

The sequence begins as María walks into the church to ask the Virgin to intercede for Lorenzo, in the belief that the Virgin will mediate between the Christian community and God. The film uses a high-angle shot which represents the point of view of the priest and thus of the symbolic order. As María lies on the church floor, she sobs loudly, showing that she is not in control of her emotions or her body. The priest recommends that she offer her pain to the Virgin (in psychoanalytic terms, that she sublimates). Instead, María angrily complains about the lack of justice for the poor, thus showing her initial unwillingness to be guided by the priest.

This scene emphasizes that María does not know how to act like the Virgin because she cannot control her anger. María's words to God inside the church ("Why don't you listen to me? Your eyes don't notice us down here.") sound like a legitimate social complaint. The campesino woman believes that the authorities have unfairly taken Lorenzo to jail. Previously, the audience has seen the overseer (who had made advances to María) deny Lorenzo's request for an early payment of his salary. Thus, when María explains to the priest that she and her fiancé have tried everything to pay for the dress, the audience considers her claim to be truthful. It is understood that the dress is a necessary item to "legalize" her relationship to Lorenzo before God and society. Although just for a moment, the film suggests that God plays favorites and gives his help only to the rich. But it soon becomes clear that María's accusations against the legal and religious authorities pose a threat to the symbolic order and need to be controlled.

In response to María's protest, the priest reprimands her and reminds her that she is hurting the Virgin. As the priest says that her anger is like a knife in Mary's heart, the camera pans to the left, simulating the movement of María's eyes as they discover a statue of La Virgen de los Dolores (Our Lady of Sorrows) that she hadn't noticed.¹⁰³ A medium shot of a Virgin that resembles a Stabat Mater (that is, with a knife stabbed in her heart) adds a literal dimension to the priest's words; it is as if María's anger had literally stuck a knife in Mary's heart.¹⁰⁴

When the camera pivots to show this Mater Dolorosa, María's behavior "pivots" as well. She enters a transitional period in which she progressively learns to act like the Virgin. First, a high-angle shot of the Virgin is matched by parallel shots of her. Thus juxtaposed, the shots stress the similarities between the two female figures: María's hands, like those of the Virgin, are crossed on her chest, and her shawl is in the same position as that of the Virgin. Yet, the parallel shots still posit a difference: the Virgin is on the top edge of the shot, while María, now on her feet, is at its bottom. Later, as María learns to sublimate her pain, alternating close-up shots of María and the statue of the Virgin on the same level indicate to the audience that María's moral status is now similar to that of the Virgin.

As the series of parallel shots comes to an end, a new element is introduced: the Virgin's tears. A close-up of the Virgin's face, emphasizing her tears, is paired with a similar shot which shows María's tears throwing light on her face. María's face lit with tears invest her Virginity with ideality, represented metaphorically as light.¹⁰⁵ These series of shots anticipate an idea that is developed at the end of the film: that María gains social status by sublimating her pain like the Dolorosa. Yet, before looking at her final

illumination, it is important to pay attention to what she leaves behind. In the final shot of the sequence, on her knees, María says: “There are so many of us asking you for things at all times! It is still not my time to be helped.” When we contrast this scene to the one in which María complains about God’s favoring the rich, it is clear that her mimicking the Virgin also involves relinquishing her ability to analyze and make social claims. Instead, she has to accept that others, God in this case, make these decisions. The ability to think independently, we can conclude, is the price to pay for being totally illuminated in the final scenes.¹⁰⁶

María Candelaria’s Death

A convoluted misunderstanding leads to María’s death.¹⁰⁷ The film’s insistence on creating a narrative explanation for her death seems superfluous, since María’s incarnation of an ideal requires death: ideals do not exist, and thus one can only be ideal if one is not human. After María has learned to act like the Virgin, she needs to leave her human condition and ascend to Heaven in order to further her resemblance to the ideal.

During the 1940s, the Catholic Church hotly debated whether, when Mary died, only her soul ascended to the skies (in which case she would be human) or both her body and soul (in which case she would be super-human). After centuries of disagreement, in 1946 the Jesuits tried to convince the rest of the Catholic Church of Mary’s Ascension.¹⁰⁸ The Jesuits were not the only ones. In 1950, eight million people signed a petition to have Mary’s Ascension declared dogma. As a result, Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of the Virgin official doctrine, stating that Mary was “taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven,” an announcement that was greeted with thunderous applause in the square in front of St Peter's Basilica" (Baring and Cashford, 553). Shot in 1942, when the

Ascension was being debated, *María Candelaria* can be seen as an argument in favor of Mary's Ascension, because in the film *María*, by then a Virgin, ascends to the sky.

The parallelism with the Virgin escalates towards the end of the film, culminating in *María's* ascension to Heaven. Her ascension begins as Lorenzo takes the body of his betrothed slowly around the spectacularly beautiful Xochimilco canals in a canoe at night. Xochimilco's peasants, standing by the canal banks with their torches, throw light on *María's* body. The diegetic sound of church bells and an extra-undiegetic choral music invest the scene with ideality. Afterwards, the camera cuts to a long shot of the canoe followed by several medium and close-up shots in rapid succession, taken from Lorenzo's perspective. Surrounded by white flowers, *María* looks like the Virgin herself. If we compare the trip in the canoe to the earlier sequence inside the church, we note that in the final scenes, there are no parallel shots of the Virgin. The shots which were crucial in the earlier scene have now become unnecessary, because in her entrance into eternity *María Candelaria* has become the Virgin of Light. The absence of a burial scene and the duration and illumination of the shots create the sense that *María* is ascending to Heaven. The shots are brief and composed of very contrasted light, and the glow of her face and flowers against the dark waters gives the impression that the Virgin of Light flits through the screen. In its emotional intensity and its association with light and melodious music, *María Candelaria* assigns positive values to the notion of acting like the Virgin.

To conclude, it is important to ask: What are the options given to *María Candelaria* in the film? What does she choose and why? She can choose between keeping the power to decide for herself and to enjoy active sexual pleasure (as is hinted in the scene in which she is to be painted in the nude), or she can relinquish her ability to think

independently and have pleasure through masochism (as the parallel shots of María and the Stabat Mater suggest). The film does not present both options as equally valuable; the second option is positively invested with light. Light represents moral superiority and in the film is also associated with the entrance into the symbolic order, into the realm of the Law and the Father. Kristeva asserts that the construct of the Virgin allows women to have a place within society, and the same can be said of María Candelaria. By the end of the film, María becomes another Virgin, gaining a place within the Xochimilco community. The same peasants who pursued her when they thought she had agreed to be painted in the nude are now the ones who literally illuminate her face with their torches as she passes through the canal.

María Candelaria creates, or perhaps reproduces, an ideal of femininity by putting forward a pattern of behavior for women and “illuminating” it (in Silverman’s terms, by idealizing that pattern of behavior). I have demonstrated that this ideal is symbolized aesthetically by associating that particular behavior with light. Furthermore, the light represents having an advantageous place in society. That is the reason why the promise of being “illuminated” makes the pain associated with acting like the Virgin seem minimal. It then follows that stereotypes for women are not imposed on them, but rather the promise of having an admired place in society attracts women. In other words, that women have a choice and a promise.

Problems with Narcissistic Idealization

Despite its beauty, *María Candelaria*’s idealization is problematic for women. In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Silverman proposes that idealization is an unavoidable process, because our relation with images and people requires it. We cannot

love something or someone without idealizing it first. Silverman then differentiates between ways in which we can idealize, and she centers her discussion on the notion of narcissistic idealization. Narcissistic in this context is not related to primary narcissism but rather refers to a love for perfection, as in Narcissus' love for his image projected in the water. Silverman's discussion of narcissistic idealization (40-81) is important for my argument because it exposes the way in which mothers in classical films are expected to be perfect and the effect that this expectation has on the audience.

In the section "The ideal ego and the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces" (45-55), Silverman explains the way in which narcissistic idealization works for a character in a film and for the female spectators. Silverman takes Ulrike Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return*, 1979) as a case study to show the cruel effect of narcissistic expectations. *Ticket*'s protagonist, generically named "Madame", incarnates society's narcissistic ideals for women; that is, Madame wants to make herself one with the ideal. Madame is guided, the voice-over suggests, by the ideal figures of motherhood of the society in which she lives: "Medea, Madonna, Beatrice, Iphigenia, Aspasia".¹⁰⁹ The Virgin, then, is seen in *Ticket* as one of society's ideals. If we apply this view of narcissism to *María Candelaria*, we can see that the protagonist, like Madame, is in search of a narcissistic ideal, the Virgin. What *María Candelaria* does not tell us, however, is that such an ideal is unreachable. The scene in which the dead María rides triumphantly through the canals of Xochimilco tries to hide the fact that the protagonist had to pay with her life to reach her ideal.

Silverman's analysis also allows us to see the danger of this ideal for the audience. She examines the deterioration of Madame's ego as the narrative develops; since

Madame cannot incarnate the ideal, she begins to select parts of herself that match the ideal image (“fetishism”, in psychoanalytic lingo). Yet this endorsement of ideal parts and rejection of the rest produces anger and frustration and leads to deterioration. By the end of *Ticket of No Return*, Madame’s image has been transformed from a beautiful and graceful figure with an elegant walk to a woman in rags tumbling onto the floor.

Silverman concludes that narcissistic ideals lead to the disintegration of women’s egos; figuratively speaking, narcissistic ideals turn women into stumbling vagabonds.

Silverman’s explanation of the dangers of narcissistic idealization can be applied to classical Mexican films. Kristeva and Warner have argued that the ideal of the Virgin is unreachable. The title of Marina Warner’s book, *Alone of All her Sex*, hints at this problem. The Virgin is alone among all women because she is perfect; other women, according to the medieval understanding, are imperfect. In “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva also finds problematic the fact that the Virgin represents an ideal that is unreachable.

To live by unreachable ideals creates significant problems. If women watching *María Candelaria* try to pursue the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood, as Madame does, they would finish as stumbling vagabonds. The main problem posed by the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is that it leads to feelings of frustration and self-hate. *María Candelaria*’s tragic end dramatizes the fact that self-idealization of mothers is incompatible with classical ideals. Classical Mexican films, however, do not find the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood problematic. What follows is an analysis of classical idealization and its manifestation in Mexican films.

Virginity

Through the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood, mothers were culturally idealized by their automatic association with the Virgin Mary. In Mexican films of the classical period, Mexican women were encouraged to be Virgin-mothers—to act chastely and to take seriously their role as mediators in the family. In the same way that Mary mediates between the Christian community and the Father (God), women in Mexican films mediate between the children and their father. Besides mediating, women also have to master suffering. Women have to try to approach the ideal through suffering, as the *Stabat Mater* or the *Virgin de los Dolores* illustrates. The Virgin had to suffer as a mother when they crucified her son; in the same way, all women have to suffer on behalf of their family members. They have to sublimate their pain and use it to advance toward the ideal of Virgin-motherhood. When they are abandoned, for example, they have to forget their pain and try to get the family back together.

In the following analyses of classical Mexican melodramas, I will use Warner's distinctions between the different aspects of motherhood that the Virgin stands for. For the most part, the connection between the female characters and the Virgin is implicit in the films of the classical period up through the 1970s. This is true of melodramas that are considered to be critical of and in touch with social reality, such as *Una familia de tantas*, as well as those that some despise as “tear-jerkers,” such as *Cuando los hijos se van*.¹¹⁰

Sexual Purity, Sacrifice, and Mediation in *Una familia de tantas* (Alejandro Galindo, 1948)

In *Una familia de tantas* (An Ordinary Family), Doña Gracia acts like the Virgin, personifying purity, sacrifice, and mediation.¹¹¹ Even her name signifies a state of innocence. Doña Gracia (Eugenia Galindo) is a housewife who is chaste in the extreme, even “blind” to sexuality. In a scene in the kitchen, the maid Guadalupe makes a sexual joke, remarking that adult son Hector asked for chile pepper in his eggs for breakfast. Doña Gracia doesn’t notice the link between chiles and sexuality and simply responds that it is unusual to have chile for breakfast. Guadalupe tries unsuccessfully for a second time to talk about Hector’s sexuality by saying that he came in late last night, to which Doña Gracia responds with the explanation that he was working. Guadalupe waits until the children leave the kitchen to try for a third time, saying: “Young Hector is old enough to be doing *his* things,” only to be ignored once again with a “Come on Guadalupe, put on more wood for the bath.” Understanding that Doña Gracia does not want to “see” Hector’s sexual maturity, Guadalupe drops the subject.

Framed in a medium shot at eye level, the scene portrays Doña Gracia and Guadalupe as equals by situating them at the same height. Their positions on sexuality, however, differ considerably; while Doña Gracia is a “blind” Virgin-like housewife, Guadalupe sees sexuality as something natural and therefore discussible. Watching *Una familia de tantas* from the perspective of its portrayal of women, one has to wonder: Why does the point of Doña Gracia’s chastity have to be repeated so many times? What does chastity stand for? In “Let it Be,” a chapter in *Alone of All Her Sex* about the Virgin as mother, Warner describes the idealization of bourgeois domestic life in the fifteenth

century, when chastity was seen as a sign of spiritual superiority (185-189). When applied to married women, who have to have sex for procreation, chastity stood for control of the body, which was understood as an essential quality of moral superiority. Within Catholic ideological discourse, chastity stands for a generous and emphatic being, for the capacity to give to others.¹¹²

While *Una familia de tantas*, in contrasting Guadalupe with Doña Gracia, acknowledges to a certain extent that chastity can become excessive, self-sacrifice—the second characteristic of the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood—is portrayed as natural. Mimicking the Virgin (the ultimate generous mother), Doña Gracia gives up her comfort so that others can enjoy their lives. In the mornings Doña Gracia gets up first to help get breakfast ready, and during her second daughter's coming-of-age party, she stays in the kitchen working. For this kind of self-sacrifice and self-effacement, the 1940s audience was expected to view Doña Gracia as a morally superior being. Weren't the morals of fifteenth-century women being applied to Doña Gracia?: "The woman, sweet and submissive to her husband, could be honored at the cradle, kitchen and in medieval times, the spinning wheel" (Warner, 188).

The ultimate sacrifice for Doña Gracia, however, is submissiveness, a skill that in the film is presented as mediation. When Maru tells her father that she doesn't want to marry the man he has chosen for her, the film shows Doña Gracia's reaction. Clasping her hands as if praying, she covers her face with her hands but says nothing. Although Doña Gracia is on Maru's side, she does not speak because she does not want to contradict her husband. Speaking against him would disrupt her mediating role, the third characteristic of the ideal.

The role of the mother in *Una familia de tantas* (as well as in many other maternal melodramas) is to mediate in order to connect the strict, old-fashioned, intransigent father with his modern, dynamic children. What exactly is involved in the mother's mediation? Father and children are portrayed as two groups that stand apart from each other. As mediators, mothers have a twofold task: they intercede for the children, but at the same time they subject them to patriarchy. Doña Gracia, for instance, intercedes for their daughter Lupita in a scene in which the father has punished her by ordering that she go to school without breakfast. Once the father is gone, the mother doesn't stop Guadalupe from sneaking some breakfast to Lupita. It is assumed that despite his good intentions, the patriarch is too harsh with his children (be it God or the father in a family), and it is up to the mother to function as intercessor, lessening the punishment, so that the connection between father and children does not terminate. The intercession of the mother, however, has its limits, because it must not undermine the authority of the patriarch. Julianne Burton-Carvajal argues that, although most melodramas glorify the figure of the mother and present fathers as inflexible and stubborn, they all ultimately defend patriarchy.¹¹³

In the Christian context that imbues the discourse of the Virgin, mediation requires submissiveness. For example, during a scene at the dinner table in *Una familia de tantas*, the narrative tension rises when the father refuses to give permission to Maru to work outside of the house. Maru, who is turning fifteen, protests that she is a young lady and turns to her sister for confirmation: "Isn't it true, Estela?" Doña Gracia intervenes by reminding Maru to submit to the law of the father: "It is not your sister who has to give an opinion on this issue." It is the father who decides.

In Mexican melodramas, chaste and self-sacrificing wives such as Doña Gracia play the role that the Virgin plays within the Christian community at large: they intercede for the community before God, the Father, but they also make sure that the community obeys his law. *Una familia de tantas* portrays the type of mediation that I described in *María Candelaria*: Virgin-like characters interceding by requesting favors but never going so far as to take justice into their own hands. The payoff for following the Virgin's model is honor (Warner) or, as understood in psychoanalytic terms, a place in the symbolic order (Kristeva).

Doña Gracia, however, does not represent the extreme that the role of mother can go to. That role in the Mexican context is reserved for the characters portrayed by Sara García, particularly that of Doña Lupe in *Cuando los hijos se van*.

Domestic Idealism, Suffering, and the Passion in *Cuando los hijos se van* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1941)

Many critics have discussed *Cuando los hijos se van* (*When the Children Leave*) (Ayala Blanco 1968, Aurelio de los Reyes 1988, Mora 1985, and Ramírez-Berg 1992). A frequent complaint in the literature of the 1960s-1980s, which for the most part was written from a Marxist perspective, is that the film defends bourgeois values (Ayala Blanco, Mora, and de los Reyes). Because of that class bias, these critics do not consider the film to be representative of Mexicanness. Ayala Blanco, for example, considers it uncharacteristic of the genre and not worthy of being studied (1993, 43). Only Ramírez Berg, who writes in the 1990s, sees the film as an example of Mexican ideology.¹¹⁴

Cuando los hijos has been attacked for its notions of home life and maternal excess. Ramírez Berg, for instance, relates the maternal excess of Doña Lupe to victimization. For him, she “Must be an innocent or an idiot. Either way, like most ‘decent’ Mexican women, Doña Lupe [Sara García] has no choice but to play dumb and accept her fate quietly”(24). Ayala Blanco, more bothered by Sara Garcia’s tears and excessive emotions, describes this melodrama as Oedipal and masochistic.¹¹⁵ One can understand Ayala Blanco’s comment as confirming the devaluation and rejection of the semiotic as described by Kristeva in “Stabat Mater”: Ayala Blanco views Sara García’s tears as the abject. Some female scholars have worked, however, at giving another meaning to García’s tears. In “*Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema,*” Ana María López affirms García’s excess by bringing García’s tears into the title of her article. López values García’s tears as much as she values the desire of the cabareteras. In the same spirit, Mexican film scholar Julia Tuñón gives positive meaning to the semiotic by relating the tears to motherly love, and nurturing (Mora, 179).

García’s access to the semiotic made her immensely popular and gave her the title “Mexico’s mother”. Most critics, however, only marginally relate the maternal excess of her characters to Catholicism. Mora, for instance, interprets the good-wife archetype that García represents as an imposition of regressive Catholic morals. For me, however, the archetype that García brings to the screen, with all its excess, helps to understand the culture of Catholicism. My analysis will show that Doña Lupe’s life gets close to being a rendition of the Virgin in its aspect of mourning mother.

Life in the Rosales family is depicted around the celebration of the birth of Christ. To convey that the children grow up and leave home, *Cuando los hijos se van* develops

its narrative by showing consecutive Christmas celebrations. Christ's birth, which is alluded to through the nativity scene and several Christmas Eve dinners, cannot be taken as superfluous folkloric detail; rather, it needs to be related to religious discourse in quotidian bourgeois life. Warner relates the bourgeois emphasis on Christmas to the development of what she terms the cult of domestic idealism, the idealization of domestic life (187), of which *Cuando los hijos se van* can be considered an example. Family life is indeed what the film is all about.¹¹⁶ Christmas is, without a doubt, an important celebration in the film, but even more important is the less noticed passion of Christ. *Cuando los hijos* is presented as a contemporary rendition of the love and mourning of the Virgin for the dying Christ. The film does not set the parallelism clearly from the beginning but rather creates a series of clues that lead at the end to the revelation that Lupe's son, Raimundo (Emilio Tuero) is but another Christ.

The connection with the passion is first established in a scene in which Raimundo sings a song on the radio that he composed for Lupe for Mother's Day. The song, dedicated to "Those seven knives that the Virgin, mother of the Redeemer, has stabbing her,"¹¹⁷ establishes a parallelism between Lupe and the Virgin. Lupe, to whom the song is dedicated, has seven knives stabbing her bleeding heart, just like the *Stabat Mater*.¹¹⁸ In the song, Raimundo, who has been unfairly accused of a dishonest act and has been thrown out of the house by his father, yearns to get back to his mother. As he sings "Who could be nurtured in your arms like I was before," and "Mother, for one of your kisses I would give my life," the love of this unfairly accused son is seen through the eyes of Lupe. It has, like the male love for the Virgin that Kristeva described, narcissistic tones.

The second instance in which the love of Lupe for Raimundo is associated with the love of the Virgin for Christ takes place after Raimundo dies. In order to get quick money to cover up her son José's theft at work, Lupe uses the house to get credit. The agent takes advantage of her, having her sign an empty form and then doubling the amount that he lent. When Raimundo tries to clear up the debt on the house, the agent shoots him. Raimundo's death is presented as the death of Christ. In a scene that takes place at the last Christmas Eve dinner of the film, Lupe, looking at Raimundo's empty chair, tells her husband: "Raimundo paid for you and for all" and continues: "Raimundo died as Christ on the cross, paying for the sins of all." *Cuando los hijos se van* is not a reproduction of the passion of Christ in the strict sense, in that the film is about a family quite different from the Sacred family; however, it reproduces the sense that Catholics give to the passion of Christ.

The cult of the death of Christ has had a vital role in Catholic belief. The passion, as a symbol, has been given different meanings, and its importance has changed according to historical situations. During the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, the passion played an important role in France, Spain, Italy, England, and the Netherlands (Warner, 210), but it was during the fourteenth century that the symbology of the passion became central. Warner believes that the passion's role increased in the fifteenth century due to the recovery of the Holy Places by the crusades and to Europe's literal death (a fifth of the population died during the Black Death). After the passion lost its most literal association with death, it became a symbol of maternal love. Warner uses multiple texts to show that the passion in its post-fifteenth-century interpretation was less about Christ's death than about the Virgin's love for her dying son; it is for that reason that "The

Crucifixion, the Deposition and the Entombment came to life" through Mary's eyes (112). As in post-fifteenth-century accounts, in *Cuando los hijos se van*, the passion refers to the mourning of a mother. As can be inferred from the fact that the death of Raimundo is seen through Lupe's eyes, the central issue in the film is not Raimundo's death, but rather Lupe's maternal love for Raimundo and all her children.

There is a second important similarity between the cult of the mourning Virgin that Warner describes and *Cuando los hijos se van*; in both accounts, the love of a mourning mother is expressed through a reference to tears (Mary) and blood (Christ). Warner explains that the cult of Jesus' blood and Mary's tears was constructed by the Franciscans, who were interested in reaching the lowest strata of society, people who could not read Latin. It is a cult that, according to Warner, carries a strong non-verbal weight and emphasizes images and emotions (211). The goal of filmmakers like Bustillo is not that different from that of the Franciscans, in that he, too, wanted to address large audiences and used an emphasis on emotions and images to convey his message. Bustillo's most important symbol, carrying all the weight of the blood of Christ and the tears of the Virgin, is Lupe's garden of red roses.

Cuando los hijos se van introduces the Rosales family through a long shot of the house and its rose gardens. At this point, the voice-over explains a pun in Spanish. The house is *la casa de los Rosales* (the house of the Rosebush family), and also *La casa de los rosales* (the house with the rosebush garden). The voice-over's pun indicates the close connection between the family and its garden and, most importantly, between the Rosales' mother and her roses. The association between Lupe and her roses takes for granted the religious discourse regarding Mary's passion at the cross, as is obvious when

the camera gets a closer shot of the rosebushes, and the voice-over says: “always watered by the hand of the little mother . . . and many times by her tears.” As the film develops, the voice-over remark is explained. Lupe’s tears are a multi-layered symbol: they refer to the pain of the mourning mother and to the nurturing qualities of the Virgin’s tears. The tears represent the mourning of a mother over the loss of her children as they leave home and over Raimundo’s death. At the same time, much in the tradition of the *Stabat Mater*, the tears signify nurturance. Kristeva has explained that in the case of the *Stabat Mater*, the tears, otherwise associated with the semiotic and abject, are re-semanticized as nurturance. Kristeva’s comment helps to understand that Lupe’s tears were nurturing, that she watered the rosebushes (her children) with her tears.

Nurturance, however, never obliterates pain. The rosebushes are also associated in *Cuando los hijos se van* with the blood of Christ, with Raimundo’s blood. At the final dinner, Lupe says that she knows that Raimundo has redeemed all of them because “Her rosebushes have told her; the voice of Raimundo between the branches.”¹¹⁹ It is clear then that the filmmaker has chosen to express maternal love through the rosebush because roses stand for the blood of Christ (Raimundo). But pain and grief may be mixed with other feelings. Couldn’t we say about Lupe what was said of the Virgin’s grief: that by participating in the Holy plan, “she rejoiced utterly that her only begotten was being offered for the salvation of the human race” (Warner, 220)? Although in their association with blood, the roses are obviously connected with pain, the suffering of maternal love needs to be understood as sublimated pain, always connected with nurturance. The Virgin, as Kristeva reminds us, allows pleasure through pain and sublimation, and we should add, so does *Cuando los hijos se van*.

My discussion of the rose symbolism did not aim at establishing an origin for the maternal love in *Cuando los hijos se van* but rather at giving maternal love another meaning and bringing it to a different level. As Ayala Blanco, Mora, and de los Reyes have pointed out, Lupe's love is excessive, yet this excess is a cultural manifestation of Catholic mystical love. When talking about the importance of the passion in the fifteenth century, Warner explains that the Stations of the Cross were reproduced in many European cities, thus allowing those who could not afford to travel to the Holy Places an opportunity to experience the passion. Warner points out that such reenactments disseminated religious thought; for her, "The Stations of the Cross are a cycle of meditations that operated as satellite television of some great international event does now: it reported the drama of Christ's suffering at first hand" (Warner, 211).¹²⁰ *Cuando los hijos se van* reports the drama of Christ (more precisely, the anguish of the Virgin at seeing her son die) literally via satellite television. The film, which was sold to other Latin American countries and is still played on Mexican television, is a contemporary portrayal of the Virgin's maternal love, one that has been disseminated around many Spanish-speaking countries. In this light, the melodramas in which Sara García has performed are manifestations of popular Catholic fervor. Indeed, they use techniques similar to the evangelical methods used by the Franciscans in the fourteenth century: symbolism, emotions, and non-verbal language. Also, like the Franciscans' sermons, the melodramas in which García acted were popularly acclaimed. Fernando Muñoz suggests that in *Cuando los hijos se van*, García was able to "personify and give life to the Mexican mothers of that time [1940s]," something that in his view "gave her a place among popular sensibilities" (40). For him, García was "an innocent and tender mother

able to cry in one of the more convincing weeps of the films of the 1940s” (40).¹²¹ A look at García’s biography and at the celebration of Mother’s Day in Mexico helps to put Muñoz’s comments in context.

Sara García (1895-1980), born in Orizaba, Veracruz, came to incarnate a screen persona that had little to do with her real life as an orphan and single mother. At age nine and ten, she lost her father and mother respectively. During her adolescence and early adulthood, García had no family to rely on, although as a young woman, the nuns at the school where she had studied allowed her to live and teach in their school.¹²² García had to take care of herself, and having an aptitude for acting, she made a living for 18 years playing parts in the theater (Mora, 230). Working conditions were hard: learning parts for plays that changed every week or acting in more than one theater on a single day. On top of the exhausting schedule, the pay was low, making an exhausting life even more precarious.

In the mid 1930s, with the advent of “the talkies”, the Mexican film industry grew, allowing theater actresses to cross over into film. Despite the expanded job opportunities, actresses like García who were not particularly beautiful still had a difficult time getting parts. The story that García had 14 teeth extracted in order to more realistically play the role of an elderly mother has been used to argue that she had an innate penchant for suffering.¹²³ While this might be the case, it is important to remember that at that time, García was desperately looking for a job to sustain herself. Since the jobs for women her age were scarce and very competitive, she took her chances and had her teeth removed in the hope that she would get the role of the good old granny. The strategy succeeded.

García's role as good-wife was in sharp contrast with her real life; her star persona was part of a fantasy world. She never belonged to a nuclear family, except, of course, in film.¹²⁴ She married actor Fernando Ibáñez, and they had a child, Fernanda, but soon after their marriage, they separated. In sharp contrast with her star persona, her biographers describe her as an emancipated modern woman, driving her own car in order to get to film sets and theaters on time and, at the same time, take care of Fernanda (Muñoz, 25-30). But García's relationship with her daughter did not last long. In yet another dramatic turn of events, Fernanda died at age 20, the year before her mother was to play Lupe in *Cuando los hijos se van*. Thus, García's melodramatic acting in the film can be seen in relation to a real mourning process, representing a grief that went beyond Fernanda, encompassing a lifetime of tragic losses.

At the same time, García's star persona cannot be isolated from the desires and values of Mexican society during the 1920s-1940s. Comments such as "Sara García's glorious masochism . . . [is] representative of 'little white heads' and of Mother's Day, the nation's Oedipus complex day" (Ayala Blanco 1993, 43) might lead us to think that García herself played a role in creating Mother's Day in Mexico. But the celebration of Mother's Day originated at least a decade before García began playing the roles that made her famous. It began as a reaction against liberal measures by the governor of Yucatán, who, in the early 1920s, proposed laws for divorce and sexual education for women (Muñoz, 34). On April 13, 1922, in response to this "criminal campaign against motherhood", the director of the newspaper *Excelsior* wrote a column proposing the establishment of a day to recognize the work of mothers, following the lead of a Philadelphian woman who had made this suggestion in 1908.¹²⁵ Subsequently, the

celebration of Mother's Day on May 10 became an important national holiday in Mexico, celebrated everywhere, from schools to department stores. Schools created their own traditions, from poetry recitals to discourses honoring mothers. Newspapers, especially the *Excelsior*, organized drawing and writing contests, columns about the peculiarities of Mexican mothers (1942), crossword puzzles with maternal themes (1942), receptions in which important mothers, such as President Franklin Roosevelt's, were honored with hours-long events at elegant theaters (1942). Mother's Day also had a clear economic dimension: newspapers ran ads with suggestions for presents, and shopping was encouraged as a patriotic act since it would help the national economy (*Excelsior*, May 10, 1937). With the development of sound films a little over ten years later, it also became a tradition for theaters to screen films on May 10th portraying long-suffering mothers. It was not unusual to show a film with García in one of her motherly roles.

It is not clear whether García took advantage of the conservative notions of motherhood in order to make a living or whether she created a fantasy world for herself, or perhaps a little of both. From 1933 to 1937, García made ten films in which she repeated her good-mother, good-wife role. Reflecting back on her life in a 1976 interview, García remembers that after the premiere of *Malditas sean las mujeres* (*Damned Be Women*), in 1936, people began calling her "The Mother of Mexican Cinema."¹²⁶ In García's view, she got this name because she always played the role of mother, especially during the late 1930s and 1940s in films such as *No basta ser madre* (*It Is Not Enough to Be a Mother*, 1937), *Malditas sean las mujeres* (1936), *Mi madrecita* (*My Little Mother*, 1940), *La gallina clueca* (*The Old Hen*, 1941), *Mama Inés* (1945), and *Madre adorada* (*Beloved Mother*, 1948).¹²⁷

The classical style of representing motherhood, epitomized by García and representative of the classical period (1940s-50s), continues until the 1970s. As García repeated her role over the years (she acted in 150 films), her presence became almost mandatory in the films shown on Mother's Day. In 1942, for example, *El Palacio Chino* played *La abuelita*, (*Excelsior* May 10, 1942), and in 1943, *Resurrección*. It is clear from the advertisements, which included full-size photographs of García with her name in big letters, that García played a central role. In the 1950s, she was expected to play her same old role in melodramas and comedies, to continue to be the "official mother."¹²⁸ In 1968, journalists of the magazine *Reseña de Acapulco* nominated her their Queen (Muñoz, 66), and in 1969, journalists writing for *Guía Cinematográfica* made her the "Queen of National Cinema" (Muñoz, 66).

By the 1970s, García's motherly role was considered outdated. The criticism, however, did not come from second-wave women filmmakers such as Marcela Fernández-Violante. Fernández-Violante, who stated at the 1990 "Encuentro de Mujeres Cineastas y Videoastas Latinas" that her role as mother came second to her identity as an artist, made two films in the 1970s, neither of which were concerned with motherhood: *De todos modos Juan te llamas* (1974) and *Cananea* (1976), which dealt with events in Mexican history. The criticism of motherly stereotypes came instead from a prolific male filmmaker, Luis Alcoriza, born in Spain and based in Mexico since 1940. In his 1971 film *Mecánica nacional*, García—the actress who from the late 1940s to the late 1960s had portrayed the sacrificing mother—is cast as a grandmother who dies of indigestion. Because of the actress's fictional death, and because of the criticism of her previous *persona* that was implicit in the film, *Mecánica nacional* can be seen as the turning point

when classical definitions of motherhood, as embodied in García's roles, were finally challenged.

1970's Parody of the Ideal of Virgin Motherhood in *Mecánica nacional* (Luis Alcoriza, 1971)

Mecánica nacional (National Mechanics) directly addresses Mexico's nationally-constructed stereotypes. As the title suggests, Alcoriza's film describes the "mechanics" of the Mexican mind, the way in which the Mexican mind works.¹²⁹ The allusion to national stereotypes is reinforced by the jacket worn by Eufemio (Manuel Fábregas), which has the word "México" written on the back. Through the jacket, the audience is encouraged to take the character as a symbol; Eufemio's machista attitudes are to be understood as representative of the attitudes of Mexican males in general. Similarly, the Mexican audience is asked to take the role of the grandmother, played by García, as a reference to the national stereotype of the good-mother. Alcoriza brings García's star persona into the narrative and uses parody as a way to declare the stereotype of the good-mother obsolete. If indeed this stereotype no longer represents national views in the 1970s, we have to conclude that stereotypes do change over time. Who then makes and changes stereotypes?

Kaja Silverman does not directly describe stereotypes but societal ideals, which are closely related to stereotypes. Her analysis of the way in which the visible world works suggests that both society and individuals are involved in the changing of ideals. Silverman situates ideals on what she calls the cultural screen, which can be described as an imagined screen that constantly takes in and projects images through which a particular society expresses its views.¹³⁰ It is important to stress that for Silverman the

cultural screen is not a mirror, a direct reflection of society, but rather a social creation. Silverman situates the cultural screen at the intersection of the individual (the look) and the social (the gaze), considering individuals the creators of the cultural screen, yet at the same time subject to it. I propose to look at *Mecánica nacional* as an individual's contribution to Mexico's cultural screen, a contribution that brings back the ideal of the good-mother to critically reconsider it. Alcoriza's film allows spectators to question their long-held ideals of femininity by satirizing the stereotype's more important symbols and assumptions.

Granny Lolita's crown is one of the most obvious symbols by which the good-mother stereotype is called into question. After finding out that Eufemio's mother is dead, the people surrounding the family make a tinfoil crown for her. In a way, the crown may come as a surprise—the good-mothers of the classical cinema, García's characters included, do not wear crowns. For much of the audience, however, the crown is a pun that refers to past ideals. The pun connects the Virgin's crown to Mexico's ideals of motherhood and to García's star persona. The crown appeared as a symbol for motherhood in 1937. For Mother's Day that year, a drawing contest was held by the newspaper *Excelsior* on the theme of motherhood, and the results showed that a majority of children associated motherhood with the Virgin. Some drew the Virgin at the Cross and her ascension to the sky, not really showing an association between contemporary motherhood and the Virgin. Others drew contemporary mothers with Virginal attributes; for example, a mother of four was shown wearing a crown. The crown in this drawing indicates that in the Mexican culture of the 1930s, motherhood was associated with the Virgin. This association needs to be seen in the context of the increased importance of the

Virgin Mary in international Catholic culture in the 1930s. During the 1940s and 1950s the importance of Mary as Queen only intensified, culminating in 1954, when the Vatican gave the Virgin Mary the title “Queen of the Church”. Interestingly, the actress considered the “Official mother of Mexico” was also crowned (Peña, 53). In 1968, the journalist from *La Ultima Reseña de Acapulco* named García their Queen and made her a paper crown (Muñoz, 66). Thus, the tinfoil crown made as a gag in *Mecánica nacional* is an attempt to de-couple the link between motherhood, the Virgin, and Sara García’s star persona.

The direct allusion to specific cinematic conventions employed to represent ideal motherhood is another means by which *Mecánica nacional* creates a distance to old stereotypes. Amazed by the death of one of the spectators in the race, the press takes a break from the cars. A crane shot of the race is followed by one of the family and friends attending Lolita’s wake. While the camera focuses on the family and friends, the broadcaster commands, “Don’t look at the camera.” This comment underscores the difference between real life and cinematic conventions and serves to introduce a scene in which cinematic conventions relating to motherhood are blatantly lampooned. In preparation for shooting the wake, the broadcaster gives directions to family and friends: “All you women, pretend you are praying”, and the women proceed to do so. When the broadcaster tells Eufemio to “kiss your mother, then raise your face and look at the sky”, his directions materialize: spectators see a medium shot of Eufemio in the lower part of the frame, with his eyes directed towards the upper right and his hands held respectfully together as though praying. *Mecánica nacional* underscores that body positions, camera angles, and frame are elements that sustain a specific discourse on motherhood.

This relationship between cinematic conventions and cultural ideals has been theorized before in film studies. In *Camera Obscura*, Roland Barthes mentions that when facing a camera to have our picture taken, we arrange our bodies. In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Silverman builds upon Barthes' idea by suggesting that the re-arrangement of the body has to do with idealization; we position our bodies in ways that we believe will make us look ideal. She says: "How we are 'photographed,' and the terms under which we experience our specularly, are the result of another agency altogether, as are the values which we impute to the gaze. They are a result of the cultural screen" (Silverman, 168). For her, one approaches the cultural screen in much the same way as a camera; individuals in a society use clothing and body positions in an attempt to approach normative ideals. The idea that one can approach the cultural screen through the mise-en-scene is fundamental to understanding the broadcaster's commands to family and friends. The broadcaster directs Eufemio on how to pose for an Ideal-of-Virgin-motherhood shot, a fact that is reinforced by the existence of an on-screen camera. Alcoriza's goal is to make a parody of famous Ideal-of-Virgin-motherhood scenes, such as the one in which María Candelaria kneels at the foot of the statue of the Virgin, her eyes directed towards the upper part of the frame where the Virgin is supposed to be and her hands held together in prayer. Through parody, Alcoriza demonstrates that the classical ideal relied heavily on the mise-en-scene to express its ideality. However, Alcoriza's goal in exposing the "tricks" that underlie ideality are not meant to be solely explanatory, but more as a conscious warning. The actors' gestures parody classical assumptions. The audience is directed to laugh at Eufemio's gestures and to reflect on the conventions for an Ideal-of-Virgin-Motherhood shot.¹³¹

Conventions for gestures and postures are not restricted to cinema. The drawings made for the *Excelsior's* Mother's Day contest in 1937 show that the connection between motherhood and the Virgin is often established by bodily posture. For instance, one drawing shows a mother in the room of a contemporary house leaning over the bed of a child. The mother's posture resembles that of many paintings of the Virgin over the crib and thus establishes a parallelism between that particular mother and the Virgin Mary. Also, when the broadcaster says: "Go down to the old woman, make sure you take the crown. Then go down all the way to her hands," isn't the audience reminded of María Candelaria's last appearance in her canoe ride through the waters of Xochimilco? We can even go as far as to suggest that the broadcaster's directions cue the audience in how to interpret the last scene of *María Candelaria*. What the spectator of *María Candelaria* sees on screen are just brief, fleeting shots of beautiful Dolores del Río surrounded by white flowers. What is missing, and what the broadcaster directly refers to, is María Candelaria's invisible crown, symbol of her Virginity. That missing link between femininity and Virginity is for the most part assumed in Mexican films of the classical period. The broadcaster's directions thus make the audience aware of a process that has been naturalized (made natural) to such an extent that it is no longer conscious. The audience has to be reminded that the Mexican notion of motherhood is, indeed, a visually codified discourse. Given the national stature of Sara García, as well as the film's overall goal of discussing the mechanics of the Mexican mind, the broadcaster's directions have to be understood as a challenge to the audience to examine their own life in terms of a discourse created for them by their culture. *Mecánica Nacional's* parody of 1940s

conventions does more than comment on those conventions; it encourages the audience to become aware of them in order to move away from them.

The parody has a de-idealizing effect, disassociating the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood from its positive qualities. The editing adds to the de-idealization; the long shot of the group of mourners is directly followed by a close-up of an unidentified person frying eggs. The connection between the mourners and the eggs makes García's Virginity seem banal and in certain ways grotesque. At the same time, the crown is a parodic sign, because while it reminds the audience that Lolita is a Queen, it also makes fun of her royalty, since the crown is made out of tinfoil and not silver.

Mecánica nacional uses somatic associations to convey the need for García's death. After having eaten too many tacos, Granny Lolita dies of indigestion in the middle of the Acapulco-to-Mexico-City auto race. Her death is presented through scenes that prompt negative somatic reactions. On a hot summer afternoon, Eufemio's car, with granny's corpse decomposing in it, is stuck in the traffic jam at the end of the well-attended race. The funeral is shot at a very slow rhythm, reflecting the pace at which the cars advance, with long shots in which hardly anything happens. The sounds in the funeral scenes are made up of high-pitched, histrionic, disorganized voices. The scene's slow rhythm, the heat of the day, and the noise of the voices make the spectator despise the ideal that García represents. Together with the boredom of the traffic jam, the spectator gets a sense of disintegration; the flesh that so many times had embodied the self-sacrificing mother "rots" onscreen. Since García the actress embodies the symbol of Mexican motherhood, her death is more than just the death of a character; it is also the death of the stereotype of

the good-mother. Thus, an analysis of the way Granny's death is portrayed is a good way to understand the criticism in the 1970s of the stereotype of the good-mother.

Alcoriza's criticism of what I have termed the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is primarily restricted to its Catholic content. Alcoriza parodies the symbols of Catholicism—the crown, the Virgin—and its excessive gestures—the hands held together, the eyes directed to the sky. Yet other aspects that Sara García stands for, such as maternal nurturance, are not objects of his disdain. It is also important to mention that Alcoriza's parody does not explore other models of motherhood. In 1972, the ideal of Virgin-Motherhood was pronounced obsolete, but there was no substitute on the Mexican screens, and there would not be one for another twenty years.

Having analyzed the “good examples” of the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood up to the 1970s, we may now proceed to look at the “bad examples”. For my discussion of Virgin-Motherhood, it is essential to look at the way in which the Ideal, with its emphasis on primary narcissism, limits female individuation. This aspect is not necessarily obvious when looking at positive examples of the Ideal in which mediation, nurturance, chastity, primary narcissism, self-sacrifice, and suffering dominate. It is by looking at the ban on desire (sexual or otherwise) that the main challenge posed by the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood becomes clear. Negative examples show that the challenge faced by Mexican filmmakers in the 1970s was not to create unchaste secular female characters but rather to create female characters illustrating individuation and agency. Nowhere is the ban on desire best illustrated than in the stereotype of the “devora-hombres” (man-eaters).

Negative Examples: Un-Virgin-like “Devora-hombres”

The “bad” woman stereotype, especially in its vamp or “devora-hombres” version, is mainly a phenomenon of the melodramas of the classical period, and most people agree that it is best represented by actress María Félix. What is, however, the role of the “devora-hombres” within the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood? And what can the study of examples of bad women bring to our understanding of the discourse of motherhood during the classical period of Mexican cinema?

A look at Fernando de Fuentes’ film *Doña Bárbara* shows that the female protagonist, played by María Félix, stands for sexual desire, agency, and individuation. Coincidentally, *Doña Bárbara* was released in 1943, the same year as *María Candelaria*; thus, one could consider Doña Bárbara’s negative example simply the flip-side of Virginal qualities (mediation, nurturance, primary narcissism, self-sacrifice and suffering). Yet if that were the case, it would not be necessary to analyze *Doña Bárbara* here, because the negative examples could be inferred from the positive ones. On the contrary, however, an analysis of *Doña Bárbara* brings to light information that, although implied in the positive depictions we have looked at, could be easily missed. Negative female stereotypes, and that of the devora-hombres is perhaps the best one, are designed to warn mothers (meaning women) against becoming individuals, in the sense of someone psychologically separate from others. Other film scholars have pointed, although indirectly, to this limitation; Jean Franco, for instance, approaches the issue when discussing the tendency of Mexican melodramas of the classical period to support Oedipal marriages. According to Franco, women such as Marianela, Doña Bárbara’s daughter, are encouraged to marry men who, because of their age and protective

behavior, could be considered their fathers.¹³² One can conclude from Franco's study that Oedipal marriages bring the process of individuation to a halt. If married to the equivalent of their fathers, women will never progress beyond the Oedipal complex, a process considered the beginning of individuation.

My study of individuation will focus on *Doña Bárbara*'s representation of physical space. In this film, physical space is a metaphor through which feminine psychic space is discussed. The limits that Doña Bárbara sets around her territory are also a symbol of her psychic boundaries, of her individuation. Doña Bárbara is a female character who has individuated; her separation from her daughter and husband, her capacity to work within the symbolic order making laws, and her sexual desire are all examples of her individuation. Although psychoanalytic discourse sees individuation as an entrance into adult life and thus a goal for the analysand, the ideology implied in *Doña Barbara* does not share the same goal. In the film's narrative, Doña Bárbara's capacity to separate is understood as a consequence of trauma (rape) and considered an aberration (masculinity in a woman). Much like *María Candelaria*, *Doña Bárbara* is also structured as a learning process; in Doña Bárbara's case, acting Virgin-like means stepping back from what the film depicts as aberration (individuation). Hence, acting Virgin-like means halting one's process of individuation.

Psychical and Psychic Space in *Doña Bárbara*

If we take the locus of *Doña Bárbara* literally, Doña Bárbara's home is not only in the jungle (and thus far away from "civilization") but also beyond the confines of the Mexican nation.¹³³ It is no accident that Fernando de Fuentes chose to adapt a Venezuelan novel to represent a character that stands for female aberration.¹³⁴ Such

characters can only live in places that in the Mexican imagination are considered far away, such as the Venezuelan Llanos (Plains). Thus, in a metaphorical sense, the devorahombres lives far away from the central space occupied by the good-mother, because she does not know how to act Virgin-like.

In *Doña Bárbara*, the Venezuelan landscape, especially Los Llanos where the main part of the film takes place, is used as a metaphor for the limits of femininity. An off-screen voice at the end of *Doña Bárbara* makes explicit the connection between gender identity and the physical limits of land. At the beginning of the film, this voice tells us that all the property of Altamira used to belong to Santos Luzardo's family. The name of the land evokes a sense of ancient origins, as the Altamira caves in Spain were the site of early human habitation. The voice also says that, in the beginning, all the land was unfenced and male. The narrative begins after Doña Bárbara has disrupted this ideal landscape; she has drawn borders by imposing a fence that separates her property, El Miedo (The Fear), from Santo's Luzardo's land, Altamira. The whole narrative will pivot on Doña Bárbara taking this fence, representative of female individuation and symbolic of a misunderstood feminine role, down.

Doña Bárbara encourages boundless femininity; women should be like land without fences. At the end, the film returns to a state of equilibrium in which the land, as well as the original gender roles, have been reestablished. The screen first shows a medium shot taken from below in which Luzardo puts his arm around the shoulder of Marisela, Doña Bárbara's daughter. The spectator understands that he is going to marry Marisela, an ideal Virgin-Mother, and that they will start a patriarchal family. The shot is taken from a low angle, which allows the sky to fill a big part of the frame; against the bright sky,

Marianela's hair moves, creating a sense of freedom. Luzardo, aligned vertically at the center of the screen, appears as a patriarch, and the image of Marisela, directly at the right, and half a head down, suggests a woman that can be protected. Immediately after, the offscreen voice says, "The man-eater has disappeared." The camera first shows a broad land without fences and then an old fence and a dead cow fading away. The offscreen voice clarifies, "El Miedo doesn't exist anymore," and the screen shows a very low horizon line only broken by a few trees. The voice continues, "All is Altamira now" and presents a space which is mostly sky. Then the voice describes the restored landscape: "Broad and expansive land, all horizons and roads of hope."

In *Doña Bárbara*, fences are the symbol through which female individuation, which we could call emotional "fencing," is discussed. Ideal femininity, as represented by Marisela, is associated with expansive lands, lands without borders. In the restored landscape that the film associates with hope, masculinity (Luzardo) embraces an unfenced femininity (Marisela). By contrast, "fenced" femininity, as represented by Doña Bárbara, is associated with fear and chaos.

Doña Bárbara uses several ways to present the female protagonist's femininity as individuated ("fenced"). The film associates individuation exclusively with masculinity and therefore portrays Doña Bárbara with masculine traits. Doña Bárbara's "masculinity" is expressed by the contrast between her clothing and gestures and those of her daughter. After the spectator sees Marisela in a white flowered dress riding side-saddle, the camera cuts to a long-shot of Doña Bárbara in a black pant-skirt riding "the masculine way," with a leg on each side of the horse. The colors, white for Marisela and black for "La Doña," give us the idea that the film approves of Marisela's reduced psychic space (or, to put it

another way, undeveloped individuation) by associating it with white (purity, innocence). Following the same logic, the film rejects Doña Bárbara's individuation by associating it with black (evil, bad intentions). Doña Bárbara's main problem, the film seems to argue, is that she took a masculine role by fencing her selfhood.

Wifehood and Motherhood

In *Doña Bárbara*, the protagonist's sense of self disqualifies her from the role of wife. Opposed to the ideal marriage of Marisela and Luzardo, which has no limits between masculine and feminine space, Doña Bárbara's prefers her "fenced" relationship to Lorenzo Barquero, Marisela's father. Doña Bárbara's "fencing" can be seen in her refusal to consider anything "ours," meaning hers and Lorenzo's. When Lorenzo tells Doña Bárbara that she needs help for "our daughter," she responds: "Can there be anything in the world that is yours and mine?" This dialogue shows that Doña Bárbara is unwilling to share anything, even a daughter, with anyone.

This incident with Lorenzo is not an isolated case. Doña Bárbara also refuses to use the plural pronoun with her new potential husband, overseer Balbino Paiba. When Balbino asks her for a cigarette, she responds, "Smoke yours," thus showing that she is unwilling to share even a cigarette, something which, the film implies, should be given to strangers. The cigarette incident helps us understand the next scene, in which Balbino proposes marriage ("We should formalize our relationship."), and Doña Bárbara responds by wanting to whip him. She is presented as unwilling to be part of an open masculine landscape, and her selfishness and irrationality, the film's logic concludes, disqualify her as a wife.

The same sense of self, which Kristeva refers to as psychic space, disqualifies Doña Bárbara from being a mother. According to the film's logic, Doña Bárbara's separate psychic space (the fence in the film) contains the emotions she might otherwise feel toward her daughter. The scene that follows Doña Bárbara's meeting with her ex-husband shows the way in which Doña Barbara's fencing prevents her from fulfilling her role as a mother. Knowing that her daughter needs help, Doña Bárbara visits her and, from her horse, throws her a bundle with money inside. Marisela refuses to take it, showing that money cannot replace the love and care that a mother should provide. The incident is portrayed as an example of inappropriate nurturing behavior. Although well intentioned, Doña Bárbara is not able to take appropriate care of her daughter. Interestingly, the film's narrative chooses to ignore the fact that Doña Bárbara provides the economic support for her daughter. A mother is supposed to give love, not money, the film lets the audiences know.

The fence, in my view, is a metaphor for the process of feminine individuation, a process that sets limits, separating what the self is from what others are. Seen within the logic of the Ideal of Virgin Motherhood, Doña Bárbara's fencing (individuation) is the reverse of mediation; it blocks her care from reaching her husband and daughter.

Desire

Doña Bárbara has a third narrative that intermingles with land and gender roles, that of desire and love. At the beginning, the film builds up an opposition between female desire and feminine love. Active female desire is presented as a way to control the action of men. Feminine love is passive desire, the need to be protected and illuminated by a morally superior being. That is not, however, the way in which object-relation

psychoanalysts, such as Klein and Freud in his first period, understood active desire. For them, the ability to have objects is part of the process of individuation. Doña Bárbara's desire, then, would be considered healthy desire by psychoanalysts, but not according to the logic that organizes the film's narrative, which insists that women, like the Virgin, should be mediators.

After meeting Luzardo (who has been away studying law in the city), Doña Bárbara falls madly in love with him. The film uses Luzardo's photograph to represent her active desire.. Doña Bárbara cuts the photograph from the newspaper and puts it in the altar in her room, transforming Luzardo into the object of her desire. *Doña Bárbara* understands active sexual desire as manipulative and associates it with witchcraft.¹³⁵ In the altar, as Doña Bárbara lights three candles to "Lucifer, Satanás and Belcebú," she puts Luzardo's photograph upside down and says: "I look at you with two, my eyes, without which, you will feel like blind, your reason and your pride will go head over heels."

Despite having a most un-Virgin-like protagonist, *Doña Bárbara's* follows *María Candelaria's* same narrative strategy. As the movie develops, Doña Bárbara is made to transform her initial active desire into passive love, much as María Candelaria has to learn to leave her anger behind and be obedient. Coincidentally, the turning point in both narratives is a religious space, a church in the case of *María Candelaria* and an altar to Satan in the case of *Doña Bárbara*. In both cases, the protagonists emerge with changed behaviors. Doña Bárbara learns that she has to take her borders down, and she gradually does so. After the altar incident, Doña Bárbara meets Luzardo in the field to return some of Altamira's cows that she has taken; it is a meeting that can be interpreted as Doña Bárbara's giving up some of her psychic space. Significantly, when they stop lassoing,

they talk about gender roles. Doña Bárbara remarks that Luzardo has not forgotten how to tumble and lasso bulls while he was away in the city. Luzardo answers that that is not surprising in a man and then tells her that she is good at it, too. Half-defiant, half under the effect of love, Doña Bárbara comments that to lasso and tumble bulls “is not to be admired in a woman.” The same rule, the dialogue shows, applies to Doña Bárbara’s active desire. It is unnatural for women to desire actively; such desire “is not to be admired in a woman.”

Learning to Act Virgin-Like

As the lassoing scene progresses, Doña Bárbara learns to love passively and to be illuminated and protected by a male with superior moral qualities. The film depicts Luzardo—whose first name, “Santos” (saint), suggests a generous character—as a morally superior character by situating him standing up while Doña Bárbara is sitting down. Luzardo restores Doña Bárbara to her original ideality by closing the wound of her rape. After Doña Bárbara explains, looking up to Luzardo, that “Brutal men took advantage of her, and that she will make men pay for it.”, Luzardo, looking down, answers: “The violence you have been victim of does not justify your own violence.” Later Luzardo adds: “Have you thought about how much harm you have done to yourself?” Doña Bárbara is illuminated by Luzardo’s words and concludes: “I have harmed myself enough with this violence.” Afterwards, she goes back to her altar and turns the photograph up again while she repeats Luzardo’s words: “Have you thought about how much harm you have done to yourself?”

As the narrative progresses, Virgin-like behavior grows; even El Maligno, the devil that lives in the altar, seems to behave in a Virgin-like way. In a moment of weakness,

still confused while trying to learn, Doña Bárbara regresses to her former ways and attempts to control Luzardo's love by turning the photograph upside-down. She is stopped, however, by El Maligno's advice: "If you want him to come to you, give up your deeds." Even the evil spirit changes sides. The film ends with Doña Bárbara taking the photograph out of the altar and lovingly pressing it against her heart. By doing so, Doña Bárbara gives up her active desire, represented by the altar, and transforms it into admiration for Luzardo, the good patriarch. As López and Ayala Blanco (1968: 108) maintain, the construct of the devora-hombres supports patriarchy.

Although we do not need more examples to prove that Doña Bárbara is not encouraged to maintain her psychic space, it is interesting to note that the psychic space that she is encouraged to leave behind is related in the film to the symbolic order. After falling in love with Luzardo, Doña Bárbara has a meeting to discuss the Law, which in this part of Los Llanos, and at the beginning of the film, means Doña Bárbara's Law. As one who makes the laws, Doña Bárbara is presented as having access to the symbolic order. The film's treatment of the Law in relation to Doña Bárbara is remarkable because it shows that the film relates psychic space to women's entrance into the Symbolic. Feminine psychic space poses a significant threat, one that possibly justifies encouraging women not to individuate. To put it differently, female psychic space is not only discouraged because it interferes with motherhood and wifedom but also, and I would say more importantly, because it may dangerously allow women's entrance into the Symbolic.

Abjection

Kristeva's notion of the abject provides perhaps the best approach to understanding Doña Bárbara's threat. Kristeva describes the abject somatically, by saying that the abject is repulsive and attractive at the same time and is linked to a disruption of the borders set up by the symbolic.¹³⁶ Doña Bárbara's psychic space is indeed portrayed as both attractive (in the casting of Maria Felix—the grand dame of Mexican cinema and the best-paid female actress of the time) and repulsive (threatening the borders of what in the 1940s was demarcated as feminine). Much like Hortensia (in *Señora tentación*) who wanted to have her own business, Doña Bárbara disrupts the symbolic by having her own psychic space, desiring actively, and making laws. Such disruption creates a feeling of anxiety that permeates the whole film. The name of Doña Bárbara's ranch, "El Miedo," reflects the anxiety created by a feminine demarcated territory and so does Doña Bárbara's nickname of "devora-hombres". During the film, Doña Bárbara herself explains that they call her that because she "takes men when she needs them and, once she is done with them, throws them away in pieces." The term "devora-hombres" reflects the threat to masculinity that María Felix's devora-hombres characters provoke; men fear that their identity is going to be "eaten up." Men's anxiety, however, cannot be separated from historical conditions. As López's article suggests in "Tears and Desire," the anxiety devora-hombres create needs to be related to the shifting of gender roles during Mexico's process of modernization in the 1940s.

My analysis of the classical films demonstrates that the notion of femininity that we find in the Mexican melodramas of the classical period restricts women's agency and almost prohibits female individuation. Classical melodramas use the Virgin Mary as a

model through which femininity can be articulated as suffering, sacrifice, mediation, and primary narcissism, creating what I termed the Ideal of Virgin Motherhood. The Ideal is reinforced by negative examples in which women who have agency and individuate are presented in a negative light. Despite the limits to agency and individuation that the Ideal sets for women, the Ideal is a strong symbolic machine that is hard to leave behind; the beauty of classical idealization is hard to resist. What is, however, the view that contemporary women filmmakers have of the representation of femininity in the classical melodramas? Do third-wave filmmakers see their female characters as a continuing or opposing the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood?

The role of Classical Melodramas during the 1980-1990s

Melodramas of the classical period, such as *María Candelaria* and *Doña Bárbara*, were played very frequently on television in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when third-wave filmmakers were producing their films. These melodramas played a political role in the 1990s context and were associated with national identity. Contemporary filmmakers look at classical melodramas as a point of departure to think about Mexico. Busi Cortés, for instance, refers to Mexican melodramas as a repository of Mexican emotions.

Classical melodramas were especially important during the early 1990s, when third-wave filmmakers were making their first features. The North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) brought a process of globalization that created anxiety among Mexicans. In Susan Dever's opinion, the anxiety brought by NAFTA is very similar to the anxiety produced by 1940s modernization. In a chapter entitled "Re-Birth of a Nation: On Mexican Movies, Museums and María Felix," Dever suggests that during the 1990s, the state revamped the melodramas of the classical period to placate national anxiety

about NAFTA. A case in point is the homage paid to María Felix, the actress who played Doña Bárbara in Fernando de Fuentes' *Doña Bárbara*. In the summer of 1990, the Tijuana Cultural Center organized a retrospective of Felix's work and invited the actress. According to Dever, Felix repeated her mediating role between the marginalized groups and the State at Tijuana (49); she mediated between the Salinas' government, which was opening Mexico's borders to U.S. commerce, and Mexican people, who feared the lack of protectionist measures for national products. Given the television programming the generation of the film schools grew up with, as well as the way in which the Salinas' government dealt with national anxiety, it is not surprising that classical melodramas were an important reference point for Mexican women filmmakers during the 1990s.

Busi Cortés sees a close relationship between Mexico's national identity and melodramas. She believes that "in each country there is relationship between cinematic language and dramatic language, and we Mexicans are melodramatic" (Arredondo 2001: 97). Cortés considers melodrama an expression of Mexico's national identity, and thus to be Mexican is to make melodramas. Cortés defines her work as an attempt to make an in-depth analysis of human, and especially women's emotions, via the re-visitation of Mexico's melodramatic tradition. In this respect, she says:

The most difficult thing is to acknowledge that you are going to make a melodrama, since the genre has been totally devalued because of the soap operas. My sister, for example, will never accept that *Serpientes y escaleras* is a melodrama, and I don't think Alicia would either. I, on the other hand, would accept it because I was trying to make a movie that would bring me into closer contact with moviegoers (Arredondo 2001: 97).

While the co-authors of the script, Alicia Molina and Carmen Cortés, would reject an association with melodrama, she would not. In my interview with her, she enumerated a list of important Mexican melodramas, situating her work within this filmic genre.¹³⁷ Cortés, however, made a point of distinguishing between well-crafted melodramas, which she associates with the 1940s and 1950s,¹³⁸ and badly-crafted ones, such as contemporary soap operas.¹³⁹ Like other directors trained in film schools, Cortés is familiar with and appreciates sophisticated scripts with in-depth description of emotions; however, she is willing to reduce complexity and rely on a intrigue-based narrative in order to move people emotionally.¹⁴⁰ In opposition to Brechian theories, which are based on a distance between audience and text, Cortés considers that her priority is to maintain a connection with the audience, because such connection is fundamental to raising people's consciousness.¹⁴¹

Third-wave filmmakers consider melodramas part of their emotional education. Novaro remembers watching melodramas when she grew up: "I would watch the movies of suffering mothers or redeemed prostitutes to the tune of my mother's critique, who would say how those women were idiots. Mother was a feminist in the making, and so I looked at female characters from a somewhat critical perspective. Nevertheless, I was fascinated by the beautiful women of Mexican films since childhood—above all, María Felix"(Arredondo 2001: 130). Novaro's remembrance shows the role melodramas played in her life as she was growing up and the attraction of classical idealization. Even someone like Novaro, who watched melodramas under the feminist scrutiny of her mother, feels fascinated by classical icons.

Melodramas are also a place to look for Mexican emotions. Talking about her career as a filmmaker, Sistach said: “all started by watching Mexican films [from the classical period]” (Millán 1999: 160).¹⁴² Sistach situates her filmmaking in relation to classical melodramas: classical films, and more specifically the female stereotypes they portrayed, motivated Sistach to create her own filmic response.¹⁴³ For example, in Galindo’s *Una familia de tantas*, the family dynamics center on patriarch Don Rodrigo. Sistach “responded” to Galindo’s family in *Conozco a las tres* by showing that many contemporary Mexican families, such as Ana’s, were not nuclear families.¹⁴⁴ By doing so, she also created “a kind of woman that exists in the Mexican reality, but who has not been represented in the screen before.”¹⁴⁵

While in *Conozco a las tres* there is an implicit reference to melodrama, in *Los pasos de Ana* there is an explicit one. Carlos compares the protagonist, film graduate Ana, to famous classical actress Sara García. The scene takes place in a bookstore, where Ana and Carlos are looking for information for their new television program. In a close-up, thirty-year-old Ana confides that she has decided to let her thirteen-year son, Juan, go to live with his father in San Diego, commenting that it breaks her heart to see him go. As the camera pulls away, Carlos tells Ana: “You better modernize yourself, or you are going to end up like Sara García in *Cuando los hijos se van*.” The reference to the classical actress is brought into *Los pasos de Ana* to emphasize the changes in mother images that have taken place over time. Carlos says to Ana: “you fuck freely; you smoke pot whenever you can; you have to work hard to make your living; and since your husband left you, you don’t have the slightest idea of what your future will be like.” *Los pasos de Ana* uses the depth of field to represent the distance that separates Ana from

Sara García's star persona. After the close-up in which the two friends converse, the camera pulls away to a medium and then a long shot, leaving Carlos and Ana in the upper right part of the background. The camera focuses on a stack of books in the foreground, which represent, metonymically, the history of film in Mexico. Literally, then, the spectator sees Ana from the historical perspective represented by the books.

1980s-1990s References to Classical Melodramas

For the most part, third-wave filmmakers avoid what I have termed the Ideal of Virgin-motherhood, which consists in appearing virginal and following the Virgin as a model, especially in her role as connector between family members. Novaro's *Danzón* questions the narcissistic idealization inherent in the Ideal, and her Lola is designed to contrast with the classical mother image. Rotberg's *Angel de fuego* calls attention to the cruelty inherent in religious thought. In *Los pasos de Ana*, Sistach complicates an easy separation between classical and contemporary mother images when she insists on recovering one aspect of a classical icon: Sara García's affection for her children.

Danzón and Classical Idealization

Novaro's *Danzón* is representative of the way third-wave filmmakers approach classical melodramas, both acknowledging them and at the same time critical of them. For instance, *Danzón* makes specific references to classical scenarios but sees these scenarios from a gender-specific contemporary perspective.

The reference to classical melodramas is direct in *Danzón*, where Novaro pays homage to *Salón México* (Emilio Fernández, 1949), a cabareteera film. In *Danzón*, the leading female character, Julia, goes to the very same dance hall where the classical film

was shot. Novaro uses *Salón Mexico* as a springboard for her re-examination of the culture of dance halls from a gender perspective.¹⁴⁶ Significantly, *Danzón* Novaro reverses the fate of her protagonist. In *Salón Mexico*, Mercedes attends a dance hall and becomes a prostitute in order to pay for her sister's education, and although her intentions are noble, the means by which she tries to "mother" her sister destine her to a fatal end. In contrast, Julia's fate is not pre-determined. When her dance partner, Carmelo, disappears, abandonment becomes an opportunity for enjoyment and self-discovery. Following a false tip about Carmelo's whereabouts, Julia travels to Veracruz where she enjoys the ocean, meets new friends, and has an affair with a young sailor; the search for Carmelo has become secondary. Julia's example shows that contemporary films use classical films as a point of reference.

Danzón does more than acknowledge the importance of classical melodramas for Mexicans, it creates a critical standpoint from which to look at melodramas. More specifically, *Danzón* critiques narcissistic idealization, best exemplified by *María Candelaria*. *Danzón* combines distortion, exaggeration, and humor to convey that classical ideals are problematic for women. *Danzón's* critique is important for my overall argument. Narcissistic idealization, I have argued, is problematic because it proposes unreachable ideals for women, leading to frustration and self-hate. In *Danzón* those ideals exists, but trying to reach them is presented not only as impossible but also as unnecessary.

In *Danzón*, Julia revisits several classical scenarios, such as the harbor. The docks and boats make a clear reference to famous classical films and songs in which women fall in love with sailors, such as *La mujer del puerto*. The wardrobe in *Danzón* also hints at

classical Mexican melodramas: Julia walks along the docks wearing a bright red dress, red lipstick, high heels, and a matching red flower behind her ear. On this sunny, windy afternoon, Julia's dress flaps in the wind and stands out in sharp color contrast to the intensely blue sky. No doubt a dolled-up woman walking along the Veracruz docks makes visual references to a classical scenario; however, the way in which the camera is positioned and the organization of the scene from the point of view of the woman purposely defy classical notions. The scene consists of three shots organized in a continuity style showing an exchange of looks between Julia and the sailors. First, in an extreme low angle, the camera takes a long-shot of the sailors looking down at Julia from a boat railing. Then the camera takes a point-of-view shot of shy and delighted Julia looking up at the sailors. In this shot, there is a close-up of one of the sailors resting his arms over the railing, still looking at Julia. It is taken from a very low angle in almost a vertical manner. This straight-down shot conveys the sailor's interest in Julia. Overall, the scene is organized around Julia's feelings and Julia's vision: the point-of-view shot assures the audience that the scene makes sense from a woman's perspective, while the extreme positions of the first and third shots attest to Julia's desire to be looked at.

Another important element in this scene is the choice of boat names. As Julia walks down the docks, the boats she passes have unusual names that refer to romantic love. For example, the boat of the sailor described above is called "See me and Suffer." Other boats are called "L'Amour Fou," "Black Tears (the name of a very famous romantic song by Toña la Negra)," "Lost Love," and "Pure Illusions." Novaro commented in an interview that when it was time to shoot this scene, she realized the high cost of the project. In order to give real boats another name, they had to get permission from the

captain, the ship's country of origin, and the harbormaster. "In addition, we could barely afford to paint the names, film them, and repaint them." Since resources were scarce, the producers tried to convince Novaro to shoot the scene with the original names, but Novaro was insistent. It was "important to the story"—these boats "are not normal ships. We're in this woman's fantasy" (151). The romantic names structured the scene from Julia's perspective and also distanced the film from classical ideals. Although classical films also used docks, they did not include vertical shots or present scenes from the point of view of a woman.

Love songs and romantic love as expressed through "L'amour Fou", sailors, the docks, and a red dress and high heels acknowledge the importance of mainstream ideals and their impact on women's lives. Yet, the film presents these ideals jokingly. The two examples of exaggeration that I just described (creating a vertical shot that emphasizes the sailor's interest in Julia and having a boat named "See me and suffer") are but two examples in which humor creates a distance from those ideals.

Humor: Make-up in *Danzón*

Humor is an important mechanism not only in this part of the film but in others and thus deserves special attention. *Danzón* uses humor to create distance from some cultural practices, so that societal ideals for women will not be equated with womanhood itself. This distance is emphasized in a scene in *Danzón* in which make-up, plastic breasts, flowers, and dresses are seen as toys that women can play with, not as elements that limit women. In this scene, Susy, Julia's gay friend, shows Julia how to use make-up and talks about the different kinds of women there are and the kinds of make-up that go with each type. Then she asks: "Can you tell the difference? Since you are a summer woman reds,

oranges, deep greens fit you very well.” (Novaro: 62). When I inquired about the idea behind these lines, Novaro told me that ideas such as the autumn woman “fascinate me, while, at the same time, I find them ridiculous.” (Arredondo 2001: 33). Novaro can treat society’s projections on women nostalgically because she has stepped back from such projections. Novaro explained to me: “In *Danzón* I wanted to rejoice, to be moved by my cultural legacy, by what it means to be a woman in Mexico. I even wanted to praise a part I no longer identify with at all because I’m at another point” (Arredondo 2001: 33). Social projections on women can be celebrated only after those images no longer determine a woman’s identity. *Danzón* brings back society’s ideal-imago for women to show that there is room for women to challenge such ideological constructions. Speaking for her sister Beatriz and herself, Novaro explains:

When Julia is primping herself, putting on make-up, dolling herself up, ready to go to the docks to look for the sailor she has seen in one of the tugboats, ready to say that Carmelo is her cousin in case anyone thinks badly of her, we were playing with our emotional upbringing.

By playing, we explore all the things we have inherited. With this method, it doesn't weigh on you: “This is how I was raised, this is my tradition and I recognize it as part of me, but I’ll make fun of it and won't let it run my life” (Arredondo 2001: 141).

Humor is a mechanism that helps the Novaro sisters accept their emotional inheritance and at the same time challenge the predicaments of Mexican Catholicism. According to Novaro, “When we made *Danzón*, on the one hand, we took elements from our emotional upbringing, but on the other, we distanced ourselves from those elements. So, through humor, we were able to accept our culture, yet, at the same time, we freed

ourselves from what our emotional education taught us to feel when we were growing up” (Arredondo 2001: 141).

Danzón acknowledges the existence of culturally-constructed ideals for women; these ideals, however, leave room for individual freedoms. Julia’s love for the *danzón* illustrates this point. When she goes to the dance hall, she follows the rules of *danzón*, which require that men lead and women follow.¹⁴⁷ This requirement that women leave all initiative to the men might be seen as symptomatic of the oppression of women in Mexican culture. However, *Danzón* shows that there is a difference between following the rules of a dance and applying those rules to all aspects of life. Julia loves dancing, but she does not allow men to direct her life. My analysis has shown that *Danzón* acknowledges the existence of mainstream ideals and the impact of these ideals on contemporary women. Humor, however, is used in the film as a tool to maintain a distance from, while still paying homage to, classical ideals.

Angel de de Fuego: at a Distance from the Ideal of Virgin

Motherhood

Another strategy that contemporary filmmakers use to critique classical ideals is anger. In *Angel de fuego* (Angel of Fire, 1991), Jewish filmmaker Dana Rotberg suggests that the religious thought that derives from the Old Testament is not based on love but on cruelty. *Angel de fuego* asks the viewer to look carefully at the logic of religion. Sinners seeking forgiveness need to repent and, in many cases, go through penance and sacrifice. This idea is introduced in the film through a book, *El libro del perdón* (*The Book of Pardon*), that the priestess Refugio carries with her to all her religious puppet shows.

After each performance, she brings out the book, and people in the audience can inscribe their names in it and be pardoned. It is assumed that the people writing their names have repented. Yet, in some cases, repentance is not enough. When circus performer Alma gets in line to have her name written into *El libro, Refugio*, who is the leader of the troupe, denies her pardon. She argues that she is not yet “clean” and insists that Alma go through penance.

It is not the first time that someone has suggested that Alma has committed a huge sin. Her surrogate mother Josefina (Merche Pascual) has told her that her sin of incest is so evil that her baby will be born a monster. Alma does not want to believe Josefina but is afraid that what she says might be true. She tells Refugio: “With the penance that you put me I feel cleaner. I think that now my baby is going to come out beautiful.”¹⁴⁸ But Refugio quashes Alma’s hopes by responding, “God spoke to me and told me that your sin was very big.” When Alma protests that “You told me that with obedience and faith it would be pardoned”¹⁴⁹ Refugio counters with a demand that she fast. Although Alma is suspicious of Refugio’s motivations and fears that fasting might affect her baby, she submits to Refugio’s directives. Until this point in the film, Alma has been shown wearing the red dress she uses for her *Angel de Fuego* performance in the circus. In the fasting scene, however, she is shown wearing a tunic and kneeling in a circle of stones with her arms extended as if she were Jesus. As she had dreaded, fasting causes a miscarriage. She is shown bleeding profusely with her legs closed tightly, saying: “Don’t come out. Don’t come out.” By trying to abide by Refugio’s rules and secure a place within the religious community, Alma loses what is more dear to her in the world, her baby.

After her miscarriage, Alma comes to the conclusion that religion fosters cruelty. Alma's conclusion is foreshadowed by a puppet theater performance of the story of Abraham. Refugio's voice introduces the story by saying that Sarah and Abraham were very old and thus had lost hope of having a child but that God was good to them and gave them a son, Isaac. At this point, the voice of God is played on a tape recorder, telling Abraham: "Take your son to the mountain and offer him to me. Kill him with your own hands."¹⁵⁰ The scene cuts to a medium shot of anguished Alma and then to a counter shot of Noé, gesturing to Alma to calm down and recite her part of the dialogue: "Don't do it Abraham. By showing your willingness to sacrifice your son you have proven your respect for God. Sacrifice a lamb, God will have it instead of your son."¹⁵¹ Alma questions the logic of the *Old Testament*, asking Noe as they are going to sleep: "Why did God ask Abraham to kill his son?"¹⁵² When Noe answers: "He was only testing him."¹⁵³, Alma responds, "Yes, but he was going to kill him."¹⁵⁴ Alma's reservations about the logic of *The Old Testament* is expressed in her conclusion that "Abraham loved God more than his child."¹⁵⁵ The audience watching *Angel de fuego* is asked to conclude that religion is cruel, hindering rather than helping Alma's development as a human being. Alma is already a victim of poverty and a dysfunctional family; religion should not subject her to further cruelty. She should not have had to prove her faith by killing her child.

Marina Warner's idea that the legends of the Bible are translated into ethics (1976: 179) helps us better appreciate Rotberg's criticisms of religion. In the film, Refugio transforms stories of the Bible, like the story of Abraham, into regimented moral precepts that she imposes on people like Alma. *Angel de fuego* points to the cruelty to be found in

the Bible and to show that that cruelty can re-emerge in institutionalized religion, as symbolized by Refugio's troupe. When penance puts the life of her unborn child in jeopardy, *Angel de fuego* presents Alma's case as a reenactment of biblical cruelty. Another aspect of the cruelty is Refugio's refusal to pardon Alma for her incest. Interestingly, Alma does not react with shame, the most common emotion for someone who has experienced incest.

Alma reacts to the loss of her son with anger, becoming the Angel of Fire. To revenge her loss, Alma makes love to Refugio's son, Sacramento. With the loss of his virginity, Sacramento can no longer be the sacred man his mother hopes him to become, and he commits suicide. When Alma later crosses paths with Refugio in the street, she says, "An eye for an eye," which in this case means, "A son for a son. You killed my son, I killed yours."

Ortega Mendoza says that the sect that Alma joins transforms her into an "angel de venganza" (vengeful angel), and Tomás Pérez Turrent shared the same idea when he entitled his review "Ángel exterminador." For Pérez Turrent there is a dramatic emotional change in Alma: at the beginning of the film, Alma is a thirteen-year-old trapeze artist dressed as an angel of fire, but by the end of the film, Alma ironically incarnates the Bible's cruel Exterminator Angel. She gets her revenge by exterminating the world of the sinners.¹⁵⁶ Alma's revenge does not stop with Refugio; she returns to the circus she worked for and, after freeing the circus animals, burns the high top with herself inside. It is a long scene in which the fire destroys the circus piece by piece.

Alma's reaction is distinctly different from classical mothers. Instead of feeling shame for having committed a sin, she feels anger. How can we interpret Alma's anger?

How are anger and shame different? And also, what are the consequences of reacting with one or the other?

Kelly Oliver on Shame and Anger

In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Oliver dedicates a section entitled “Shame and Depressive Identity” (112-120) to an examination of the underpinnings of shame and anger. Oliver is interested in relating shame and guilt to the ability to act. She refers to a study by Helen Block Lewis (1978) in which Lewis compares the way in which male and female undergraduates explain why things did not work in their lives. She found that female undergraduates were more likely to blame their character, while male undergraduates tended to blame their behavior. From Lewis distinction between being and behaving, Oliver concludes that women tend to react with shame, while males tend to react with guilt (112). Oliver considers both feelings oppressive but points out that, “Shame is more deeply seated in subjectivity than guilt” (112). Looking at the implications of Lewis’s study for society at large, Oliver writes: “Those excluded or abjected by dominant values are made to feel ashamed, not about something they have done, but about who they are” (114). She then proposes that alienated people are the depository for the shame of the dominant culture (117). In other words, the dominant culture shames certain social groups in order to use that shame as a justification to alienate them.

The negative images that society projects on women can be treated by women in two ways. If they internalize them, they feel shame: “The subject experiences itself as a damaged, defective or flawed being who deserves to be ostracized” (114). If women reject the negative images, they will feel anger. Oliver argues that rage provides a much

healthier response than shame, since the feeling of being flawed leads to inaction and thus to depression.

Oliver's understanding of the dynamics of shame and anger helps to think through the differences between classical and contemporary mother images in a Catholic and patriarchal culture such as Mexico, where shame plays such an important role. If, as I have argued, internalizing the Ideal leads to shame, and if, as Oliver proposes, shame produces depression, then reacting with anger as Alma does is not only defiant but healthier.

Angel de fuego contributes to undermining the Ideal of Virgin Motherhood. In a scene that takes place in the morning light near Refugio's headquarters, we see Alma standing by a large image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The physical proximity of Alma to the statue emphasizes the differences between them. The Virgin stands for the shame that results from women's failed attempts to live up to the Ideal of Virgin motherhood. In contrast, Alma defies that shame, proudly wearing a large photograph of her father around her neck. This badge of "sin" symbolically represents Alma's pride in having a loving though incestuous relationship with her father. *Angel de fuego* proposes a healthy and defiant anger. The scene of the burning big top at night lasts four minutes; the length of the scene is essential for expressing Alma's rejection of the shame projected on her by the people around her. The film's hint at the parallel between Alma and the Bible's Angel of Justice suggests that indeed Alma is bringing justice to a religious world ruled by cruelty and injustice. The story of Abraham shows that religion demands cruel sacrifice in order to gain acceptance. Similarly, Refugio insists that Alma submit to a cruel fast in order to be accepted by the troupe. *Angel de fuego's* view of religion can be seen as a

critique of classical ideals, in particular the Ideal of Virgin Motherhood. Rotberg's film asks the audience to distance themselves from the religious views they were raised with and re-examine the questionable messages embedded in them.

Classical and Third-wave Mothers

The generation of the film schools was especially interested in the mothers of classical melodramas. A good example of this interest is Novaro's *Lola*.¹⁵⁷ Film reviews written after the press conferences that followed the premiere quote Novaro as saying that in *Lola*, she had intended to open up new possibilities for the mothers of classical Mexican melodramas. She pointed out that at the beginning of the film, Lola is in a situation not very different from the many mothers that populated the 1940's maternal melodramas; the difference was in how they reacted to it. When abandoned, mothers in classical melodrama would cry and then heroically come to terms with their situation. In contrast, when Lola's partner leaves on a yearlong performance tour, Lola becomes so depressed that she is incapacitated (Velázquez 1989). Novaro presents depression as a more likely outcome than the heroism depicted in classical melodramas.¹⁵⁸

Many critics responded to Novaro's assessment of classical melodrama (Barriga Chávez 1989, Celín 1989, Johnson Celorio 1989, Mam 1989, Murúa 89, Vega 89, Velásquez 1989). Positive reviews came from critics who liked the idea of revising the classical stereotypes of mothers and using more contemporary portrayals. Johnson Celorio liked the film because: "The saintly mother of Mexican cinema is portrayed in *Lola* as a real being, with all its problems and *raison d'être*." Another critic described *Lola* as the story of a lower-class mother with relationship problems who has to work to

survive (Barriga Chávez 1989); such a description indicates that the protagonist is a contemporary, flawed mother.

Not everyone, however, liked Novaro's revision of classical melodrama. Moisés Viñas, who wrote similarly negative reviews in 1989 and 1991, directly addressed Novaro's attempt to change melodramatic stereotypes. He explained that he liked the "reality of melodrama", preferring melodramatic mothers (even if they did not stop crying, as Novaro claimed) to Lola, for these mothers at least thought, whereas Lola had lost her capacity to do so (Viñas 1991).¹⁵⁹

After García's literal and symbolic death in *Mecánica Nacional* (1971), no one had any doubts that the classical stereotype of the "good mother" was dead. Yet in *Los pasos de Ana*, Sistach defies easy conclusions about the "good mothers" of classical melodramas by showing that they have points in common with contemporary mothers and that those points in common matter.

Sara García's *Cuando los hijos se van* (Juan Bustillo Oro's *When the Children Leave*, 1941) is perhaps the best example of García's melodramatic excess and allegedly one of the most popular films in Mexico and Latin America.¹⁶⁰ Doña Lupe (Sara García) worries mainly about whether her three sons and her daughter (most of them well into their twenties) will be sitting at the same table for the family's Christmas Eve dinner. Her difficulty in separating from her children is melodramatically represented in the film with tears and even depression. Adding to this is a voice-over which hyperbolically dramatizes her emotions—for example, claiming that when her children are away, her heart drips blood.

Sistach viewed Garcías' love for her children as something worth incorporating in contemporary films. When I asked Sistach how to interpret *Los pasos de Ana*'s reference to García she said:

Sara García is an actress who always played the role of the self-sacrificing mother in the movies: she is always “the mother of . . .” and has a relationship of very affectionate acceptance with her children. Ana also fully assumes motherhood and, of course, desires to have a husband and to form a nuclear family. Nevertheless, although Ana and Sara García might fundamentally be mothers, their principles separate them: Ana gets divorced, breaks with familial security, works, and has sexual relations with several men. That is to say, Ana plays two roles: on the one hand, she is the woman who loves her children tenderly and, on the other hand, her sexuality is overt and liberated. In this sense, they are truly at opposite ends of the spectrum. Everything Sara García believed in, Ana cannot (unpublished interview 11).

Sistach believes that Ana and Sara García share one thing in common: their love for their children. Ana may not hyperbolically “feed her rosebushes blood” (as García does), but she anticipates missing her son terribly when he leaves to live with his father. Using García as a reference, Sistach creates a character whose most fundamental characteristic is love for her children. This is quite a different approach from the one Alcoriza takes in *Mecánica nacional*. Alcoriza abjects García's maternal traits, relating Granny's corpse to death and putrefaction. In contrast, Sistach makes an extraordinary effort to separate García's tears of maternal love from abjection. This effort to separate the mother figure

from abjection is one of the most important contributions that third-wave filmmakers have made.

Conclusion

This chapter reaches three conclusions. First, it is clear that third-wave filmmakers see classical melodramas as a repository of emotions that can be used as a reference point for representing Mexico. By situating their work in relation to classical melodramas, these filmmakers pursue a double goal: on the one hand, taking part in a cultural context in which classical Mexican films are used to understand and cope with the present, and on the other, inscribing their gender-specific views in the history of Mexican film. An example of these gender-specific views is Sistach's reassessment of the Mexican icon of motherhood, Sara García, in *Los pasos de Ana*. Other examples are Novaro's critique of classical idealization in *Danzón* and Rotberg's revision of the role of religion in defining mother's identities in *Angel de fuego*. Besides presenting third-wave filmmakers' views of classical melodramas, this chapter also includes my own analysis of the problems for women that classical films entail.

My second conclusion is that classical films such as *Doña Bárbara* discourage individuation in mothers; they recommend that women not acquire a sense of themselves as individual entities in a psychological sense. *Doña Bárbara* is presented as a negative example of the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood because she sets boundaries (a fence) to her psychic space. One of the tasks for third-wave filmmakers is to create women with the physical and psychic space in which they can individuate.

My third conclusion is that classical narratives use narcissistic idealization to encourage women to follow classical notions of femininity. With the term Ideal of

Virgin-Motherhood, I have summarized the classical outlook on mediation, self-effacement, sacrifice, and sexual purity as the only proper roles for women. The Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is sustained aesthetically by associating it with light. *María Candelaria* creates, or perhaps reflects, a Mexican ideal of femininity by portraying a pattern of behavior for women and “illuminating” it (in Silverman’s terms, by idealizing that pattern of behavior). The promise of “illumination” makes the pain of acting like the Virgin seem minimal compared to the considerable reward: a secure place in society. Because of the promises inherent in the Ideal and because of its beauty, classical ideals are hard to resist. Even Novaro admits, “I was fascinated by the beautiful women of Mexican films since childhood” (Arredondo: 2001, 130). At the same time, the light is a manifestation of what Silverman calls narcissistic idealization. The idealization that characterizes the Virgin is based on its un-approachability, on the fact that no human woman can hope to achieve it. Narcissistic idealization therefore inevitably leads to feelings of frustration and self-hate. *María Candelaria*’s tragic end dramatizes the fact that a classical idealized state is incompatible with life. Silverman maintains that idealization is an unavoidable phenomenon because our relation with images requires it. If that is the case, what kind of idealization can contemporary filmmakers create that can make up for the ideality *María Candelaria* portrayed?

Chapter 3 looks at the way in which third-wave filmmakers approach the problems outlined in chapter 2, namely, the need to individuate and the need to look for a type of idealization that allows for mothers’ self-love.

⁷⁸ Following Marina Warner, I am referring to the narrative around the Virgin as a myth. Warner points out that the narratives around Mary are more than just a collection of stories because they sustain a myth that reflects the culture. She says: "A myth of such dimension is not simply a story, or a collection of stories, but a magic mirror like the Lady of Shalott's, reflecting a people and the beliefs they produce, recount, hold" (xxiii).

⁷⁹ Scholarly opinions about the dates for the classical period of Mexican cinema differ. For the purpose of the stereotypes of women, I consider classical the decade of 1940-1950. I use as my reference Joanne Hershfield's *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940-1950*, which takes the decade of the 1940s as the years in which a cohesive way of representing women emerges. In my view, the classical model only undergoes small transformations up until 1972.

⁸⁰ Ramírez-Berg proposes a typology that distinguishes between virgin/ Virgin/ whore/ wife/ mother (1992 23-24).

⁸¹ This assumption is not exclusively Mexican; in *From Reverence to Rape*, speaking about U.S. films, Molly Haskell points out the double bind: "The persistent irony is that [a woman] is dependent for her well-being and 'fulfillment' on institutions—marriage, motherhood—that by translating the word 'woman' into 'wife' and 'mother,' end her independent identity" (159-160).

⁸² See Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld, 1976). See also Kristeva's "Motherhood According to Gionvanni Bellini," published as part of *Desire in Language* (1975), and "Stabat Mater," written in 1976 and later included in *Tales of Love* (1987).

⁸³ Written in 1947 and first published in Spanish in 1950 and in English in 1961, *The Labyrinth* had one revision (1981 in Spanish and 1985 in English). In the year 2000 there was a commemorative edition and an international colloquium to celebrate the 50th year of its publication. Paz was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1990.

⁸⁴ Most importantly Norma Alarcón in "Chicana's Feminist literature: A Re-Vision through Malintzin; or , Malintzin: Putting the Flesh Back on the Object" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown: Persephone, 1981), 182-90. Alarcón also wrote against Paz's interpretation of Malintzin's role as a traitor in "Tradutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" in the special issue of *Cultural Critique, The Constitution of Gender and Modes of Social Division*, ed. Donna Przybylowicz vol 13, (Fall 1989) 57-87. In Dever 213. Also Cherríe Moraga's "From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, Ed. Teresa de Lauretis, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁸⁵ In 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," ' Mulvey discusses the possibility of having a female spectator who identifies with a male hero.

⁸⁶ Some feminists left Freud's association of women and narcissism unquestioned. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey contends that women cannot have external objects, whether inside or outside the screen. To support her argument, Mulvey uses Freud's, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes"(1915) in which Freud proposes that there is an auto-erotic stage, which consists of "oneself looking at a sexual organ," that leads to another stage "oneself looking at an extraneous object (also called active scopophilia)" (1975: 131). According to Mulvey's reading of Freud, the classical psychoanalyst relates this auto-eroticism to narcissism: "The preliminary stage of the scopophilic instinct, in which the subject's own body is the object of scopophilia, must be classed under narcissism, and that we must describe it as a narcissistic formation" (1975: 132). Freud sees narcissism as an obstacle in the development of the active scopophilic instinct. "The active scopophilic instinct develops from this, by leaving narcissism behind" (1975: 131). For Mulvey, the person associated with narcissism has no object relations; the narcissist has only a relation of identification with his or her image. Mulvey's association of women with narcissism was developed later by Mary Ann Doane and adapted to the specific context of watching films. Doane considers that men and women identify differently with the images projected in the screen. Following Freud's idea that daughters have difficulty in separating from their mothers (a sign that they do not grow outside the Oedipus complex), Doane maintains that women, who for the most part are described by Freud as narcissistic, cannot keep a distance from the screen. Doane sees the female spectator as a consumer who cannot separate herself from the images projected in the screen.

⁸⁷ Klein proposes instead that from the very beginning, women (and men) have the mother's breasts as an object of desire.

⁸⁸ Some analysts question Freud's postulate that women do not go beyond a narcissistic stage. In "Love, Guilt and Reparation," for instance, Melanie Klein contends that a narcissistic stage of development does not exist, since babies, independent of their gender, have the breast as an object (88). However, as *Señora tentación* shows, social values of the classical period encourage women to mimic what Freud calls narcissism.

⁸⁹ In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz describes the Virgin as someone who "consoles, dries tears and calms passions" (1961, 85).

⁹⁰ Some Chicana artists have appropriated the cult of Guadalupe for their own purposes and discuss notions of mothering through the image of Guadalupe. In this regard, see "El desorden, Nationalism and Chicana/o Aesthetics," by Laura Elisa Pérez.

⁹¹ Paz's discussion of the Virgin of Guadalupe, conducted from a Jungian perspective, does not include a historical development of the symbol. To call attention to Paz's lack of historical perspective, in a chapter entitled "Timeless Paradox: Mother and Whore," Hershfield, following Patrice Petro's call to study the "historical nature of representation," looks at the way in which the Virgin de Guadalupe is important for a sociologically defined majority of Mexicans (1996 12).

⁹² Paz's discussion of the Virgin of Guadalupe, done from a Jungian perspective, does not include a historical development of the symbol. To call attention to Paz's lack of historical perspective, in a chapter entitled "Timeless Paradox: Mother and Whore," Hershfield, following Patrice Petro's call to study the "historical nature of representation," looks at the way in which the Virgin de Guadalupe is important for a sociologically defined majority of Mexicans (1996 12).

⁹³ There are many other studies on Mary, although in them the gender-specific perspective is not so central. Important among them is Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's *The Myth of the Goddess*. In a chapter of their book, "Mary: the Return of the Goddess," these scholars use a Jungian approach and the notion of archetypes to defend the idea that the construct of the Virgin Mary is a latter development of the Paleolithic Mother Goddess (547-608). For them, the cult of the Goddess introduces the notion of the feminine into the sacred.

⁹⁴ Kristeva makes the same point, although her comment creates more of an impact because she lists the references one after the other. Mary appears five times in marginal references that are no longer than three lines.

⁹⁵ Warner believes that psychoanalytic approaches have oversimplified the role of the Virgin (xxiv).

⁹⁶ In this regard, it is interesting to note that Catholic representations of the Virgin when pregnant are rare if not non-existent. This absence cannot be easily explained, as is not in contradiction with her immaculate conception.

⁹⁷ The same idea can be inferred by reading Warner's study. According to her account, men conduct highly violent, emotional discussions outside the orthodoxy about different aspects of Mary.

⁹⁸ Kristeva's 1970's account of individuation has been attacked, and I believe with reason, by scholars. However, Michele Montrelay has a position similar to Kristeva in relation to mothers and daughters; she argues that females have to become the first object of desire (the mother).

⁹⁹ Other scholars, such as Judith Huggins Balfe, who analyze the representations of the Virgin as a Queen in the eleventh to twelfth centuries prove the same point.

¹⁰⁰ Emilio Fernández, the director of *María Candelaria*, takes the existing cult of the Virgen de la Candelaria as a reference but substantially modifies it. In Mexico, the cult of la Virgen de la Candelaria is a cult of the Virgin as mother of Jesus, which is why she is represented with a baby in her right hand and a candle in the left. The festivity of la Virgen de la Candelaria reenacts the presentation of Jesus to the temple, for which reason the baby plays an important role. Put differently, there is no celebration of la Virgen de la Candelaria without baby Jesus. Yet Fernández alludes to a specific Mexican ritual (the blessing of baby Jesus and animals is portrayed in the film) but significantly excludes Jesus from the ritual (*María Candelaria* is a bride, not a mother).

¹⁰¹ The Virgin of Candelaria is a holiday celebrated all over Mexico on February 2. The holiday makes a reference to the biblical passage in which Mary takes Jesus to the temple to be blessed. One of the first images that we have reference to is on the island of Tenerife, pre-dating the Castillian conquest of the island. The first celebration in honor of this Virgin (February 2, 1497) coincided with the Castillian expansion and colonization of the Americas. The dark-skinned Virgin of Tenerife carried baby Jesus in one hand and a candle on the other, and for that reason she was called the Virgin of the candle. In Mexico, the celebration of the Virgin of Candelaria is very important, in part because of the dark color of the Virgin and the pre-Hispanic importance of candles. Candles are still today one of the most important presents that are offered in celebrations marking rites such as marriages. Yet, Mexico added a different tone for the celebration of the Virgin of Candelaria. In many cities and villages all over Mexico, indigenous campesinos bring their images of baby Jesus to be blessed at temples dedicated to the Virgin of Candelaria and also their animals (as the scene in *Maria Candelaria* shows). The blessing of the animals gained such importance that in many places the festivity includes fairs to display the animals. Xochimilco, a city located 30 kilometers outside Mexico City, has an important celebration of Niñoapan, which is an extension of the celebration of the Virgin of the Candelaria. Each year, this image of baby Jesus stays in the care of a family, referred to as mayordomos. As in many other indigenous celebrations, the mayordomos, who volunteer for the job, organize and pay for several days of festivities, including drink and food for the whole community (there is a long reference to this practice in the documentary *Xochimilco* (Eduardo Maldonado, 1987).

¹⁰² Fernández's can be seen in reference to the church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, built in Xaltocan, a neighborhood of Xochimilco, in 1751. Coincidentally, this church was first dedicated to baby Jesus (a symbol closely associated in Mexico with the Virgin of Candelaria), then to the Virgin of Candelaria, and afterwards to La Virgen de los Dolores (Our Lady of Sorrows).

¹⁰³ When looking at the film in relation to the church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, which was first dedicated to the Virgen de la Candelaria and then to the Virgen de los Dolores, the connection that Fernández established in this scene between both Virgins was already part of the folklore of Xochimilco.

¹⁰⁴ From the sixteenth century on, popular fervor and the Vatican battled over the Mater Dolorosa or Lady of Sorrows. In 1506, the Vatican refused to accept the cult of the Lady of Sorrows. Popular fervor was very strong, most importantly among the Servites, a monastic order that claimed that the Virgin had revealed her Seven Sorrows to their seven founder saints in a vision in the oratory near Florence. In the seventeenth century, Pope Paul V allowed the cult to develop. The sorrows of the Virgin were established at seven: "the prophecy of Simeon, the flight into Egypt, the loss of Jesus in the temple, the meeting with Jesus on the road to Calvary, the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and the Entombment." The pain of the Virgin has since then been represented by a breast pierced by seven swords (Warner 218).

¹⁰⁵ The association of the protagonist with light is reinforced by the protagonist's name; a Spanish audience would know that the name María Candelaria refers to a local Virgin whose literal name is a candle, a *candela*, a stick of light.

¹⁰⁶ The end of the meeting between María Candelaria and the Virgin already suggests differences between mediation and agency; María Candelaria can request things, but she cannot become an agent in making them happen. This difference is an essential component of the ideal that can be better understood by comparing María Candelaria to Rosaura (María Felix) in Fernández's *Río Escondido*. In *Mexican Cinema*, Joanne Hershfield points out that María Candelaria and Rosaura are aligned with the figure of the Virgin Mary (70) and that Rosaura stands in for the Virgin of Guadalupe (62). The scenes that Hershfield chooses are convincing in demonstrating that Rosaura is framed to bring out the similarities with the Virgin Mary. There is, however, a fundamental difference: Rosaura does not act Virgin-like. María Felix, the star famous for her roles as a "man-eater," plays a Virgin closer to the ideals of Liberation Theology than to those of the conservative Catholic Church. Hershfield describes Rosaura's deeds by saying that: "According to the narrative of *Río Escondido*, Rosaura's short stay at Río Escondido destroys the oppressive, feudal Mexican hacienda system and restores the "natural" balance between the Indians, the nation, and the Church" (71). Rosaura is a real agent, unlike María Candelaria, who obediently waits for her time to be helped. As Anne Baring and Jules Cashford put it, the character of the Virgin "is a model of loving obedience to something higher than herself" (550).

¹⁰⁷ A painter had asked Lorenzo Rafael if he could paint María Candelaria's portrait. Lorenzo Rafael's initial refusal changed to agreement once he was in jail and had more time to talk with the painter, who had argued his case. A very shy María Candelaria went

to the painter's studio, but finding out that she was to be painted naked she ran away; for that reason, the painter had to ask another woman to pose in her place. When people from María Candelaria's community saw the finished portrait, they mistakenly assumed that she had posed naked. After a long persecution scene, the outraged campesinos stoned María Candelaria to death below Lorenzo Rafael's jail cell.

¹⁰⁸ Warner provides a detailed explanation of the discussions around Mary's Immaculate Conception and Assumption for several centuries (250-254).

¹⁰⁹ Silverman separates herself from Doane and Mulvey in regard to her view of the relation between women and their images. Silverman refuses to situate the "feminine" domain in a pre-symbolic space from which woman never fully emerges or to which she easily regresses from the symbolic order. Silverman situates femininity in the social and in acts such as wearing red high-heel shoes (47)

¹¹⁰ Ayala Blanco considers Gavaldón's *Una familia de tantas* representative of the family melodrama. For him, *Una familia* is worth studying from a socio-historical perspective, although he considers this melodrama naïve and bourgeois (1993 43). In a historical discussion of the Virgin as a model, *Cuando los hijos se van* should be discussed first, because it was produced in 1941, before *María Candelaria* (1943). I have decided, however, to discuss it last, because it is a model that was repeated for thirty years and is thus also representative of the 1950s and 1960s.

¹¹¹ Ayala Blanco gives a detailed analysis of the film's lack of historicity with regard to the family and the challenges posed by 1940s modernity (1993 42-53). Julianne Burton examines *Una familia de tantas* as an example of paternal melodrama and does a gender analysis of the father, Don Ramiro (Fernando Soler) and of the actor's star persona ("Mexican Melodramas of Patriarchy: Specificity of a Transcultural Form," *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 213-219).

¹¹² Warner, however, calls our attention to the fact that the emphasis on the feminine virtues establishes a double standard; she writes: "The woman in the home can be seen as the keeper of her husband's conscience, the vicarious Christian who is humble and obedient—and chaste—enough for two" (188).

¹¹³ "Mexican Melodramas of Patriarchy" (227-8).

¹¹⁴ Ramírez-Berg discusses *Cuando los hijos se van* as an example representative of Mexican ideology of the 1940s. He says: "films of any Mexican genre exhibit similar ideological conflicts and tensions (albeit in different narrative proportions) and that the project of the popular Mexican cinema is to attempt to resolve them" (21). By doing so,

Ramírez-Berg sees García's melodramas not as atypical, as Ayala Blanco portrays them, but rather as the norm.

¹¹⁵ Ayala Blanco ridicules Sara García's maternal melodramas; for him, "Sara García's glorious masochism . . . [is] representative of 'little white heads' and of Mother's day, the nation's Oedipus complex day, and for those reasons the film is not the best example of the family melodrama" (1993 43). ("El masoquismo glorioso de Sara García . . . emblema de las "cabecitas blancas" y del 10 de mayo, día del complejo de Edipo nacional, no es una culminación genérica").

¹¹⁶ Although Warner sets the starting date of Catholic domestic idealism in the fifteenth century, she also mentions that such idealism is prevalent in the late twentieth century.

¹¹⁷ The lyrics of the song in Spanish are: "Por esos siete puñales que tiene clavados la Virgen María, María madre del redentor. Madre, por un beso tuyo diera yo la vida. Madre, no hay otra alegría. Quien pudiera como entonces, arrullado entre tus brazos. Madre, sólo un beso tuyo es la única ilusión. Madre, diera yo mi vida por tenerte cerca de mi corazón."

¹¹⁸ For a reference to the Stabat Mater, see a reference in my analysis of María Candelaria in the church.

¹¹⁹ "Me lo dice la voz de mis rosales, la voz de Raimundo entre las ramas."

¹²⁰ In the chapter on "Faith and Knowledge" in *Acts of Religion*, Derrida understands the dissemination of Catholic culture, what he terms Latinity, in much the same way. For him, religion would not be what it is today if it were not for the media. Derrida writes: "Religion today allies itself with tele-technoscience, to which it reacts with all its forces. It is, *on the one hand*, globalization; it produces, weds, exploits the capital and knowledge of tele-mediatization"(82).

¹²¹ "A lo que Sara logró dar vida en esa cinta fue a la personificación de las madres mexicanas de esa época, la cuál le ganó un lugar inamovible en la sensibilidad popular. Era una madre inocente, tierna, capaz de deshacerse en uno de los llantos más convincentes del cine de entonces" 40.

¹²² García's father, Isidoro García Ruíz, died in 1904, and her mother, Felipa Hidalgo Rodríguez, the next year (Fernando Muñoz, "Sara García," *Clío*, 1998, 12-14). Teresa Carvajal sees García as an orphan whose only home were the nuns. "Huérfana desde temprana edad, Sara García tuvo en el colegio de La Paz Vizcaínas su único hogar" (36). ("Vizcaínas," *Somos Uno*, vol 191, January 2000, 36-42).

¹²³ This information comes from Julia Tuñon (179), although other critics such as Julianne Burton also make reference to the extraction.

¹²⁴ She played other roles, such as a cabaretera, although she was not famous for those.

¹²⁵ *Diccionario Porrúa*, D-K, México City: 6th edition, 1995, p. 1069. See also more information about Alducín in *Revista de Revistas*, May 8th, 1987, p. 56.

¹²⁶ Eugenia Meyer, Alba Fulgeira, and Ximena Sepúlveda "Sara García," *Cuadernos de la Cineteca Nacional: Testimonios para la historia del cine mexicano*, 8 vol (Mexico City; Dirección de Cinematografía de la Secretaría de Gobernación, 1976, 2:11-26 also in Mora 216). García says that "A partir de 1936, casi desde el estreno de la cinta *Malditas sean las mujeres*, me empezaron a llamar 'la madre del cine nacional'." (15-16).

¹²⁷ García played other roles, such as bad woman and rumbera, although she was not as famous for those roles (Muñoz, 56).

¹²⁸ Mauricio Peña maintains that García was cast in her role of good mother and was obliged to be the "oficial mother" of the melodramas and comedies of the 1950s. "No pudo separarse de la obligación de ser la 'mamá oficial' de las comedias y melodramas que abundaron en el cine mexicano de los años 50" ("Sara García," *Somos Uno*, México City, 2000, 53).

¹²⁹ For a more general study of *Mecánica nacional*, see David Foster's *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* (57-66) and Carl Mora's *Mexican Cinema* (121).

¹³⁰ Silverman coins the term "cultural screen" based on Lacan's notion of the gaze. Following Lacan's seminar XI, "Of the gaze as petit object A," Silverman understands the gaze as a screen, as a place where we project things, and not as a mirror that simply reflects things. For a discussion of film studies' interpretation of Lacan's gaze, see Joan Copjec, *The Ortopsy Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan* Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹³¹ See Silverman's section for more about the importance of bodily postures.

¹³² In *Plotting Women* (1989) Jean Franco calls this kind of marriage, which she finds typical of Mexican melodramas of the 1940s, an Oedipal marriage. According to Franco, female characters go from the arms of a protective father to those of an equally protective husband.

¹³³ *Doña Bárbara* takes place in Venezuela.

¹³⁴ *Doña Bárbara* is based on the homonymous novel written by Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos in 1929.

¹³⁵ Since Doña Bárbara's open desire is so obvious in this scene, I do not agree with López's emphasis on Felix's lack of desire. López says that María Felix "could not embody female desire, for she was an ambivalent icon, as unknowable, cold and pitiless as the mother figure was full of abnegation and tears" (156). López's comment, however, could be read to refer to the audience's desire for Felix. It is true that Felix does not come across as a sex symbol; however, the fact that there are more books about Felix than about any other Mexican star and also that Felix was the best-paid actress at the time proves that Felix attracted people, an attraction that in my view was many times sexual.

¹³⁶ See *Powers of Horror* (1980).

¹³⁷ Cortés said: "In fact, if you sit down and watch movies like *Principio y fin* (*Beginning and End*) or *El callejón de los milagros* (*Midaq Alley*) they are profoundly melodramatic—well, in the case of *El callejón de los milagros*, there are also tragicomic elements. Even in the comedies of Cantinflas, Tin-Tán, or La India María, there is always a melodramatic moment and many times, the comedy is sustained by the melodrama. When all is said and done, melodrama is what dominates the biggest box office hits like *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*). *Los olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*) is also an excellent melodrama, and then there's the work of Ripstein." (97).

¹³⁸ Comparing the melodramas of the 'Old' Mexican cinema to contemporary soap operas Cortés said: "The melodramas of the Golden Age relied on the sensitivity of many professionals. The cinematographers, screenwriters, directors, and actors did sensitive work. Even though the actors lacked any significant method, they were at the service of a director" (97).

¹³⁹ Cortés said: "The language of melodrama must be renewed and made richer, because in Mexico it is a genre that has been cheapened" (I 99).

¹⁴⁰ "My objective as a filmmaker, besides raising consciousness, is to move people emotionally" (Arredondo 2001: 97).

¹⁴¹ Cortés said: "I am also struck by the fact that not only women, but children as well, stay up till one in the morning to watch soap operas. They're "hooked"—they want to know what's going to happen. That is what I, as a writer, want to achieve: to be able to maintain a narrative that leaves you with that itch, that leaves you wondering what's going to happen, even though you don't care. When I go to see my parents and they're watching a soap opera, I get hooked, even though it might be dreadful, even though the set is horrible, even though you don't believe the actors at all, even though you are hearing the prompter the whole time. That's why soap operas sell. I had the same feeling of wanting to know what was going to happen—whether you're interested or not—when I first read *El viudo Román*" (Arredondo 2001: 98).

¹⁴² Sistach prefers the critical melodramas of Gavaldón, such as *Una familia de tantas* (*Your Ordinary Family*, 1948), because they critique the values of the bourgeoisie family in the 1940s. In her interview with Millán, Sistach situates her work as a continuation of Gavaldón's social interest, by saying that in *Conozco a las tres* (1983), she focuses on a 1980s middle-class social change: the appearance of a considerable number of families in which single mothers are the head of their household.

¹⁴³ “El cine mexicano que más me gusta, que puede ser el de Gavaldón o de Galindo, sobre todo el del primero, retrata a las mujeres de dos maneras, o como la madre abnegada o como la prostituta.” (“The Mexican films that I like, such as the films of Gavaldón or Galindo, especially the first, portray women in two ways, either as abnegated mothers or as prostitutes.”) (Millán 1999; 160).

¹⁴⁴ Millán: “*Conozco a las tres*, que es como una contestación a *Una familia de tantas*” (142).

¹⁴⁵ Millán, “Otro tipo de mujer que existe pero de la cual no había ninguna referencia cinematográfica” (142). Sistach told Millán that she wanted to bring to the screen women “who are not within the institution of the family and who obviously are not prostitutes” (“que no están dentro de la institución familiar y que obviamente no son prostitutas”) (Millán 1999; 160).

¹⁴⁶ For further details, see my article “By Popular Demand: I Will See *Danzón* until I Can't Stand It Any More,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 232, 183-196. 1999

¹⁴⁷ “El hombre manda y la mujer le sigue.”

¹⁴⁸ “Con las penitencias que me puso me siento más limpia. Yo creo que ahora sí mi niño va a salir bonito.”

¹⁴⁹ Refugio: “Dios me habló de ti, me dijo que tu pecado fue muy grande.” Alma: “Usted me dijo que con obediencia y fe eso se perdonaba.”

¹⁵⁰ Lleva a tu hijo al monte y ofrécelo en sacrificio. Mátalo con tus propias manos.

¹⁵¹ Voice in the tape recorder: “No lo hagas Abraham, has demostrado que tienes temor de Dios pues no te negaste a matar a tu hijo. Sacrifica al cordero que con eso el se conforma”.

¹⁵² “¿Por qué Dios le pidió a Abraham que matara a su hijo?”

¹⁵³ “Nada más lo estaba probando”.

¹⁵⁴ “Sí, pero lo iba a matar.”

¹⁵⁵ “Entonces le quería más que a su hijo.”

¹⁵⁶ In “Ángel Exterminador” Perez Turrent describes the change as follows: “El aprendizaje se inicia con el incesto, un incesto de amor, querido, aceptado, asumido y que desemboca no en la obtención de la sabiduría . . . sino en la pérdida de la inocencia y el nacimiento de la ira.” (“[Alma’s] learning experience begins with incest, an incest of love, wanted, accepted, assumed, and which leads not to the acquisition of knowledge . . . but to the loss of innocence and the birth of anger.”) (Pérez Turrent 1993).

¹⁵⁷ *Lola* was released in November 1989 at Mexico City’s Muestra Internacional de Cine (XXII International Film Festival in Mexico City), a showcase of international films that includes the best Mexican films.

¹⁵⁸ Novaro commented that the reactions to such proposals were varied, with conservative sectors and some feminist opposing such views. “A certain sector of feminist critique disagrees with the way *Lola* ends and thinks it should be different. It seems strange to me that this feminist criticism is in agreement with a segment of the male audience that is bothered when Lola starts to cry and can’t control herself. For a man, it would have been much easier to watch a movie in which the woman is abandoned but lifts herself up, works, and deals with things. If the woman lifts herself up he bears no responsibility nor does he have to consider certain issues. However, when you let that woman be destroyed by some guy’s selfishness, then the men get awfully irritated” (Arredondo 2001: 110).

¹⁵⁹ See my interview.

¹⁶⁰ Ramírez Berg 17, the comment comes from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans, Myra Bergman Ramos, pp. 75-81. Ramírez Berg, who considers the film representative of the “classic transparent text” (17) has an excellent gender and socio-historical analysis of the film, pp. 17-28.

Chapter 3: 1980s and 1990s Films by Third-Wave Women Filmmakers

This chapter studies the representation of mothers in contemporary films made by third-wave filmmakers between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. The analysis includes films done as graduating theses from film schools during the early 1980s and commercial films produced during the first part of Salinas' six years of office (1989-1994). Among all the films produced during this period by women filmmakers, I concentrate on those that propose a reconsideration of motherhood and female identity: Novaro's *Danzón* (1991) and *Lola* (1989), Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz* (1984) and *Angel de fuego* (1991), and Cortés shorts and *El secreto de Romelia* (1989).

Chapter Three is a continuation of Chapter Two. In Chapter Two I argue that classical films portray an idealization of motherhood that creates two problems for women spectators: discouragement of individuation and encouragement of Virgin-like qualities which are impossible to attain, leading to self-hate. The present chapter examines the ways in which third-wave filmmakers have addressed these two problems. The first section, "Women and Mothers Physical and Psychic Space," considers the individuation of young women and mothers in contemporary narratives. The second section, "Depressed Mothers Idealized-at-a-Distance," examines the way in which third-wave films use a type of idealization that is conducive to self-love.

The first section examines the life of women and mothers as it is represented in films by third-wave Mexican women filmmakers. Films that portray female characters who are

not mothers are also included in the study because the creation of a mother's psyche is formed early on, before she has children. This section begins by studying the representation of women's spaces in Cortés' short films, *Las Buenromero* (1979), *Un frágil retorno* (1980), *Hotel Villa Goerne* (1981), and *El lugar del corazón* (1984). This section also includes an analysis of the link between physical and psychic space in Novaro's *Una isla rodeada de agua* (1985). Finally, this section examines the way in which the space separating daughters from their mothers is represented in Cortés' *El secreto de Romelia* (1989).

The second part of this chapter addresses the idealization of mothers. It attempts to answer such questions as: How do third-wave filmmakers approach the idealization of mothers? Is there a way to idealize mothers that is not narcissistic and does not produce self-hate? In order to understand the way in which third-wave filmmakers counter the downside of narcissistic idealization, it is necessary to reflect on another issue: the abjection of mothers in society. The abjection of mothers cannot be fully appreciated when watching classical films, because these narratives cover up much of mothers' social abjection. The ideal of Virgin-Motherhood purposely illuminates Motherhood, represented by the Virgin, but not mothers, which are necessarily imperfect copies of the Virgin.

Contemporary films link motherhood to abjection. Third-wave filmic narratives portray mothers as colonized subjects, as citizens abandoned by the law and society in general. Thus, when contrasting classical and contemporary images, one of the most outstanding differences is that while classical mothers, such as Sara García, appear happily mothering, contemporary mothers look angry and depressed. In contemporary

films, mothers' depression is used to call attention to the position of mothers in society; mothers are depressed because of the ways in which society treats them as foreigners, as others, as people who do not belong, as invisible citizens, as colonized subjects.

In films by third-wave filmmakers, mothers are presented as abject subjects, but at the same time are idealized. Contemporary films use "light" (idealization) to bring mothers' social abjection to the forefront in order to evoke love and empathy for them. However, third-wave filmmakers do not resort to narcissistic idealization. Silverman created the term "idealization-at-a-distance" to refer to a type of idealization that stays at a distance from Ideals; that is, one that accepts that the desire to match an Ideal exists but understands that such a desire cannot be fulfilled. Accepting the desire for an Ideal while realizing the impossibility of achieving it has important consequences. It allows characters to be "illuminated" despite their flaws, as a gift of compassion and respect from the audience. In the specific case of mothers in third-wave films, idealization-at-a-distance allows filmmakers to illuminate mothers, to present them with love, while avoiding the perils of narcissistic idealization. Novaro's *Lola*, for instance, portrays the depressed mother as lovable despite her obvious imperfections. Overall, third-wave films portray with love the difficult task of being mothers in a society where mothers are colonized subjects.

Women and Mothers' Physical and Psychic Space

The term "psychic space" has been used in psychoanalysis in relation to depression, and it is first used by Julia Kristeva in *Sense and Nonsense of the Revolt* (1996). Kristeva associates depression with flattened space in which drives cannot be articulated into symbols, and affects cannot be expressed through words. The opposite of this flattened

space, is psychic space—a set of conditions that allows affects to be expressed in words and drives to be articulated as symbols (Oliver 2006: 54). In this thesis, the concept of psychic space is applied to the analysis of female characters and is used to illustrate these characters' relation to their social environment.

In “Psychic Space and Social Melancholy”, Oliver expands Kristeva’s notion of psychic space to include social aspects. Oliver believes that the society in which women currently live despises femininity and that such a society plays an important role in women’s depression. “In so far as the girl is expected to identify with her mother, particularly with her mother’s function as mother, the girl cannot leave the abject maternal body behind but drags this abjection with her like a festering wound at the core of her psyche” (Oliver 2002: 50). In Oliver’s proposed psycho-social arena, social support takes the place of Kristeva’s primary father. For Oliver, psychic space is the space in which, with positive social support that values women’s affects and experiences, women can articulate drives into symbols, affects into words. With appropriate social support, Oliver contends, mothers overcome their flattened space and create their own psychic space.

Kristeva and Oliver use the notion of space without emphasizing the space’s physical dimension. In my analysis of films, I give Oliver’s notion of psychic space a physical dimension; in this way, the physical space of films is representative of the mental space of the characters. I examine the way in which third-wave films “open up” physical spaces only accessible to women and allow those spaces to contain the thoughts and emotions of women. These physical spaces, I contend, are visual manifestations of these women’s experiences.

Classical and third-wave films create different spaces for women. In classical models of femininity, illustrated by the model of the Virgin Mary, women occupy a transitional space, a space in which a father (God) and children (Catholics) connect. In classical melodramas, mothers' subjectivities are constructed in relational terms; mothers inhabit transitional spaces that are not their own. As an example, I analyzed the case of Doña Bárbara, who, unlike "good mothers", literally creates a space for herself by putting up a fence to demarcate her physical and mental territory. In the final scenes of *Doña Bárbara*, the fence that separates her territory from that of the patriarch, Santos Luzardo, is taken down. The vanishing of the fence marks the flattening (disappearance) of Doña Bárbara's psychic space, which the film assumes is a return to normative femininity. Third-wave films go in the opposite direction; they create physical and psychic space for their mothers, giving them a space of their own, demarcated by boundaries.

This section examines the development of psychic space in third-wave films. The analysis begins with Cortés shorts, in which space is literally "opened up" by killing the male characters. These spaces, now emptied of men, become psychic spaces, places where women can put their affects into words. These new physical-mental spaces allow a new subjectivity or sense of self to emerge. The new psychic space is illustrated by *Una isla rodeada de agua* (1984), a film in which the protagonist's subjectivity is represented metaphorically as an island, a space with borders. In third-wave films, women no longer occupy transitional spaces; they demonstrate independent identities. *Una isla rodeada de agua* uses formal strategies, such as framing and color, to represent the subject's unique point of view, and *Angel de Fuego* shows a mother determined to have her child. Third-wave films also create psychic space for women by showing the space that separates

daughters from their mothers. *El secreto de Romelia*, for instance, shows that mothers and daughters have very little in common, including their notions of what motherhood is. In this way, third-wave films create a space, in psychological and physical terms, where mothers are not seen in their relational capacity and where they can experience a positive image of themselves.

Cortés' Short and Medium Films: Killing Male Characters

From her early work in film school to her feature-length films, Busi Cortés has looked for ways to give female characters psychic space. In an interview in *Palabra de Mujer*, Cortés reflects on the fact that, in all of her shorts and medium films—*Las Buenromero* (1979), *Un frágil retorno* (1980), *Hotel Villa Goerne* (1981), and *El lugar del corazón* (1984)—men die.¹⁶¹

Las Buenromero (The Buenromero Sisters, 1979-80) was a class exercise at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC). A still shot of the three Buenromero sisters in the end credits shows them as if they were three nineteenth-century melancholic sisters on a sofa, their heads laid softly on each other's shoulders and their eyes lost in space. They are clearly more active than that. They live in a house in an old provincial Mexican town, away from the elements of the outside world. Inside the house, they have designed their own entertainment: they kill their lovers in homage to their father, who died thirteen years before (Did they also kill him?). In an interview, Cortés pointed out that the Buenromero sisters kill men who symbolically represent power in different areas of society. Josefina kills a painter, who represents the arts; Matilde kills a sexton, who represents the power of the Church; Refugio kills a political candidate, who represents the power of politicians. It is as if, metaphorically, the death of the father and the killing

of male characters opens up a space for these plotting sisters to be in control. By killing their lovers, the three Buenromero sisters create a physical space, the house, where they can have their own psychic space, their games.

A man is also killed in Cortés *Un fragil retorno* (A Fragile Return, 1980). Filmed while she was still a student at the CCC, this short associates the physical space of an office with psychic space. The short takes place at Luis' office, where his wife Elia helps with secretarial tasks. *Un fragil retorno* begins as Elia is preparing a candlelight dinner for Luis, who is returning from a trip. She prepares the dinner at the office instead of their home because Luis is in the habit of coming back to his office first. The husband's office symbolizes Luis' priorities and also the ways in which women are used as workers but not given credit for the work they do; Elia organizes the office, does the errands, and provides new ideas, but all the credit goes to Luis.¹⁶²

When Elia, who suffers from heart problems, is told by her sister Silvia that Luis has died in an airplane crash, her heart survives the shock. She and Silvia decide to enjoy the dinner that Elia had prepared for Luis. With Luis' death, the physical space of the office becomes vacant. This vacant space becomes Elia's psychic space; she decides to have dinner with Silvia and make plans for the future. Now that Elia, who spent most of her time working for Luis, has more time, the two sisters can make their own plans. These plans represent a woman's psychic space because through them Elia puts affect into words. However, when Luis, who was actually not on the fatal flight, shows up, Elia's fragile heart gives out: she has a heart attack and dies. The mistaken announcement of Luis' death opens a space for Elia which his reappearance closes. With Luis' return, Elia's psychic space disappears, and she literally dies.

Another man dies in Cortés' *El lugar del corazón* (*The Heart's Place*, 1984). Cortés filmed this medium length feature film when she was a film teacher at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. In *El lugar del corazón*, a group of high-school girls, "kill off" their male history teacher. The friends take revenge on him because he ridicules them in class. The killing begins as a game: to get rid of the anger they feel at being ridiculed, the friends pretend to use witchcraft, sticking pins in a doll which represents their teacher. Through this game, however, the students get what they wish for: when they stick pins in the doll's legs, the teacher becomes an invalid. The film's title refers to the "voodoo" practice at the climax of the plot: when the students stick pins in the doll's heart, "the heart's place," the teacher dies.

In *El lugar del corazón* the high-school girls take possession of a symbolic space. Significantly, the teacher is a history teacher, so his death metaphorically means the death of a history made from a male perspective. At the end of the film, the three female students are left to tell the story and to make history; their history, it is understood, will articulate their drives with their own symbols. *El lugar del corazón* can be seen as a development of *Las Buenromero's* effort to take over symbolic spaces. Half innocently, half purposely, these students fight to re-appropriate the space from which to speak and make history. It is understood that as they grow up, these students will write a history of Mexico that includes the work and the presence of women.

In Cortés' *Hotel Villa Goerne* (1981), another man dies. Cortés made this medium-length film as her thesis for the CCC. *Hotel Villa Goerne* takes the process of de-colonizing the masculine social space into the arena of the arts. More specifically, Cortés'

thesis addresses the tendency among male artists to appropriate women's images and stories for their own art.

The Hotel Villa Goerne is presented as the physical and psychic space of a family of women—an adolescent girl, Fernanda, and her three aunts—who own it and will not allow a male writer to colonize their space. Writer Eligio arrives at the hotel with the intention of staying for an extended period to write stories. As Eligio lacks inspiration to write his own stories, he hopes that he can turn the personal stories of the women living in the hotel into stories that will win him a literary prize. However, the writer's plan fails; whenever Eligio asks questions, he gets vague and contradictory responses. *Hotel Villa Goerne* shows several close-ups of Eligio's trash basket full of paper; the basket tells the audience that he is not making much progress.

In contrast, the women at Hotel Villa Goerne are successful writers. The film is divided formally into sections, like a book; each section has a title that appears on the screen and is read by an off-screen female voice. The section titles announce the actions that follow. For example, after the spectator sees and hears "The Arrival", Eligio enters the hotel. Thus, the titles, redundantly written and spoken, are a strategy to emphasize the fact that women are the ones who write and control the narrative.

In *Hotel Villa Goerne* the physical space owned by these women is also their psychic space, a space in which women turn affect into words, into literature, into the story of a male writer who cannot write. Their story begins in the opening credits when one of the aunts reads the future in a deck of cards, foretelling the plot to come. *Hotel Villa Goerne* plays with two levels of information: on one level, the audience sees a writer who believes that he is in control of information, that he knows what is happening; on the

other level, the audience knows that he is being controlled by the women in the hotel, that they are using him to write their own narrative. For instance, in the episode “The Departure,” Fernanda tells the writer that he is going to leave. The writer answers that he has no intention of doing so, but by the end of the episode, he has left, confirming Fernanda’s statement. The audience is led to conclude that he is a toy in these women’s hands.

As in the other films Cortés created, in *Hotel Villa Goerne* the death of a man facilitates the creation of women’s psychic space. In this case, the writer is not literally killed, but the story that he writes, a symbol of his control, is. In the episode “The Departure,” Fernanda goes to Eligio’s room, steals his manuscript, and disposes of it. She goes to the park and makes paper swans out of the manuscript pages and quietly watches the swans float away. The scene has a mischievous, perverse tone, half playful, half malicious. After the audience sees Fernanda taking Eligio’s manuscript from his room, the camera cuts to a shot of the pond in the park. As the change from an indoor space to an unfamiliar outdoor space is very sudden, it is disconcerting, and so it is easy to miss that what is floating on the water are paper swans and not real swans. A third cut, a close-up of a paper swan juxtaposed against a real swan, makes it clear that Fernanda has created paper swans out of the manuscript. The real swan and the paper swans enjoy a tranquil dance, thus associating the opening up of psychic space with a ludic game. By its association with beauty and peacefulness, the de-colonization of female spaces is presented as enjoyable entertainment.

In Cortés’ shorts, all women have the ability to plot, not only the young and more open-minded ones, such as Elia, Silvia, and Fernanda. In fact, Cortés’ most daring

women, those who kill men and not just wish they were dead, are among the most traditional ones. For instance, *Las Buenromero* pays homage to a patriarch while at the same time destroying the basis of the symbolic order: the church, the political party, the arts.

Hotel Villa Goerne draws on some ideas already outlined in Cortés' previous shorts. As in *Las Buenromero*, in *Hotel Villa Goerne* the centrality of the male artist as the maker of meaning is challenged. The difference is that while in *Las Buenromero* the artist is killed, in *Hotel Villa Goerne* his work is destroyed and women take control of the artistic process. *Hotel Villa Goerne* also expands on an idea that appears in *El lugar del corazón*; in both films the "games" of women need to be taken seriously.

Hotel Villa Goerne is the culmination of Cortés' search for psychic space. She introduces the process of de-colonizing women's spaces gradually. She begins by getting rid of the obstacles; the death of men or the disappearance of their work—whether lovers (*Las Buenromero*), husbands (*Un frágil retorno*), history teachers (*El lugar del corazón*), or writers (*Hotel Villa Goerne*)—is related to creating a physical space. In a second step, Cortés has women "own" their physical spaces. In *Un frágil retorno*, for instance, Luis's emptied office (since he is considered dead) allows Elia and Silvia to make their own plans. A step further, in *Hotel Villa Goerne*, women create their own art in their physical/psychic space. Kristeva defines psychic space as the process by which affect is transformed into words; in *Hotel Villa Goerne*, Fernanda and her aunts transform their life (their affect) into literature (the film's narrative). Cortés' process of claiming psychic space for women takes place almost simultaneously with María Novaro's representation of women's subjectivity as a space with borders.

Women as Subject in *Una isla rodeada de agua*

In *Una isla rodeada de agua* (An Island Surrounded by Water, 1985), Novaro metaphorically refers to a woman's subjectivity as an island surrounded by water. This metaphor emphasizes that a woman's subjectivity has borders. Novaro thus breaks with classical melodramas in which a woman's subjectivity is conceived of as a transitional space that connects to other family members.

Novaro made *Una isla rodeada de agua* as her graduating project at the CUEC. In this film, Lucía, a guerrilla fighter, leaves her one-year-old daughter, Edith, in the care of her neighbor. Despite her neighbor's advice to "Think about Edith . . . Don't be unreasonable," Lucía paddles away to join the Lucio Cabañas front and is never seen again in the film. As a teenager, Edith receives a photograph of her mother and goes to search for her in the town where the photograph was taken and where her aunts still live. There she visits a psychic to get help with her search.

In Novaro's thesis project, paintings of islands appear several times. As Edith is about to enter the house of the psychic, the camera stops at the door, showing a painting of an island with palm trees. The metaphor of an island is especially prominent in Edith's fifteenth birthday celebration, when she goes to a photography studio to have her picture taken. The backdrop for the photograph is an island with luxurious palm trees surrounded by crashing waves. As she poses for the photograph, Edith aligns the upper part of her body with the island. This backdrop becomes the symbol in *Una isla rodeada de agua* through which female individuation is expressed. The painting represents Edith's identity; the perimeter surrounding the island represents the boundaries of her identity; her physical and psychic space ends where the water begins. In *Una isla rodeada de*

agua, boundless femininity is not idealized; Edith is encouraged to individuate, to associate her identity with a space that has clear limits. At the beginning of the film, Edith looks for her identity in connection with her mother; by the end of the film she accepts that she has a separate identity.

While going through Novaro's photographic archives, I came across several photographs related to the scene in the photography studio. Examining the photographs, I discovered that other members of the film crew, the majority of whom were film students from the CUEC, also posed in front of the island backdrop. Apparently, while shooting the film, both the director (Novaro) and the photographer (María Cristina Camus) wanted to be seen juxtaposed against the island.¹⁶³ If we read these pictures in relation to the film, we can conclude that Novaro and Camus view their identities as those of individuated women.

In *Una isla rodeada de agua* individuation is not portrayed as isolation. The waves surrounding the island represent Edith's connection to other people. The "rodeada" in the film's title suggests that despite being an island, Edith is surrounded by water; she is not alone. Edith's individuated, "limited" identity does not impose limits on her connection to other people. Water is associated in the film with Lucía; it is understood that Lucía will always be with Edith, like the water that surrounds an island. In a sequence in which Edith is looking out at the sea from a balcony, early memories of Lucía come back; she sees herself holding onto Lucía's waist with her legs. The song "Piensa en mi" (Think about me) is played in the soundtrack while Edith remembers her mother. The narrative context reframes the heterosexual love alluded to in the song, changing it into the love of a mother for her daughter. In this way, Lucía promises to accompany Edith through

feelings of sadness (“ganas de llorar”) and deep sorrow (“un hondo pesar”) and to remain by her side. Edith is an island surrounded by her mother’s unconditional love. In *Una isla rodeada de agua*, ideal femininity, as represented by Edith, is associated with individuation. In the landscape that the film associates with hope, the island surrounded by water, an individuated femininity is associated with order and nurturance.

The Visual Dimension of Subjectivity in Novaro’s *Una isla rodeada de agua*

In *Una isla rodeada de agua*, the protagonist’s individuated identity is expressed through her sense of vision. Having a separate identity is synonymous in the film with seeing the world in different colors. For instance, there is a scene in which Edith, who has very blue eyes, looks at the world and sees colors other people do not see. The scene begins with the question of a four-year-old girl who, surprised because blue eyes are an unusual trait among the local population, asks Edith: “Do you see everything blue?” The film then cuts to a shot of the ocean in which the water is magenta and the sky is yellow; a close-up of Edith looking at the ocean follows. This sequence suggests that Edith sees the world differently from other people. The audience knows that people with blue eyes do not see a magenta ocean, but the film relates Edith’s individuation with her capacity to see the world that surrounds her in a way that is specifically hers. Edith has an independent identity, not only because she is apart from Lucía but because she is a viewing subject. Additionally, Edith is granted the ability to enjoy what she sees. The main character’s capacity to see is surprisingly and refreshingly associated with pleasure and playfulness. When Edith looks, she enjoys luxuriant colors.

In *Technologies of Gender* and also in “Rethinking Women’s Cinema” and “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation”, Teresa de Lauretis proposes focusing on an

aesthetic centered on the viewing subject, and in “Aesthetics and Feminist Theory” (1989), she warns against searching for a female aesthetic:

To ask of these women's films: What formal, stylistic, or thematic markers point to a female presence behind the camera? and hence to generalize and universalize , to say: This is the look and sound of a women's cinema, this is its language—finally only means complying , accepting a certain definition of art, cinema, and culture, and obligingly showing how women can and do "contribute", pay the tribute to "society". Put another way, to ask whether there is a feminine or female aesthetic, or a specific language of women's cinema, is to remain caught in the master's house (131).

De Lauretis holds that we cannot claim an aesthetic that is genuinely feminine. In line with de Lauretis, in the scene in which Edith looks at a magenta ocean, Novaro connects femininity with an independent viewing subject. Seeing from a female point of view is not related to a specific cinematographic language but to the capacity to see independently. The next section considers another character who has an individuated identity, Alma in *Ángel de fuego*.

Mother as Independent Thinker in *Ángel de fuego*

In Dana Rotberg's second feature, *Ángel de fuego* (1991), a thirteen-year-old trapeze artist has incestuous relations with her father, the clown Renato. The clown dies near the beginning of the movie, and Alma, pregnant by her father, insists on having the baby, for which she must leave the circus. She joins a group of puppeteers who enact passages from the Bible and whose leader is the priestess Refugio. Horrified by Alma's incestuous relations, Refugio promises to “cleanse” her through sacrifice and fasting.

Alma's individuated identity is expressed in her insistence on having her child and on wearing a large photograph of Renato around her neck, much like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who wear photographs of their missing children. The photograph expresses the young mother's defiant love for her father and her desire to see her pregnancy through. *Angel de fuego* challenges the audience to put their preconceptions about incest aside and try to understand Alma's point of view. To do so requires looking at incest from the precarious economic and emotional conditions in which Alma lives.

To pursue my study of a mother's psychic space, I will first examine whether or not *Angel de fuego* establishes psychic space. I will then look at the reactions of the critics to the opening of psychic space. In order to be able to tell whether the film or the critics "flatten" or "open up" psychic space, I will look at the type of identification established between the director and the film and also between the film and its critics.

In "Political Ecstasy," a chapter from *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman studies cinematic identification and critically examines the way in which psychoanalysis has understood the identification process. She first considers the model proposed by Max Scheler, for whom identification is either a heteropathic or idiopathic process. In the former, the self identifies with the other, and in the latter, the self incorporates the other, an act similar to cannibalism (23). Silverman points out that both processes require that either the self, in heteropathic identification, or the other, in idiopathic identification, disappear. Silverman believes that Freud's and Scheler's notions of identification are based on the disappearance of the self or the other, which Silverman calls the self-same principle. She suggests that Freud's concept of identification is a cannibalistic process by which the other's otherness disappears when he or she is

ingested by the self. Silverman argues that identification does not have to be conceived as a cannibalistic process. She proposes a process of identification in which the self acknowledges the differences of the other and does not try to make the other the same as the self; she calls this process identification-at-a-distance. Silverman also looks at identification through the prism of love; she associates Freud's concept of identification with narcissistic love, with love that looks for the gratification of the self. In contrast, identification-at-a-distance implies an act of disinterested love; it is a love that "illuminates" the differences of the other at the expense of the self.

The type of identification that Silverman calls identification-at-a-distance appears in *Angel de fuego*. In Rotberg's film, the audience is invited to identify-at-a-distance with Alma's condition of being other, with her desire to be pregnant with her father's child. The film also invites the audience to abstain from "cannibalizing" Alma, from seeing her from the perspective of the self. Tomás Pérez Turrent, who wrote five reviews about *Angel de fuego*, analyzes the identificatory process established between the filmmaker and the film. In "*Ángel de fuego y otros asuntos*" Pérez Turrent mentions that "Dana Rotberg does not have a self-righteous look, she has a look of surprise towards a world that she can't grasp because of its complexity and that attracts her for its unforeseen possibilities."¹⁶⁴ For Pérez Turrent, Rotberg replaces a self-righteous look, one that knows what is right and wrong, with a look of surprise, a look that is open to understanding a world that is hard to grasp. In other words, Pérez Turrent makes a distinction between a condescending view, which knows what is good or bad for the other, and a view that is open to the differences of the other, what he calls "a look of surprise." What Turrent calls Rotberg's "look of surprise" is very similar to what

Silverman calls identity-at-a-distance. To be surprised by Alma is to identify with her qualities of being other, to “illuminate” and respect a world that is “hard to grasp.” For me, the presence of identification-at-a-distance marks also the presence of psychic space. I associate cannibalistic identification with the flattening of psychic space and identificatory processes that respect the otherness of the other (identification-at-a-distance) with psychic space.

As part of my analysis of mothers’ psychic space, I am interested in the reactions to a film such as *Angel de fuego* that opens up that psychic space. In order to study the way in which audiences reacted, I examine the film reviews published in newspapers. In this examination, I look at the type of identification the film critics establish with Alma as a way to determine whether these critics respect or flatten Alma’s psychic space. I choose to examine the critics’ reaction to *Angel de fuego* in particular because the psychic space the film establishes for Alma created much controversy. In 1991, *Angel de fuego* opened the Quinzaine des Realizateurs at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for fourteen Ariels, the Mexican equivalent of the Academy Awards. In spite of all these nominations, the film did not win any awards (Ramos Navas 1993). In general, the press reacted not against incest itself but against the film’s request to look at incest from Alma’s perspective.

My analysis groups the film critics into three categories: those who assimilated (“cannibalized”) Alma, those who assimilated some aspects of Alma but not all of them, and those who respected the distance that separated them from Alma. The critics in the first group viewed Alma’s insistence on having her father’s child as odd and sickening and surely not something that happened often in Mexico. At times, love is intertwined

with pity for the de-idealized motherhood that Alma represents. For instance, in the review “Angel de fuego,” Julia Elena Melche refers to Alma as “small” and “defenseless.”¹⁶⁵ Melche’s wish to protect defenseless Alma is an emotion that implies assimilation; it is a love that wants to protect but in doing so, disregards Alma’s point of view. Gabriela Bautista also wants to protect Alma, but rather than showing pity, she makes the father, whom she refers to as “an incestuous and decrepit father,” a scapegoat.¹⁶⁶ Bautista reacts with self-righteousness, not wanting to accept Alma’s situation as Alma perceives it or her need to love the only person who cared for her.¹⁶⁷ Like Bautista, male critic Naief Yehya also feels that Alma needs protection, but unlike Bautista he expresses this using sarcasm. He writes: “Alma, trapeze actor, throws fire from the Fantasía Circus. She is a girl who is in love with her father, who would also be the father of his grandchild if he would not die of being so ‘hot.’”¹⁶⁸ Yehya defends Alma by accusing Renato of being “hot,” sexually aroused by his own daughter. His accusation, however, implies a rejection of the reasons that Alma had to sexually love her father, and consequently his protectiveness implies assimilation of Alma’s point of view to his. Despite their good intentions, these critics identify with Alma in a cannibalistic way by disregarding Alma’s otherness, her desire to have her child.

The second group of critics partially respected Alma’s psychic space. For Susana López Aranda, Alma’s incest is a “desperate act of love,”¹⁶⁹ and for Jesús Ortega Mendoza “a reality that is incomprehensible for her. She has in her womb the product of an incestuous love that she has had with her father clown Renato (Alejandro Parodi), a man of bad health that dies when she most needs him.”¹⁷⁰ While these critics accept the film’s tenet that incest took place in a loving situation, their views express aversion to

such an act; incest is associated with desperation and presented as something incomprehensible. These critics are half way between an identification that respects Alma's otherness and a cannibalistic identification; while they acknowledge Alma's perspective, they do not respect it—instead assimilating it to their own point of view.

The third group of critics identifies with Alma at a distance. For instance, Ysabel Gracida approaches *Angel de fuego* by trying to understand the situation. In her review she mentions that “*Angel de fuego*'s incest contradicts the tabloid press” because it “is an incest that is born not from violence, but that takes place almost as a natural behavior in a hostile medium where the traditional idea of a family has lost all its conventions.” Given the emotional and economic poverty in which Alma lives, incest, according to Gracida, is the trapeze artist's way of getting affection. Gracida writes:

Underworld?, circus of poverty, redundant if it could be, the context in which Alma (Evangolina Sosa) has grown up takes her, in an almost natural way to the arms of her aging and sick father, the only affective tie that the trapeze artist wants to perpetuate.¹⁷¹

By searching for Alma's unique perspective in the social conditions that surround her, Gracida is able to understand Alma's motivation and thus move away from assimilation. The respectful love that Gracida shows for Alma contrasts with the protective love shown by the critics from the first group, Melche and Bautista. Gracida loves Alma in spite of her love for Renato. When she writes of Alma's incest that it is “a natural behavior in a hostile medium where the traditional idea of a family has lost all its conventions”, she is accepting the conditions which Alma has come from and is throwing light (as Silverman

would say) on them. Thus, unlike Bautista, Gracida does not assimilate Alma's otherness into her own. What is more, Gracida's description of Alma leads to an identification with her condition of being other. Rather than considering Alma's incest an aberration, Gracida's explanation illuminates Alma's life by calling attention, with love, to the conditions of extreme emotional and economic poverty in which Alma lives. As a conclusion, we can say that the reviews of *Angel de fuego* show that critics accept in differing degrees the psychic space that the film opens for Alma.

Psychic Space between Mothers and Daughters

In the previous sections I examined the relation between physical and psychic space in Cortés' shorts, the relationship between psychic space and subjectivity in *Una isla rodeada de agua*, and the reactions of film critics to the establishment of psychic space in *Angel de fuego*. To continue my examination of the way in which third-wave Mexican films open up psychic space for mothers, I study the space that separates mothers and daughters. In Freudian psychoanalysis, that space is "flattened" in the sense that psychoanalysis sees the daughter as a substitute for her mother in the function of procreation. Feminist film theorists used psychoanalysis to study film, and they inherited Freud's notions about the difficulty or perhaps impossibility of women separating from their mothers. In *Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator* (1991), Mary Ann Doane describes the development of women's psyche as full of obstacles. She refers to the work of a woman psychoanalyst to support her position: "[Michele] Montrelay argues that while the male has the possibility of displacing the first object of desire (the mother), the female must become that object of desire (Doane 1991: 2). The emphasis on women's reproductive capacity makes these theorists "flatten" women's

psychic space. For Montrelay and Doane, a daughter is destined to become her mother's substitute.

The idea that daughters and mothers are the same because daughters will substitute for their mothers in their reproductive role is not exclusive to Freudian or Freudian-based perspectives. Mexican classical cinema also conflates the space between mothers and daughters. For instance, in *Una familia de tantas* (Alejandro Galindo, 1948), Don Rodrigo, Maru's father, gives a speech at Maru's fifteenth birthday party. The quinceañera party represents Maru's coming of age and is explicitly linked to motherhood. After the party, Don Rodrigo tells his wife Gracia: "Your daughter is all a woman now; she should be a good mother." In Freudian psychoanalysis as well as in Don Rodrigo's understanding of motherhood, a woman's identity is based on mothering, and since mothering is one and the same for mothers and daughters, Maru is essentially the same as Gracia. For me, the way in which Don Rodrigo understands mothering has the effect of "flattening" psychic space, in the sense that it conflates Doña Gracia's way of being a mother with her daughter's. Don Rodrigo does not consider the possibility that Maru might be a mother in a way that differs considerably from her mother's. Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis and classical melodramas, third-wave films portray daughters' approach to motherhood as very different from their mothers'. Cortes' *El secreto de Romelia* (Romelia's Secret, 1989) dramatizes these differences by presenting a daughter who has very little in common with her mother.

Generations of Women View Virginity

El secreto de Romelia compares the different approaches to motherhood of three generations of women. It centers on Romelia, a grandmother who was unfairly accused

by her husband, Don Carlos, of having lost her virginity before their wedding. The accusation spread, and as a result, Romelia had to leave town. Forty years later, Romelia tells her daughter Dolores, conceived on the only night that she spent with her husband, that she kept the blood-stained sheets to prove to her that she was a virgin when she married.

El secreto de Romelia emphasizes the differences between women of different generations by showing the way in which they view virginity. While Romelia might think that virginity at marriage is essential, her daughter does not share this value, and her daughter's three daughters make fun of it. At the end of the film, the granddaughters overhear the conversation between Romelia and Dolores about the importance to Romelia of virginity. In trying to make sense of this discussion, Romi, the youngest, named after her grandmother, asks if her grandmother is a virgin. María, the eldest, doesn't want to answer, but Aurelia, the middle sister, explains that "Single women without husbands are virgins." The eldest sister jokes that if that is the definition of virginity, then she is the Virgin Mary. This joke is especially significant in the Mexican context, where femininity is based on the model of the Virgin. In Mexican films of the 1940s and 1950s, female characters try to approach normative ideals by imitating the Virgin. I have created the term "Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood" to refer to the encouragement given to women to mimic the Virgin. This scene from *El secreto de Romelia* directly refers to the sexual aspect of the recommendation, to the emphasis on sexual "purity" for women before marriage.

The Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood that was taken so seriously in the 1940s has been transformed into a joke by the young generation. This comic sequence continues with

another question from Romi: “Why did the sheets have blood?” Aurelia explains that “On their wedding night women get a little blood.” Romi then wants to know where the blood comes from, and her sister tiredly answers: “From her nose.” This answer, comically displacing the main concern of Virgin-Motherhood from the vagina to the nose, shows that the granddaughters will not live by the ideals of their grandmother. By widening the scope of the film to include granddaughters, *El secreto de Romelia* reviews patterns of mothering over several generations, showing that while all may have children, for some, virginity will be fundamental, while for others, it will be just something from the past. *El secreto de Romelia* takes the differences to an extreme by suggesting that women of different generations may not even understand each other. This lack of understanding is especially strong between Dolores and Romelia. The next section closely examines the differences between mother and daughter and relates such differences to the establishment of psychic space.

El secreto de Romelia's Respectful Look at Classical Mothers

In Cortés' film, Romelia's identity is presented as a space of her own. The narrative pivots on Dolores' effort to understand her mother. In order for that to be possible, however, Dolores has to accept Romelia's psychic space, which in the film is represented by Romelia's defense of virginity. *El secreto de Romelia* begins with Dolores' disdain for her mother's ideas, with her flattening of her mother's psychic space, and ends with her respect for her mother. *El secreto de Romelia* takes Dolores' point of view, thus encouraging the spectator to join in her painful process of accepting Romelia's psychic space.

During the beginning credits, the screen shows a medium shot of Romelia behind a window. She looks sad, and her image is frozen while the credits are written over her image. The shot that follows, in which her image unfreezes, further explains Cortés' intentions. Gazing at something the spectator cannot identify, a tired and worried Romelia moves her lips up and down in a mechanical and confused manner. *El secreto de Romelia* encourages the audience to engage in understanding why Romelia looks so tired and sad and to participate in the process of “unfreezing” Romelia.

This section examines the way in which Dolores' awareness of her mother's ideas establishes two separate psychological spaces, her own and her mother's. The film's narrative depicts the progressive opening of psychic space. At the beginning of the film, Dolores refuses to acknowledge any viewpoint other than her own, thus “flattening” Romelia's space. Discovering that her father, Don Carlos, had died, not many years ago as her mother had led her to believe, but only the previous month, Dolores is furious with her mother; she would have liked to have met her father. When she demands an explanation, mother and daughter go into the living room, where there is a warm fire in the background. Despite the allusion to warmth suggested by the fire, the camera takes the two women in a series of shot reverse-shots, thus underscoring their lack of empathy for each other's ideas. Their clothing and body positions visually reinforce their differences: Romelia is dressed in an impeccable, old-fashioned suit and sits properly on the front part of her chair, holding her back straight, her legs carefully together; Dolores is wearing casual clothes and leans back in her chair, lighting a cigarette. Their emotional distance is evident in their conversation: Dolores asks “What was my father

like?”, and Romelia responds with “Aren’t you going to work on your dissertation today?” and then expresses a wish to drop the subject and go to bed.

The turning point in their relationship comes when Dolores acknowledges her mother’s views on virginity. After the two leave the living room, they continue their conversation in the bedroom, a more intimate space, lit with the warm, low, confidential light of a nightstand lamp. In contrast to the living room sequence (shot in a shot-reverse-shot fashion), the bedroom sequence is shot using a more intimate medium shot which includes both women in the same frame. As mother Dolores and mother Romelia sit talking with each other from opposite sides of the bed, Romelia’s secret is brought up.

In *El secreto de Romelia*, the process by which Dolores comes to understand Romelia’s point of view hinges on her understanding why Romelia kept, for almost forty years, the sheets from her wedding night. When Dolores learns that her mother left town because she couldn’t bear the gossip about her, Dolores accuses her of caring only about appearances. Her disdain for her mother, as well as her guilt about her disdain, is apparent in her tone of voice. It comes from her unwillingness to accept that for women of her mother’s generation, virginity was essential for social acceptance. When Romelia explains that she left her village because “Everybody in the village thought that I wasn’t a virgin,” Dolores answers: “So what? Your virginity belongs to you, not to men.” At this point, Dolores is unable to move beyond her own point of view, while her mother continues to insist, “No Loli [Dolores], you are wrong. A lady shouldn’t think that way.” For Dolores, it makes no sense that her mother kept the blood-stained sheets, and she asks incredulously: “To show to whom?” But although she cannot quite understand her mother at this point, her mother’s openness to vulnerability moves her. When Romelia

explains that she kept the sheets to show “you, your children, I do not know . . .”, we can see, by looking at Dolores’s face, that she finally can feel her mother’s pain. Her compassion is also expressed in her posture; she bends forward, as if starting to carry her mother’s burden. This movement brings her closer to the light emanating from the bedside lamp behind her mother, and her look of condescension changes to one of empathy. After asking for forgiveness, she asks: “Did you love him?” When her mother says she did, Dolores reaches to touch her mother and says softly: “Why didn’t you tell me?, I would have understood you.”

Thus the film shows that Dolores is capable of accepting Romelia’s point of view even though she does not accept the ideals of virginity for herself. Her identification still maintains a distance between them, or, to use Silverman’s terminology, we could say that Dolores identifies with Romelia’s “conditions and quality of being ‘other’” (15). By the same token, the acceptance of Romelia’s otherness establishes mother Romelia and mother Dolores as two different individuals, the former subscribing to the ideal of virginity, the latter rejecting it. Looking at their differences, we could not say that Dolores is a mere substitute for her mother. Instead of flattening psychic space between mothers and daughters, as Freudian psychoanalysis does, *El secreto de Romelia* opens up psychic space.

Depressed Mothers Idealized-at-a-Distance

This section examines the way in which third-wave films avoid the pitfalls of narcissistic idealization. Third-wave films do not present examples of mothers who support the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood; rather they bring to the forefront depressed and imperfect mothers and ask that we love them.

Depressed mothers are uniquely contemporary phenomena. For instance, if we compare two narratives representative of the classical and contemporary periods, such as Bustillo Oro's *Cuando los hijos se van* and Novaro's *Lola*, we can see that while for Doña Lupe, taking care of children comes "naturally," for Lola the task is exhausting. In *Lola* the protagonist gets so depressed that she is not able to take care of her own daughter and has to leave her with her mother.

There are other depressed mothers in contemporary films. In Guita Schyfter's *Sucesos distantes* (Distant Happenings, 1995), Irene suffers from depression and insomnia. As the film develops, the spectator learns that after divorcing her first husband, she left her two children in Russia in order to be able to find a better life for herself. Images of these children haunt her in her sleep, but Irene feels that telling her personal story to her new husband, Arturo, will put their marriage in jeopardy. So she lives haunted by melancholy, by an image of herself that she cannot love or live with.

In several third-wave films, depressed mothers commit suicide. In Eva López-Sánchez's *Dama de noche*, a mother who prostitutes herself in order to live the luxurious life she likes, gets so depressed that she ends up losing her capacity to act and, in despair, commits suicide. In *Ángel de fuego*, Alma burns herself alive. The representation of suicidal mothers is not common just to films of the late 1980s and early 1990s; the theme of depressed mothers also appears in literature. Beatriz Novaro, co-scriptwriter of *Lola*, wrote the short novel *Cecilia, todavía* in which the protagonist, Cecilia, commits suicide. Not knowing how to cross the bridge from being a young pregnant woman with feminist ideas to being a mother, and after multiple abortions, Cecilia drowns herself in the ocean during her sixth pregnancy. The novel suggests that Cecilia dies because she does not

know how to be a mother in a way that is meaningful to her. *Cecilia, todavía* shows the dilemma of young women of the 1980s, living in a society without positive images of mothers that they can relate to.

After examining the way in which depression has been modeled in classical and contemporary psychoanalysis, this section tries to understand why, according to these films, mothers are depressed. *Elvira Luz Cruz* sees the roots of depression in the social alienation of mothers, more specifically in the ways in which mothers are treated by the Mexican legal system. *Lola* provides another example of a depressed mother, although in this case depression is related to unfulfilled societal promises regarding romantic love. In both cases, society, and not just the family as claimed in classical psychoanalysis, plays a prominent role in mothers' depression.

The Roots of Depression

Mothers' afflictions, according to Oliver, have been misunderstood and misdiagnosed by the medical establishment. In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Oliver contends that "Much maternal depression can be diagnosed as social melancholy rather than individual pathology, or merely biological chemical imbalance" (50). What she means is that the medical model, including Freudian psychoanalysis, attributes maternal depression to psychological or biological disturbance, whereas she believes the problem is rooted in society's lack of support for women.¹⁷² With the term "social melancholy", Oliver shifts the weight of responsibility to society. If maternal depressive pathologies are not caused by a woman's biology or family background but rather by values ascribed to her within the social context, then the solution is not to be found in pills or family therapy but in societal love for women.

Oliver's emphasis on approaching depression from a social perspective differentiates her work from that of other scholars. In her introduction to *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Oliver summarizes the work of scholars who have extended the psychoanalytic framework to include the social milieu, including Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Elisabeth Grosz, and Teresa de Lauretis (201). She then situates her position vis-a-vis these scholars: while they have extended the psychoanalytic framework, she proposes to modify the concepts that underlie classical psychoanalysis, such as the notion of depression.

Oliver's first interpretation of depression appeared in "Psychic Space and Social Melancholy" (2002). In this article, Oliver expands Julia Kristeva's notions of abjection and psychic space, taking them from the level of the individual, where Kristeva applies them, to the social. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), Mary Douglas studies pollution and taboo in several cultures in order to understand how defilement concepts arise. She comes to the conclusion that rules regulating what is dirty or untouchable, i.e., what is considered polluted or taboo, do not come from an attempt to avoid disease but from an effort to re-order the environment, to make it conform to an idea (2001:2). For Douglas, then, defilement is about boundaries set up by societies. Kristeva incorporates Douglas' idea of defilement into her study of patriarchy, proposing that within patriarchal society, the female body is abjected. Oliver takes Kristeva's notion a step further by suggesting that society forces women to identify their bodies with the abject. For Oliver, the culture at large devalues maternity by reducing it to repellant animality (2002: 50); sexism, for example, "reduces its targets to

unthinking animal bodies driven by natural instincts rather than by rational thought process” (2002: 62).

To be able to talk about the social side of the individual and about the ways in which the social is intertwined with and affects the individual psyche, Oliver incorporates the ideas of Frantz Fanon. This psychiatrist from Martinique worked in North Africa, mainly in Algeria. Based on his experience treating inhabitants of French colonies, Fanon wrote about the way in which colonization affects the self-image of the colonized (*The Wretch of the Earth*: 1961). His studies on the effects of colonization on the individual’s psyche have been fundamental for post-colonial feminist commentators such as Kaja Silverman. Silverman uses Fanon to emphasize that identification does not take place in isolation because it is a social process. In the section “Fanon and the Black Male Bodily Ego” (27-31), Silverman complicates Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage by looking at it through the lens of Fanon’s ideas. In Lacanian psychology, the ego forms by looking into the mirror, where it finds a coherent image of the self. Silverman comments that when reading Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), it is obvious that the image that a black person finds in the mirror is often not the one the person wants. This impossibility of recognizing the reflected image as one’s own impedes the ego development described by Lacan. Silverman argues that society plays an important role in the way in which the subject interprets the image that appears in the mirror and that the role of society is not fully accounted for in Lacan’s work.

Oliver approaches the oppression of mothers in North America and Europe through Fanon’s understanding of the dynamics of colonization. She views mothers as colonized subjects and maps colonization in continents where it has not been mapped before.¹⁷³ For

colonized people, oppression entails a focus on their skin at the expense of their psychic world; for women and mothers, it entails a focus on their sexuality and reproductive capacity at the expense of their psychic world. Oliver proposes that women in general, and especially women of color, become depressed because they do not have enough social support.

Elvira Luz Cruz: A Colonized Subject

This section examines the way in which several media—the press, films, theater, and public opinion—treated the case of Elvira Luz Cruz, which in my view is an example of a colonized mother. In August 1982, Elvira Luz Cruz, a twenty-six-year-old indigenous woman, was accused of strangling her four children. She was sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison.¹⁷⁴ The sensationalist press called Luz Cruz “The Medea of Ajusco” and “The Wild Beast of Ajusco.” She lived in Ajusco, one of Mexico City’s poorest sections, a town of shanty houses taken illegally by people in need, without electricity or sewage.

My analysis shows the different degrees to which the media recognized Luz Cruz as a colonized subject. My study focuses on two films that represent opposing views: Felipe Cazals’ *Las razones de Luz* (Luz’s Motives, 1985), in which Luz Cruz is not depicted as a colonized subject, and Dana Rotberg and Ana Díez’s *Elvira Luz Cruz: pena máxima* (Elvira Luz Cruz: Maximun Punishment, 1984), in which the opposite is true. I chose these two films because they incorporate the social context in ways that other films do not. Most importantly, *Las razones de Luz* and *Elvira Luz Cruz: pena máxima* bring in Mexico’s legal system. The legal system appears in Luz Cruz’s trial and also in the suit Luz Cruz brought against Cazals’ film. The social is also brought in through the medical system; the psychologists had to determine whether Luz Cruz was sane or not when she

committed filicide. This influence of the medical establishment reminds me of Oliver's tenet that psychologists and psychiatrists have misdiagnosed depression. The factors that Oliver considers fundamental for depression are present in Luz Cruz's case: the judiciary system's mistrial of an indigenous mother and the psychologists' attempts to pathologize a colonized mother.

Several artists were inspired by Luz Cruz's tragedy and created a long-feature film, a documentary, and a play, while a journalist wrote entries about the trial and other events about Luz Cruz. These works raised a controversy; especially as they reached conclusions before Luz Cruz had been sentenced. A year after the children died, Marta Luna wrote the script for a play entitled *La razón de Elvira* (Elvira's Motive, 1983), which was presented in theaters in 1985 under the title *La fiera del Ajusco* (The Wild Beast of Ajusco). In 1984, Rotberg and Díez finished the medium-length documentary, *Elvira Luz Cruz: pena máxima* (Elvira Luz Cruz: Maximun Punishment).¹⁷⁵ In 1985, Felipe Cazals made a fictional film, *Las razones de Luz* (Luz's Motives), for which he was sued for defamation by Luz Cruz's lawyers.¹⁷⁶ Journalist Patricia Vega wrote eleven articles about Luz Cruz between 1985 and 1989. Though inspired by the same person, Cazals and Rotberg reached radically different conclusions about Luz Cruz.

Assumptions about motherhood and its interpretation within a social context are at the core of the differences between Cazals and Rotberg. Cazals asks: Did she kill her children? Is she guilty? In contrast, Rotberg goes beyond the question of guilt and tries to understand the conditions under which Luz Cruz had to live. Rotberg wonders: How does a poor mother in a deprived area of Mexico City like Bosques del Pedregal live? And

also, how is the law applied to a woman from this impoverished part of town? To understand the nuances of each position, a more detail study is necessary.

Felipe Cazals' *Los motivos de Luz*

Los motivos de Luz (Luz's Reasons, 1985) presents Luz Cruz as psychotic. When she is asked if she killed the children or not, she responds that that day she and her partner Nicolás had had a fight but that she can't remember it because her mother-in-law, a witch, gave her a potion. Believing in witches and potions is used as a sign of Cruz's ignorance and adds strength to the argument for her irrationality.¹⁷⁷

Los motivos de Luz tries to demonstrate that Luz Cruz is guilty. Cazals' film begins in jail, after Luz Cruz has been arrested, and it is narrated from the point of view of her psychologist, Dr. Maricarmen Rebollar (Delia Casanova), and her lawyer (Marta Aura). The choice of narrators is deliberate; the psychologist and lawyer are individuals who represent the symbolic order, which gives authority to their claims.

Los motivos de Luz brings up Luz Cruz's past mental problems in a conversation between Dr. Rebollar and a friend. As the conversation progresses, the film cuts to a flash-back in which Luz Cruz reports to the village priest that she has seen an apparition. The film uses Luz Cruz's religious convictions, her belief in apparitions, to portray her as psychotic. The flashback is used to support the psychologist's argument, but it is presented in a narrative incongruence. The film is narrated from the point of view of the psychologist, who could not have had direct access to Luz Cruz's visual memories. The leap from the psychologist's viewpoint to her patient's memories legitimizes the psychologist's view in a covert manner.

Los motivos de Luz shows that Luz Cruz's mental illness persisted while she was in jail. Her psychologist and lawyer have a conversation about her anger and her potential threat to society, and the conversation is intercut with shots of Luz Cruz in her cell. In one instance, she is shown screaming and banging her head against the cell bars at the sight of another inmate nursing her infant. The violence progresses in parallel with the lawyer and psychologist's conversation, driving home the point that Luz Cruz is not sane. The film then shows her being led away to a high-security cell as a punishment for her violent behavior. Another violent incident is shown, adding to the mounting evidence, past and present, that Luz Cruz cannot be cured or even be given a second chance. And thus, assuming that irrational mothers kill their children, the film concludes that Luz Cruz is guilty. Once the film has established Luz Cruz's guilt, it expands its view to the social context, showing mobs of women inside and outside the prison demonstrating against Luz Cruz, condemning her for being a "bad mother."

Cazals' film produced a lot of controversy. Some filmmakers and journalists I spoke with objected to the fact that the film presented Luz Cruz as guilty while her trial was still in progress. These intellectuals feared that the film's verdict would affect the trial judges. Patricia Vega, a journalist from *La Jornada*, followed the case closely. Her articles on Luz Cruz were afterwards compiled in a section of Vega's book *A gritos y sombreros* (1996). Vega called her section "Elvira Luz Cruz, sus motivos" (Elvira Luz Cruz, Her Reasons 23-45). I interpret her use of the possessive pronoun *sus* (her) as a poke at Cazals' title. Vega used the possessive pronoun to imply that Cazals projected his own view onto Luz Cruz in his film.

“Elvira Luz Cruz, sus motivos” attests to the actual reactions of a colonized mother. The section begins with a historical summary and continues with the different newspaper articles in the order that they were published. The articles documenting the legal disputes between Cazals’ and Luz Cruz’s lawyers are worth examining, because they highlight the power of film to interpret reality and the reaction of a mother to her portrayal in film.

In 1985, Luz Cruz initiated a legal process against Cazals, demanding that the exhibition of *Los motivos de Luz* be halted. Her lawyers (first Mireya Toto and afterwards Efraín Ramírez) argued that it was a case of defamation. Cazals' lawyers responded that most films were merely an interpretation of reality. The person with the authority to make the decision, the then Director de Radio, Televisión y Cinematografía (RTC), Fernando Macotela, decided that the film should be released, arguing that pulling the film would violate freedom of expression. Thus, in 1986, commercial exhibition of the film began, and Luz Cruz’s response from jail was to sue Cazals for “moral damages, slander and defamation” (“daños morales, tergiversación y difamación”) ¹⁷⁸. She declared: “I was not satisfied with the fact that they were making a movie about the tragedy I went through.”¹⁷⁹ In response to the suit, the exhibition of *Los motivos* was halted so that the film would not damage Luz Cruz’s reputation. The case against Cazals for defamation, slander, and moral damages continued until 1988, at which point it was overturned because Luz Cruz did not have the 25 million old pesos needed to pursue the case. However, losing the first case did not stop Luz Cruz, who made a second appeal. This time she sued Cazals and the Producing House Chimalistac for moral damages only, arguing that she had never given permission to have her life portrayed in a film. (Vega, “En la escuela”: 24). In 1992, Luz Cruz won her case. The judge found 42 coincidences

between her life and the life of the person represented in *Los motivos de Luz*. These coincidences, the judge ruled, did not respect Luz Cruz's right to a private life. Producers and distributors had to pay Luz Cruz 70 million old pesos as a pay-back for the income generated by the exhibition of the film. In 1996, Luz Cruz received 62,000 pesos in compensation (Vega: 180). Vega considers the outcome only partially successful. The people involved in making the film (Cazals and the script writer Xavier Robles), as well as the ex-director of RTC who did not stop the exhibition in 1985, suffered no penalties. Vega's work on Luz Cruz is noteworthy in its deliberate effort to compile evidence about the case. Vega's columns in *La Jornada* called attention to Cazals' interpretation of Luz Cruz, showing a gap between what Luz Cruz believes happened and Cazals' interpretation of it. Vega's point reinforces my own analysis of the film, which tries to demonstrate Cazals' abjection of Luz Cruz. Vega's columns also brought up other issues: Luz Cruz's voice, her struggle to question her portrayal in *Los motivos de Luz*, and her frustration in dealing with a legal system that has no mechanism for colonized subjects to question the system that alienates them. Luz Cruz's lawyers had to try a variety of ways to present their client's claim so that her argument would be heard. In the end, Vega's articles bring hope. They show that despite the difficulties, and despite the fact that full victory was not achieved, Luz Cruz was able to win her case against *Los motivos de Luz* and against Mexico's legal system.

Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz*

In *Elvira Luz Cruz*, Dana Rotberg tries to understand the way in which society treats one of its colonized subjects. Initially, Rotberg, influenced by the media, saw Luz Cruz as a Mexican Medea; however, after a year of research, she found a story that "completely

altered the preconception she had from the media” (Arredondo 2001:145). Rotberg found out that prior to 1982, Luz Cruz had been a victim of domestic violence and of the legal system. Not only had her partner, Nicolás, beaten her into semi-consciousness; he used his ex-policemen status to confine her in jail. Furthermore, the same type of irregularities had taken place with the evidence of the alleged filicide; no one had taken the declaration of the policemen who found the bodies of the children. Instead, the declarations of Nicolás and his mother Eduarda had been taken as the truth.¹⁸¹ Rotberg concluded that the impunity with which Nicolás was able to act spoke negatively of Mexico’s legal system (Arredondo 2001: 173). The director’s respect for Luz Cruz and indignation with the Mexican system came through in the film’s title, *Elvira Luz Cruz: pena maxima*. The second part of the title, *Maximum Punishment*, calls attention to the abuses perpetrated by the Mexican legal system. Another issue that changed Rotberg’s assessment of Luz Cruz was evidence of the extreme poverty in which she lived; the autopsy reports showed that the children had not eaten for four days (Arredondo 2001: 172).

To better represent Luz Cruz’s world, Rotberg combines snap-shots of the neighborhood where she lived, the shanty houses of Bosques del Pedregal, with interviews with her neighbors, who had organized the Defense Committee of Elvira Luz Cruz (Comité de Apoyo a Elvira Luz Cruz). Rotberg also includes interviews with the family members who had abused her—her partner, Nicolás Soto Cruz, and his mother, Eduarda—and interviews with her psychologist, Concepcion Fernandez, and the defense lawyer, Mireya Soto. The interviews create two accounts: the family members accuse Luz Cruz of killing the children, but their statements are discredited by the accounts of the neighbors, the psychologist, and the defense lawyer, who testify to her innocence and

show the abuse she was subjected to. For instance, the neighbors describe her as a hard-working mother abused by her partner and his family; Nicolás forced her to stop taking birth control pills, alleging that she took them to have sex with other men. Her neighbors also say that Nicolás fathered three of her children but did not provide money to feed them. From their testimony, one sees Nicolás as an irresponsible father who brought children into the world but neglected to care for them.¹⁸² The neighbors also describe the day of the death of the children: Nicolás was hitting Elvira, and when the oldest child came to her defense, Nicolás knocked him down and killed him. He then knocked Elvira unconscious, probably thinking he had killed her, too.¹⁸³ The neighbors' testimony presented in *Elvira Luz Cruz* attests to a high level of domestic violence in the past and on the day of the incident; the neighbors were witnesses to a badly-beaten Elvira when the police arrived.¹⁸⁴ In the last part of the film, intercut with comments by the psychologist, the lawyer contends that Elvira's detainment was faulty on three grounds: no one asked for a declaration from the policemen who found the bodies; Eduarda and Nicolás were not detained, and their testimony went unquestioned; and Elvira was made to sign a pre-written declaration in which she pleaded guilty to having killed the children.

Elvira Luz Cruz operates from a notion of motherhood that is very different from Cazals'. Cazals assumes that only an irrational mother can kill her children. In contrast, Rotberg suggests that Luz Cruz's living conditions were the insanity. Rotberg told me: "In the specific case of Elvira, if she did kill her children, it was a profoundly maternal act and an act of animal survival" (146). To Rotberg, Luz Cruz lived in conditions that were less than human.

The above description of *Elvira Luz Cruz* puts Cazals' interpretation of Luz Cruz's life into a different perspective. My intention, however, is not to comment on the different interpretations, but to point to a more important difference: the absence of Luz Cruz in Rotberg's documentary. The logistics involved in shooting the film explain, at least in part, Cruz's absence. Originally, Rotberg and Ana Díez had planned to shoot the trial and interview Luz Cruz and those who accused her: Nicolás and Eduarda (Coda). However, although Rotberg and Díez secured an interview with Luz Cruz, she withdrew from the agreement under threat from the prison director that if she let the "cameras in", she would lose her appeal (De la Vega 1991b: 7). The filmmakers could not shoot the trial either, because the judge moved the trial date forward and there was not enough time for Rotberg and Díez to prepare (De la Vega 1991b: 6). The filmmakers' conclusions after their investigation also explains Luz Cruz's absence. Their discoveries about Luz Cruz's world shifted Rotberg and Díez's perspective; they were no longer interested in finding out if Luz Cruz had committed the crime or not. This lack of interest on Luz Cruz's guilt is apparent in Rotberg words: "In the process of investigating, filming, and editing, I learned that the absolute objective truth does not exist; we will never know who murdered those children. I believe that Elvira did not kill them, but I will never know" (146). At this point, Rotberg's focus was on Luz Cruz's colonized world. As she explained to me in an interview, "What was important was to see this person in the context of very specific emotional, social, and economic conditions, because of which—whether or not she committed the murder—she is really the first victim of this story" (Arredondo 2001: 146).¹⁸⁵ When Rotberg discovered the reality of Luz Cruz's world, she looked for a way to construct her documentary so that it would

evoke empathy and respect for Luz Cruz. Luz Cruz's absence from the film was one of the ways this was achieved.

Luz Cruz's absence from Rotberg's film was noticed by the press and the academic world. Well-known Mexican academic Eduardo de la Vega sums up the filmmakers' approach by saying: "Elvira is the absence that ends up being omnipresent,"¹⁸⁶ and Mexican film critic Gustavo García adds that her absence establishes a respectful relationship between the spectator and Cruz.¹⁸⁷ Her simultaneous absence and presence in the film shares similarities with what Silverman calls "remembering." For Silverman, "remembering" implies recovering the personal and individual emotions, "provide[ing] that psychic locus" (1996:189). Silverman relates "remembering" to "forgetting history" (188-189); she means that in order to "remember," to recover the psychic locus, one has to forget the history that the dominant fiction has created around that event and look at it with new eyes. *Elvira Luz Cruz* "forgets" the history the Mexican sensationalist media created and hunts for Luz Cruz's recollection; the film has a look of remembrance that implies discovery.

A comparison between *Elvira Luz Cruz* and *Los motivos de Luz* allows us to appreciate the very different way in which each film portrays the social basis of pathological behavior among women. The way in which both filmmakers approach poverty illustrates my point. Cazals stresses the poverty of Mexico's slums; however, in his film the poverty is only a circumstance.¹⁸⁸ *Los motivos de Luz* denounces the poverty of the slums, but it does not look at the effects that this poverty has on mothers.¹⁸⁹ Neither poverty nor Nicolás' violence are used to explain Luz Cruz's actions. If we were to draw conclusions from Cazals' film, we might say that what is needed is the

institutionalizing of low-income mothers, not a change in Mexico's legal and social system. For Cazals, Luz Cruz is a deviant other who has to be re-wired through punishment in jail and therapy with a psychologist. In Cazals' film, society is not responsible for what happens to mothers, mothers are.

In Rotberg's film, Luz Cruz's poverty and abusive treatment explain her situation. She is a desperate mother trying to live with meager resources as well as a victim of the Mexican legal system. She is also presented as an alienated subject within her own household, with a husband who subjects her to repeated beatings and objects to her use of birth control. If we were to draw conclusions from Rotberg's film, we might say that what is needed is the creation of an economic system in which low-income mothers can raise their children under decent conditions, the establishment of a better-trained police force free of corruption, and the enactment of effective laws against domestic violence. Rotberg finds society at fault, not mothers; Luz Cruz is presented as a colonized other in a society which has alienated her.

In portraying this family tragedy, the two films discussed above provide radically different explanations for the pathological behavior. Cazals' film finds no social basis for the tragedy, while Rotberg's film does. In *Los motivos de Luz*, the protagonist is an abject mother who is mentally ill and condemned, while in *Elvira Luz Cruz*, she is abject, but she is presented as a victim of Mexico's social and legal systems. These films attest to the alienated situation of mothers in Mexican society and at the way in which society tends to blame mothers, rather than the system, for their behavior.

According to Oliver, colonized mothers like Elvira Luz Cruz are highly susceptible to depression. Depression is not a part of either Rotberg or Cazals' treatment of the Luz Cruz story, but it is very important in other films by third-wave filmmakers.

Lola: A Depressed Mother in Mexico City

In a review entitled "The film *Lola*, a Proposal about Depression," journalist Patricia Vega interview Novaro, who says that *Lola* is "an emotional response that narrates the flow and cycle of a depression, with details hardly perceptible" (1990). According to Novaro, depression is central to her film. I use Oliver's notion of social melancholy to study depression in *Lola*. My study examines the way in which Novaro's first feature links a mother's depression and society by using Oliver's concept of social melancholy.

An Abandoned Mother

In *Lola* the protagonist's depression is presented as a case of social melancholy. The film approaches motherhood from a social viewpoint, presenting Lola as a character alienated from society in two ways. First, she is a woman surrounded by a world of songs and media that promise a romantic life that she never finds. Secondly, Lola is part of a social sector which has been abandoned by an irresponsible and corrupt government. Emotional and economic alienation are the roots of her depression.

Lola's depression is related to her partner's absence from the household. The film opens up with a sequence emphasizing Omar's absence from the Christmas Eve dinner. *Lola* introduces a significant change in the way family dynamics are portrayed in film. In classical films the husbands are always at home. *Cuando los hijos se van* is a case in point because it turns around the Christmas Eve celebration. In this classical film, Doña

Lupe worries that the “children,” who are over twenty years old and each have a job, are going to be absent for the dinner. Lola presents the same situation, the Christmas Eve dinner, but with a difference: the father is the absent one.

Lola is emotionally invested in her relationship with Omar. The film begins with six-year-old Ana imitating daddy’s rock performances in a dark room. The singing is interrupted by the sound of the phone ringing. At this point, someone turns on the light in the room, and it is apparent that it is Christmas Eve. There is a decorated Christmas tree and an elaborate festive dinner already set on the table. The food shows that Lola has been very involved in preparing food. The phone conversation reveals that Lola and Ana, the ones singing, are waiting for Omar. The call lets them know that he won’t be coming. Upset, Lola takes to the streets to avoid being in a space that makes Omar’s neglect manifest. It is nighttime, and the camera takes long shots of the streets with colorful lights in slow motion. The lights contrast with Lola’s sadness, and the speed of the take foreshadows Lola’s depressive state.

Abandonment is a recurrent theme in *Lola*; it appears for a second time when singer Omar is shown preparing for a year-long trip to Los Angeles. On this occasion, Novaro’s film gives the audience an appreciation for why Lola is so emotionally invested in Omar, showing her first as a sad, distracted figure in a medium shot followed by a flashback to Omar singing “Si tú te vas” (If you leave me) on stage.¹⁹⁰ The song promises eternal love, saying that the world will be meaningless and his heart will die without her. Downstage, Lola is a cheerful part of the crowd attending the concert. The flashback explains Lola’s present feelings of abandonment; the promises Omar proclaimed in his song were not

fulfilled. To accentuate Lola's depression, the flash-back is followed by a shot of Omar happily preparing to leave.

The film also conveys Lola's feelings of abandonment through her obsession with her tape player. Lola is hungry for romantic love and is constantly listening to songs. Even when she travels, she carries her tape player with her, a symbol of her investment in romantic love. *Lola's* main objective, according to Novaro, is to reflect on the way in which broken romantic promises affect women's lives. She says:

Some feminists were bothered by the fact that Lola's crisis is related to the emptiness that she feels when she finds herself without a partner. I think that I'm very sincere; I'm not judging her, I'm speaking about what I have observed in the lives of a great many women. Being abandoned creates a very serious emotional problem for us and I reflected on this in the movie, with much pain. Maybe it is possible one would want things to be otherwise. I simply told it as I've experienced it and seen it happen around me. I could have changed the story of Lola's depression, but I think that rather than mythologize that emotional emptiness, it's very important to reflect on it. I don't think it works for us women to wish to be what we aren't, but rather, to look at what is happening to us and to transform ourselves from there (Arredondo 2001: 120).

Novaro refers to a wide-spread phenomenon: the depression of women caught in social promises articulated in romantic songs. Lola's investment in romanticism is presented as a social issue, not an individual one.

The idea that the culture at large encourages women to believe in romantic relationships appears in a marginal but significant scene that takes place on the stairs leading to Lola's apartment. Lola's mother is shown ascending the stairs, where she sees and hears a declaration of love. For lack of a better place, a middle-aged couple is embracing in the corner of the stairs. The sound track catches the man's voice, singing a song about the moonlight and promising the woman an unforgettable night in a hotel. The scene echoes Lola's crisis, caused by having sought the love promised in songs. At the same time, the scene expands Lola's situation to that of other Mexican women, pointing to a romantic deception across class, ethnicity, and age. Thus, the promises that Lola bought in from Omar's songs are not exclusively hers; they are part of a culture in which promises are made to women and then broken.

A Broken Mother in a Cracked City

In *Lola*, promises are also broken in another arena. Broken buildings in Lola's neighborhood connect her personal melancholy to the larger social context; her abandonment is reflected in the cityscape. This section examines the aspects of Lola's social world that alienate her and contribute to her melancholy. These aspects include the place where she lives and the type of work she has to do.

Lola is shot in Tlalpan, one of Mexico City's working class neighborhoods where the effects of the 1985 earthquake were strongest.¹⁹¹ Two major earthquakes, measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale, shook Mexico City on September 19 and 20, 1985. Between 7,000

and 10,000 people died, and it is estimated that 50,000 people lost their homes. After inspection, it became obvious that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the political party in power, had allowed contractors to use low-quality, unsafe materials. The complaints about PRI were not restricted to the issue of construction. In Mari Carmen de Lara's documentary *No les pedimos un viaje a la luna* (We Are not Asking for a Trip to the Moon, 1986), a group of seamstresses denounces their employers, accusing them of not paying them the salaries owed them and not compensating them for the loss of their jobs. The film argues that this was possible because the government sided with the employers. Civil organizations were formed to deal with the catastrophe because the government failed to respond with a plan to assist the victims. Thus, when Lola walks amid broken buildings, empty lots, and graffiti incriminating the government for its reluctance to restore the city, we need to read the cityscape as a historically-specific space that testifies to the government's abandonment of its citizens.

Throughout the film, there is a visual pairing of the city and its citizens, a broken mother and a broken city. In her application for funding from the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE), Novaro wrote a synopsis of the argument she wanted to develop in *Lola*. The synopsis mentions the parallel between the city and its citizens: "Mexico City appears as a backdrop. Cracked after the 1985 seismic movement, the city resembles its inhabitants; hurt and full of life, strong and intimate, broken" (Latina). The idea of a broken city and a broken mother appears in the way in which the film depicts Lola's surroundings. Mexico City's broken poor neighborhoods are in tune with Lola's broken life. For example, at the culmination of Lola's depression, when she realizes that she is no longer capable of caring for her daughter and leaves her at her grandmother's

house, Lola walks by graffiti that directly incriminates the PRI for the damage to the buildings. Novaro explains:

In *Lola*, I was disillusioned with my country's government, especially the PRI, which I think should disappear. I didn't propose that directly, although perhaps it was reflected in a visual way. I used a slogan painted on a wall that says "México sigue en pie" ("Mexico Still Standing") ironically, as a gibe. It was the anger that other Mexicans and I felt because the government was unable to organize assistance after the 1985 earthquake and because it had disseminated lies regarding the true figures and the responsibility of the companies that had constructed the buildings. I angrily contrasted "México sigue en pie" with very strong images, and even had Lola walk with her daughter past a store where you could read: "Death to the PRI, electoral fraud" (118).

In the scene depicting the peak of Lola's depression, as well as in other parts of the film, Novaro makes the government directly responsible for the state of the buildings.

Film critics understood that the broken buildings featured in *Lola* were an accusation against the government. Some thought that Novaro's portrayal of a broken Mexico City was exaggerated (Albarrán and Viñas); others (Velázquez and Man) agreed with Novaro's portrayal. In *Lola*, the protagonist's depression is related to the PRI's corruption; by incriminating the government, Novaro places broken promises to a mother within the social context, making it a case of social melancholy.

In *Lola* the government is accused of abandoning its citizens in a second way, by alluding to the economic crisis that forced the poorest citizens to become part of an informal economy. Unable to make ends meet, many Mexicans in the 1980s had to resort to street vending; selling in the streets became a way of "self-employment" that helped many families survive (Cross). *Lola* directly refers to this informal economy by having Lola and her friends sustain themselves by selling clothes as street vendors. Economic analysts have suggested that in the post-earthquake, economically deprived Mexico City, the government had an ambivalent policy, using street vendors alternatively as scapegoats for urban problems and as political allies (Cross). In the synopsis of *Lola* that Novaro sent to IMCINE, there is a reference to the economic crisis: "Lola's friends: el Duende, Dora, Mudo, are this way [broken]. Street vendors take over the street and are driven away by undercover police. Street vendors who come back to fight every day, trying to win their right to sell on the street" (Latina). The synopsis disparages the position of the government towards street vending; selling in the streets is described as a war in which vendors are urban guerrillas who fight for what is theirs. Film critic Naief Yehya comments that *Lola* denounces the government's "double standard . . . of street selling" (Yehya). On the one hand, the government allows street selling, but on the other, it raids vendors, turning street selling into a clandestine activity.

Street selling is one of the causes of Lola's social melancholy. Several times the film shows the police cracking down on "illegal" street sellers like Lola and confiscating their goods. In one of the scenes, when the police van enters the streets where Lola has her stand, Lola's friend, el Duende, runs down the street announcing the raid. The camera then cuts to a medium shot of Lola that presents a contrast in speed: el Duende was

shown running as fast as he can; Lola is shown motionless. The fact that Lola's friends have to hurriedly gather up her merchandise so the police will not confiscate it stresses her immobility. Her static body is one way in which the film connects abandonment to her depression; her unwillingness or perhaps inability to act are connected to the social reality she lives in. Having been denied secure housing and made to subsist in a policed informal economy, Lola is socially alienated.

Other Readings of *Lola*

Despite the obvious associations the film suggests between a mother's depression and the social context, some film critics and film scholars ignored these associations. Many linked Lola's depression to her personal psychological problems. In *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Oliver proposes that society, by linking mothers' depression to personal psychology, makes mothers into colonized subjects. The critics and scholars who ignore the film's portrayal of Lola as a case of social melancholy show precisely the tendency that Oliver describes. Overall, these reviews are examples of the way in which society understands and explains motherhood and of the difficulty of changing those notions.

Several of these critics and scholars fail to understand the dynamics of depression. In their reviews they argue that Lola is irresponsible in "attempting to elude her role as a mother" (Pérez Turrent 1991: "Retrato"); that she lacked the capacity to think (Viñas 1989, 1991); that she was a "being drifting" who did not know who she was or what she wanted (Ayala Blanco); and that she was a selfish person (Marúa). There were even those who felt shame because people abroad might think that all Mexican women were as irresponsible as Lola (Cato).

From all the negative criticism that the film received, I have chosen to focus on film scholar David William Foster's interpretation of *Lola*. In *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema*, Foster analyzes the representation of the city in several Mexican films, among them *Lola*. Taking a sociological perspective, Foster begins his review with a small introduction about the large number of single women who are heads of household in Mexico City. He says that these women are "trapped in the lower depths of Mexico City economic structure" (134) and suggests that Novaro uses *Lola* to represent all single mothers in Mexican society. Foster's analysis, however, does not support his own thesis.

In "Lola", Foster avoids reading the links the film proposes between *Lola's* problems and her social environment, preferring instead to look for *Lola's* problems in her individual psyche. According to Foster, *Lola* becomes a "vagrant mother . . . because of her meaningless, yet dangerous rebellion against her mother" (139). I interpret this to mean that *Lola's* behavior stems from her inability to separate from her mother and not from her social condition. Foster believes that *Lola's* melancholy comes from her irresponsible choices and her decision not to take family matters seriously. He avoids taking the social context into account; when analyzing the buildings in *Lola*, he recognizes a vague link between the state of the buildings and the 1985 earthquake but fails to link the issue to a corrupt government:

Her apartment building is not a slum, but it is the bare bones in the amenities it provides, and it serves as a point of reference for the surrounding neighborhood, characterized by unfinished buildings, buildings damaged by wear or perhaps by the recurring earthquakes of the city (these cheaply built and poorly maintained concrete structures

are particularly susceptible to the constant seismological activity of the central Mexican valley) (140).

Not only does Foster miss the film's references to the government's role in the physical devastation, he also overlooks the film's accusation about the government's role in the economic devastation experienced by the poorest strata of society, of which Lola is a part. He views it as a given: single women just fall into these bad economic conditions. Foster also ignores the portrayal of Lola as a mother emotionally abandoned by her partner and her culture. He takes for granted that Omar does not have familial responsibilities to fulfill and accuses Lola of seducing men other than her husband without a good reason (139). He even suggests that Omar leaves because Lola does not take good care of him.

Overlooking the social and political circumstances that may justify Lola's depression, Foster views Lola as an example of bad mothering. He writes: "The inevitable near disintegration of Lola's life, therefore, is mostly a lamentable circumstance of her bad choices in her life and her rejection of the specific set of bourgeois values held by her mother" (138). In this quote, rather than seeing alienation as a cause that explains her situation, Foster makes Lola into a perpetrator of bad choices. He then uses her bad choices to prove her immorality and to argue that she is unfit to be a mother. Using the vertical structure of class as a metaphor, Foster suggests that Lola "falls" (138) from the lower-middle class (where her mother lives) to the "casual labor class" (134). Lola's graphical fall from a good neighborhood to a bad one is also a "fall" into immorality. Lola's choice of inserting herself into a working class neighborhood where there are only "dead-end opportunities for women" (136) is, according to Foster, a

bad choice for a mother. He even goes so far as to suggest that she shows signs of becoming a prostitute and of leading her daughter into prostitution as well (143). Foster puts the blame on Lola and not in the social and personal conditions that surround her.

This section has shown the debate about Lola's motherhood. Statements made by Novaro in interviews and in her synopsis sketch indicate that Lola's depression is a case of social melancholy. In contrast, film critics and scholars such as Foster interpret it as a case of personal melancholy. My conclusion, then, is that despite the filmmaker's efforts to tie Lola's depression to social issues, some critics avoid seeing it that way. If one considers the films about Elvira Luz Cruz and the reactions to *Lola* together, one can conclude that perceiving a mother's depression as a case of social melancholy does not depend on whether the case involves a real person (Elvira Luz Cruz) or a fictional character (Lola). It is the assumptions about motherhood that the filmmakers and spectators bring to the film that matter.

Having looked at two mothers through the prism of social melancholy, it is time now to consider the possibility of countering social melancholy.

Giving Lola Love

Love, as defined by Kaja Silverman, is a way to counter social melancholy. Oliver sees the roots of social melancholy in the lack of societal love. Mothers in general, and mothers of color in particular, suffer depression because they do not receive enough love through social support. According to Oliver, maternal depression results from a loss of "a positive image of oneself as loved and lovable available within the dominant culture" (2005: 50). She also believes that "Social melancholy is . . . the inability to mourn the loss of a loved or lovable self." (Oliver 2005:110).¹⁹² Oliver distinguishes her notion of

lost love from that of classical psychoanalysis: “The melancholy of oppression, however, is not Freud’s internalization of a lost love, but the internalization of the loss of a loved or lovable self image” (2005: 121). Oliver’s notion of lost love, then, corresponds to Fanon’s description of the effects of colonization on the psyche of the colonized. According to Oliver, “maternal melancholy is the result of the unavailability of positive representations of motherhood” (2005:110). Oliver stresses the importance of positive images that foster love for the self but does not include any examples from films. In contrast, film scholar Kaja Silverman addresses the issue of cinematic images that foster love for the self.

Idealization-at-a-Distance

In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Silverman discusses idealization, stressing the difference between forms of idealization that foster love and those that do not. Silverman believes that “Idealization means the increase in an object’s value which occurs when it is elevated to the level of the impossible non-object of desire” (40). According to Silverman, some objects are so widely represented as being worthy of idealization that they assume the status of normative ideals. Silverman believes that we are the only ones responsible for the production of ideals, and consequently we have the ability to propose new ways to idealize. Silverman proposes an ethical way to idealize that she calls idealization-at-a-distance. She derives her notion of idealization from Lacan’s concept of sublimation. Unlike narcissistic love, “sublimation works to the credit of the object” (74). Silverman emphasizes the differences between sublimation and narcissistic love when she says: “The all-important undertaking with respect to the domain of images is to idealize at a distance from the self . . . the goal is to confer ideality upon an image which

cannot be even delusorily mapped onto one's sensational body" (45). Narcissistic love is an idealization done from the parameters of the self, while sublimation allows idealizing the other from his or her own parameters. To emphasize the non-narcissistic nature of the idealization she has in mind, Silverman talks about love as a gift to the other, not to the self (74).

Silverman proposes Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* as an example of idealizing as a gift of generous love. In these photographs, Sherman depicts several women trying to appear ideal. The second still, for instance, shows a woman who is looking at herself in a bathroom mirror. The woman is positioned at the center of the photograph, posing in a classical fashion, but beyond the mirror, one sees the ordinary backdrop of the whole bathroom wall. Silverman calls attention to the contrast between the woman's pose, striving after an ideal, and the way the photograph is framed, showing her ordinary circumstances. For Silverman, the contrast between the pose and the framing underscores the distance between the woman's aspiration to ideality and the reality of her everyday life. But Silverman's analysis does not end with this observation; she adds:

But the *Untitled Film Stills* go even further: they promote our identificatory relation not with the ideal imago which the women they depict fail to approximate, but rather with the women themselves, and they make this identification conducive of pleasure rather than unpleasure (207).

According to Silverman, Sherman's photographs invite us to empathize with women in their unsuccessful attempts to achieve ideality. For me, this empathy is a gift of love,

not for an idealized woman, but for a woman who longs for an ideal that is beyond her reach.

Silverman's reading of Sherman's stills can be applied to my analysis of the mother images created by third-wave filmmakers. As in Sherman's photographs, women in third-wave films are portrayed as imperfect. Lola, for instance, cannot handle the pressure of taking Ana to school. The distance between Lola and normative ideals is implicit; unlike the mothers of classical melodramas, Lola cannot cope with taking care of children. Besides presenting women who are far from reaching normative ideals, both Sherman and third-wave filmmakers invite empathy from the audience. There are parallels between the allusion to normative ideals in Sherman's stills and in *Lola*. In Novaro's film, for instance, Lola attends a celebration of Mother's Day in Ana's school. In another instance, Lola is shown drinking a bottle of beer at the foot of a statue to "The Mother." She clearly fails to live up to the ideal depicted by the statue, but her failure is not "conductive of unpleasure". Rather, the film uses humor to evoke empathy for Lola's difficult task of being a mother.

Lola offers a very sympathetic portrayal of a socially marginalized other. The film's solidarity with the main character is made evident in three ways: it presents the responsibility of childcare as a heavy burden; it shows Lola engaged in children's play as a way for her to take temporary breaks from her economic and emotional alienation; and it respects Lola's desires, such as her love of the beach.

Taking care of children is presented as hard work in *Lola*. Lola lives in a world in which institutions, such as schools, place heavy demands on mothers. When Lola goes to her daughter's school, she gets reprimanded by Ana's teacher: "It hurts to see her so

untidy.”¹⁹³ The audience understands the teacher’s complaint by looking at Ana’s uniform; her skirt is shorter than the other children’s, and the hula skirt she wears for a dance recital on Mother’s Day is also too short. In *Lola*, however, the teacher’s complaint is not used to make Lola guilty but rather to raise awareness and compassion in the audience for the tasks that mothers constantly fulfill. Ana’s uniform is also an indirect reference to Lola’s working conditions. Lola has to sew cheap clothes at home in order to sell them in the street and does not have the time or energy to adjust the hem of Ana’s school uniform.

Lola suggests that some of the demands society places on mothers are exaggerated by showing Ana emerging from several risky situations unharmed. For instance, unsupervised Ana dyes a streak of her hair, eats ketchup sandwiches, and drops the house keys from the top of a bridge onto oncoming traffic. According to the logic of the film, Ana is simply copying her mother’s hair and behaving like many children who prefer junk food to healthy food and adult objects to toys. Lola even gives sips of beer to Ana to help her go to sleep (something that is more acceptable in Mexico than in the U.S.). The way in which *Lola* portrays the demands placed on mothers takes some of the pressure off of them, and in so doing, helps to make mothering a less stressful affair.

Lola shows solidarity with the protagonist in yet another way, by showing Lola engaged in children’s play. *Lola* conveys love for the protagonist by showing her pleasure in engaging with Ana. The unspeakable emotions Lola feels when burdened with earning a living and preparing Ana for school are lessened by the rewards Ana brings into her life. Scholars have not paid much attention to Lola’s immersion in Ana’s

world. This is, in part, due to the way mother-child relations have been understood in psychoanalysis. Oliver addresses this issue as follows:

Freud's describes the mother's desire for the child as a desire for the father's penis: the child is a penis substitute that satisfies the woman's penis envy. Although Freud's theory seems objectionable to most feminists, there is a sense in which it is telling. If within patriarchal culture women are valued only or primarily as mothers, then their relation to the social order is through the child. The child is a substitute for access to culture and positions of power. To the depressed mother, the child becomes a substitute for symbols or words. The mother, who has been denied full access to the symbolic, gives up on the symbolic and turns to the child as a substitute, the only compensation available within patriarchal culture (2006: 111).

Freud and Oliver's interpretations of mother-child relations differ. For Freud, mothers' attachment to children is a consequence of their envy of men; for Oliver it is a consequence of their exclusion from the symbolic. Oliver links the mother's engagement in children's play with her abjection from society.

Oliver's idea, that engagement in children's play counters society's alienation of mothers, helps to clarify Lola's relationship to Ana. Toys are the first sign that tells the audience that children's play is important; the camera slowly documents the arrangement of Ana's toys in Lola's apartment. In another instance, the camera shows the almost impossible task of fitting all the inflatable beach toys in the back of the car for an

excursion to the beach. Toys also help Lola and Ana engage in play. From playing with Barbie dolls to dancing at the playground, the time that Lola spends playing with Ana is one of positive affect. Engaging in play is not always relaxing, such as when Lola chooses a gorilla to dance with Ana's Barbie doll and the girl gets upset and refuses to play, but it is still meaningful for Lola.

Lola shows solidarity with the film's protagonist in a third way, by allowing her one of her wishes. There are several instances in the film that indicate that Lola would like to make a trip to the beach. She appears several times lying on the couch of her apartment with her legs up against a wall that is decorated with a huge poster of a beach and palm trees. This poster hints at Lola's wish to relax at the beach; the beach plays an important role in countering Lola's depression.

The occasion to go to the beach appears in the film after Lola and Ana are caught shoplifting, and Lola agrees to have sex with the manager in order to avoid being fined. While Lola is having sex in a parking lot with the manager, Ana is alone at home. The building's electricity goes out, and Ana lights a candle in her bed and then falls asleep without blowing out the candle. When Lola realizes the danger Ana was exposed to, she leaves Ana in her mother's care and takes a weekend trip with her friends to an undeveloped beach.

Critics have understood Lola's trip to the beach in various ways. For some, the beach is a metaphor for freedom and peace (Diez), a place where she can reflect and make decisions about her life (Virgen). For others, such as José María Espinasa, the trip to the beach is an escapist happy ending. This Mexican critic argues that Novaro became so frightened by Lola's depression that she decided to resurrect her graduate thesis, *Una isla*

rodeada de agua (1984), a film in which an adolescent goes to the beach in search of her mother. In particular, Espinasa believes that one “Can’t allow fantasy in a film like that [like *Lola*].”

In *Lola*, going to the beach is first and foremost the fulfillment of a desire and thus needs to be seen as an example of self-love. At the peak of her depression, Lola gives herself what she likes most. Also, the beach in *Lola* is associated with love and caring. Novaro’s synopsis of the film explains that the trip lessens Lola’s depression: “While watching a human landscape of waders, poor people who are unaware of the love they share, we, together with the protagonist, get a brief but profound emotional lesson” (Latina, 2). The phrase “human landscape” establishes a contrast between the space in the city—inhuman—and the space at the beach—human. Implicit in the contrast is the notion of love; love is unavailable in the city but available at the beach. Love is then the reason why the beach helps to counter the dystopian space of the city.

The synopsis also says that both the audience and the protagonist “get a brief but profound emotional lesson.” What Novaro is referring to is an experience at the beach that is conveyed purely visually. The sequence begins with a medium shot of Lola seated outside a café overlooking the beach; she is by herself, and the bright blue color of the café contrasts with Lola’s sad face. The wind pulls her long hair in her face, but she makes no attempt to push it away. She is motionless, watching. We then see a counter-shot of what she is looking at: a local family enjoying an outing at the beach. As Lola watches, a humorous incident takes place and her depression subsides. An elderly man wades into the ocean, and the waves pull his swimming trunks down. Since he doesn’t

seem to realize they have fallen, his granddaughter and daughter try to pull them up for him. Novaro talked to me about the difficulty of shooting the scene:

One of the things that grabbed me in *Lola*, and that I think I was right about, is the scene on the beach when Lola is looking at the old man who goes into the water and pulls down his shorts. I was told that this wasn't appropriate, that narratively—in the classical sense—it wasn't crucial to the story. It so happened, besides, that this scene was very complicated to film because we couldn't get anyone who would agree to let his shorts drop. There are so many women willing to take off their clothes for a sex scene and yet, we couldn't find an actor who would simply play in the water, let his shorts slip off, and let it all hang out. No one would do it, and less so for a small role. There was a moment when I was told, "Don't film it, it's very complicated, what is the point?" But at times like that I think you must listen to that internal voice of yours that says, "Yes, it serves a purpose, I'll sacrifice this other scene, because you must know how to tell what you shouldn't suppress, however crazy it might seem" (152).

For the producers, who were thinking in terms of a narrative based on action, the scene was not necessary. In contrast, for Novaro the scene was pivotal in marking a change in Lola's emotions. After the incident, the camera takes a reverse shot of Lola with a half smile on her face. Lola smiles because she can see in the family a reflection of the love she feels for Ana. The profound emotional lesson we can draw from this experience is

that love matters. After watching the family, Lola is able to go back to Mexico City to take care of Ana. My reading of *Lola* is that love counters depression. Novaro develops her idea of generous self-love in her second feature.

Danzón's Road to Self-Love

Novaro evolves from pointing at the devastating effects of romantic love in *Lola* to turning romantic love into self-love in *Danzón*. Several scholars and film critics seem to be disappointed that, in *Danzón*, Novaro goes back to scenarios from the 1940s to retell a story of lost heterosexual love. *Danzón*, however, proposes a notion of love that is quite different from classical melodramas.⁷ For the protagonist, Julia, romantic love becomes secondary, and accepting and loving herself takes first place.

Danzón turns romantic love into self-love. At first sight *Danzón* might appear to be a traditional romantic narrative. When Julia can't find her dance partner, Carmelo, she leaves Mexico City to search for him in Veracruz. There she has an affair with Rubén, an attractive man much younger than herself. Love for Rubén is not an end in itself; rather it helps Julia get in touch with her own sexuality and better accept and love herself. At the beginning of *Danzón*, Julia is presented as somebody who is not at ease with her sexuality. She reacts with fear when a transvestite called Susy, who becomes her best friend, shows her how to wear makeup. The *Danzón* script explains Julia's feelings: "Julia doesn't know what she fears, but she is afraid of going out with the make-up that Susy put on her."¹⁹⁴ By the end of the film, after she leaves a goodbye note to Rubén and returns to Mexico City, Julia is and looks like a different person. When she meets a friend and shows her the new sexy clothes she bought in Veracruz, her friend is both surprised and happily suspicious. Although she doesn't say anything, her gestures show

that she is thinking: Where did Julia's austere and traditional wardrobe go? Above all, Julia's journey is a search for self-acceptance.

In *Danzón* the song "Antonieta" spells out the notion of self-love. "Antonieta" sounds like many traditional Mexican love songs because its danzón rhythm fits in well with the rest of the film's songs. However, the lyrics don't come from Mexican lore but from a poem by the gay Mexican poet Javier Villarrutia:¹⁹⁵

Love is anguish is a question/ A suspended and suspenseful shining
doubt/ Love is to want to find out all about you/ And at the same time
fearing to finding out/ Love is hearing in your chest/ The rushing of
your blood and the tide/ But love is also closing your eyes/ Letting
dreams flood your body/ Like a river of forgetfulness and shadows/ and
sailing aimlessly adrift/ Because to love is, after all, indolence

This song is not about missing the loved one but about conferring ideality onto the otherness of the self (the parts of the self that we do not want to accept). The love described in "Antonieta" that is directed towards the lover is, in *Danzón*, redirected towards Julia. As the narrative develops, it is as if it were Julia who closes her eyes, letting her dreams flood her body like a river of forgetfulness, and she sails aimlessly adrift. In Veracruz, Julia learns to love herself, she lets herself enjoy the ocean and rests from her tense life in Mexico City.

Creating Images that Foster Love

Paraphrasing Oliver, we could say that third-wave Mexican women filmmakers make lovable images of mothers available to the dominant culture. In 1989, Marisa

Sistach stated in an interview that Mexico needed Mexican images in general and that the female audience needed images of contemporary women in particular. Sistach was referring to a problem studied by sociologist Nestor García Canclini, who reported that only 7% of the films shown in Mexican theaters during 1989-90 were made in Mexico, while the vast majority were made in Hollywood. In an interview with the author, Sistach explained that while she liked some Hollywood films, these films did not provide a reality that she could identify with as a Mexican. "Since in Mexico, women taking care of their children on their own is an everyday occurrence, it seemed essential to me to deal with this topic, because not to have characters on the screen with whom women can identify, which is what happens with Hollywood movies, is a real shortcoming. The cinema I wanted to make was one which Mexican women could identify with" (Arredondo, personal interview, 10). Indeed, the films of third-wave women filmmakers propose a positive identification that can serve to counter mothers' depression.

Conclusion

Positive feminist thought can emerge from questioning society's way of viewing and understanding motherhood. Studying third-wave films requires theories of motherhood that relate the depression of mothers to their position in society and a reconsideration of the meaning of love and idealization. In this chapter, idealization is also put into question, in order to clarify that there is a type of idealization that leads to self-love.

This chapter contrasts ways in which motherhood is understood. There is a tendency among filmmakers, film critics and academics to link a mother's depression to her own problematic psyche. For instance, Cazal considers Elvira Luz Cruz emotionally unstable and even irrational; Foster links Lola's depression to her rebellion against her mother. In

some instances, such as in *Angel de fuego*, the film critics blame Alma's father for her depression. These approaches ignore the importance society plays in the alienation of mothers.

By contrast, third-wave films find the cause of the depression of mothers in the social. These films are not about how difficult it is to be a mother; *Elvira Luz Cruz* shows the protagonist as a colonized subject under the Mexican law, *Lola* points to mothers' emotional abandonment by society and Mexico's government, and *Angel de fuego* portrays the negative effects religion can have on a mother's sense of self.

To counter mother's social melancholy third wave films "illuminate" mothers, requesting empathy for these mothers' conditions from the audience. Third-wave films also counter mothers' social melancholy by opening physical and psychic space for mothers. Contemporary films open psychic space by literally creating a physical space for women, as in the case of Cortés' *Las Buenromero*, *Un fragil retorno*, *El lugar del corazón* and *Hotel Villa Goerne*. In third wave films such as *Una isla rodeada de agua* a woman's subjectivity is conceived as a space with its own limits, as an island. The creation of psychic space and clear limits helps to counter depression. According to Oliver, the opening of psychic space fosters woman's strong sense of self. Third-wave films depict women who have independent identities, such as Edith, who can see the world in her own colors in *Una isla rodeada de agua*, and who have their own ideas, such as Alma's desire to carry over her pregnancy in *Angel de Fuego*. In third-wave films such as *El secreto de Romelia*, psychic space for women is also opened by postulating that a mother and her mother are very different. Third-wave films provide social support for mothers so they can love themselves and be agents.

¹⁶¹ Cortés said: "I don't understand why I was so misogynist toward the men in my exercises at the CCC" (Arredondo 2002, 89).

¹⁶² Cortés explained to me that this idea appears in the novel *La mañana está gris*.

¹⁶³ The photographs are part of Novaro's private collection.

¹⁶⁴ In "Angel de fuego y otros asuntos", Pérez Turrent says: "Dana Rotberg no lanza una mirada comprensiva (¿piadosa?), la suya es una mirada de asombro a un mundo que se le escapa por su complejidad y al mismo tiempo la fascina por sus insospechadas capacidades" (Pérez Turrent 1992).

¹⁶⁵ "Pequeña Alma" and "Desamparada Alma".

¹⁶⁶ "Incestuoso y decrepito padre".

¹⁶⁷ Incest is described in the script as a loving incest, meaning that Alma did not have anyone else who could love her.

¹⁶⁸ "Alma, la trapecista, escupe fuego del Circo Fantasía, es una niña cuyo amor es su padre, quien también sería el padre de su nieto si no muriera de un ataque por andar calenturoso".

¹⁶⁹ El incesto es "un acto de amor desesperado".

¹⁷⁰ "Alma . . . se enfrenta a una realidad incomprensible para ella. En su vientre lleva el producto de amor incestuoso que ha mantenido con su padre el payaso Renato (Alejandro Parodi), hombre enfermo que muere cuando ella más lo necesita".

¹⁷¹ "*Angel de fuego* tiene como punto de partida un incesto que contradice las páginas rojas de los diarios; es un incesto que no nace de la violencia, sino que se asume como una conducta casi natural en un medio hostil en donde la tradicional idea de la familia pierde todas sus convenciones. Inframundo, circo de pobreza, redundancia si la hay, el ámbito en el que Alma (Evangelina Sosa) ha crecido le lleva de una manera casi normal a los brazos de su padre envejecido y enfermo, único lazo afectivo que la trapecista quiere perpetuar".

¹⁷² If we take Freud's Oedipus complex, for instance, we can observe that Freud studies the problem of individuation from the framework of the family. All social aspects that could influence the process of individuation, such as peer pressure or racial and gender tensions at school, are not included in Freud's framework.

¹⁷³ Oliver already used Fanon's theory of colonization in an earlier article entitled "Psychic Space and Social Melancholy" (2002).

¹⁷⁴ In *Elvira Luz Cruz*, there is an actual television clip in which Cruz is sentenced to twenty-three years.

¹⁷⁵ Both were students at Mexico City's film school, the CCC. For her final project in her documentary class, Rotberg chose to feature Luz Cruz's case, and Díez joined forces and helped. Each student was given six cans of a positive film to do his or her exercises. Since six cans are not enough for a 46-minute film, Díez contributed her six cans and worked as Rotberg's assistant (De la Vega 1991b, 6).

¹⁷⁶ Since Rotberg was considered an expert in Luz Cruz's case, Cazals hired Rotberg as his assistant. Rotberg, however, does not want to be connected with the way in which Luz Cruz is represented in Cazals' film. According to Rotberg, the script for *Los motivos de Luz* was already made when she began her work with Cazals (De la Vega: 1991b: 9-10).

¹⁷⁷ Luna's play *La fiera de Ajusco* presents Luz Cruz in a similar light, emphasizing her naiveté and linking her views to her indigenous background.

¹⁷⁸ According to Patricia Vega, "ELC ha promovido mediante sus abogados un juicio— aún sin resolver— contra la cinta por estar basada y distorsionar hechos relacionados con su vida" Elvira Luz Cruz has started, with the help of her lawyers, to sue—although it has not been resolved yet—against Cazals' film for being based on her life and for distorting facts related to her life.

¹⁷⁹ "No me satisfizo en nada el hecho de conocer que se había filmando una película de la tragedia que yo había vivido".

¹⁸⁰ Information drawn from <http://www.revistacinefagia.com/mexico048.htm> on 8/7/2007.

¹⁸¹ As the trial was reviewed, more irregularities surfaced: when Luz Cruz was asked if she could recognize the bodies of the children as her own, her affirmative answer was taken to mean that she had killed them (Gustavo García: 1986).

¹⁸² From the interviews conducted by Díez and Rotberg and included in the film, the audience also deduces that Eduarda and Nicolás are accomplices in the cover up of the killing of the children. When giving her own account of the crime, Eduarda stated that she went to Elvira's house looking for a guitar, and it was there that she saw Elvira strangling the youngest daughter and discovered the murdered children. She then called her son who brought the police.

¹⁸³ Afterwards, Eduarda and Nicolás were in Elvira's house for thirty minutes without any sound; the neighbors believe that this is when they strangled the other children.

¹⁸⁴ The report of Luz Cruz's psychologist reinforces the argument presented by the neighbors. The psychologist says that after seeing Elvira once a week for a year, she could not find any memories that would come from having murdered the children.

¹⁸⁵ Rotberg gave a similar response to Martha Coda in 1985. When Coda asked, "Why doesn't your film attempt to explain the case of Elvira Luz Cruz?", Rotberg answered that she did not know. Instead she gave a description of what had interested her: "The documentary talks about the lacks, the absences, the failures of the Mexican juridical process."

¹⁸⁶ Termina diciendo Eduardo: "Elvira es la ausencia que se vuelve omnipresencia" (Vega de la 1985).

¹⁸⁷ "Por un respeto elemental, las directoras prescinden de los testimonios de la acusada" (García 1986 "Anatomía").

¹⁸⁸ Cazals has a reputation in Mexico for being a filmmaker that makes social denunciation films. In a review of *Angel de fuego*, Mauricio Montiel proposes that *Angel de fuego* takes a disengaged look at social compromise and adds: "The compromise of the spectator with what is being shown in the screen decreases [as time goes by]; it is at this point that social denouncement—so masterfully done by Cazals in *Los motivos de Luz*—fails." For Montiel, Cazals is a master of social denunciation, a fact widely recognized in Mexico. *Los motivos de Luz* is included in the list of the best 100 Mexican films made by the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE). Despite making social denunciation films, he does not find a social basis that explains Luz Cruz's case.

¹⁸⁹ Cazals was much criticized for asserting Luz Cruz's guilt while her case was still being appealed. In 1985, her lawyers requested that the Dirección General de Cinematography (the institution in charge of censoring films) stop *Los motivos*' exhibition, arguing that the film distorted reality.

¹⁹⁰ Juan Luís Guerra's song says: CHORUS: Si tu te vas, si tu te vas,/ mi corazón se morirá (x2)/ si tu te vas./ Eres vida mía todo lo que tengo/ el mar que me baña, la luz que me guía/eres la morada que habito/y si tu te vas ya no me queda nada/ si tu te vas. Eres la montaña que busca mi cuerpo/ el río en la noche, primavera e invierno/ eres lo que sueño despierto,/ y si tu te vas ya no me queda nada. CHORUS: Eres vida mía, el trigo que siembro,/ todo lo que pienso,/ mi voz, mi alegría,/ eres lo que añoro y anhelo/ y si tu te vas ya no me queda nada/ si tu te vas. Eres vida mía, todo mi alimento,/ la historia que rima si estas en mis versos/ eres la cobija, mi aliento/ y si tu te vas ya no me queda nada/ hay no.

¹⁹¹ Novaro indirectly alludes to this relationship when she says: “I’m interested not only in the particular story of Lola and her child: Lola is also the means by which I can reflect profoundly on women, motherhood, and Mexico City” (Arredondo 2001, 120).

¹⁹² Oliver’s notion of love comes from Kristeva’s idea of an Imaginary Father or Third. This agency facilitates the psychological growth of children; the love of the Imaginary Father facilitates the separation of the infant from the maternal body (Oliver 2002: 50). In Oliver’s schema, the Imaginary Father or Third becomes a supportive society.

¹⁹³ Es molesto verla tan desaliñada.

¹⁹⁴ *Danzón*, 71.

¹⁹⁵ According to Novaro it is a “troba yucateca adanzonada”.

Conclusion

In order to fully understand representations of mothers in Mexican film, it is necessary to reconsider the way in which we think about motherhood. My analysis draws on Oliver's explanation of mothers' depression in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*. Oliver posits that any psychology of mothers must take into account the position of mothers in the society in which they live. Likewise, any analysis of cinematic representations of motherhood must look at the social context in which they are produced. In Chapter 1, I suggest that the creation of sympathetic portrayals of Mexican mothers, ones that foster self-love, occurred concurrently with the success of third-wave women filmmakers in the public sphere, both nationally and internationally.

My study contrasts the mother images seen in Golden Age melodramas with those seen in third-wave films made between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. Classical melodramas project an idealized image, the "Ideal of Virgin Motherhood"; third-wave films such as Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz*, Novaro's *Lola*, and Rotberg's *Angel de fuego* provide alternative models. Third-wave films are not about how to be a "good mother" but about how difficult it is to be a mother.

I contrast classical melodramas and third-wave films in three areas: idealization, self-love, and individuation. For concepts of idealization, I draw on Kaja Silverman's *The Threshold on the Visible World*, in which she distinguishes between narcissistic idealization, an idealization of the unattainable, and idealization-at-a-distance, which idealizes what is imperfect. I use these notions to highlight the differences between classical and third-wave films. As an example of the former, I discuss Fernández's *María*

Candelaria, showing that despite its beauty, the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood is problematic, both in its demand for sexually purity, and, more critically, in its demand for idealized behavior. The demands placed on María Candelaria, the film's protagonist, are so great that in the end she dies in the attempt to meet them. From a feminist perspective, it is clear that the Ideal of Virgin-Motherhood has a devastating effect on women, based as it is on the premise that no human woman can hope to be like the Virgin Mary.

Unlike classical melodramas which idealize the unattainable, third-wave films idealize what is imperfect. For example, the protagonist of Novaro's *Lola* is shown as an imperfect mother whom the audience is encouraged to love despite her imperfections. The film argues that her depression arises from social issues: the position of poor mothers in Mexican society, society's propaganda about romantic love, and the indifference and outright hostility of the government. Rotberg's *Elvira Luz Cruz* also idealizes her main character at a distance by encouraging sympathy for a mother who is presented as a colonized subject, colonized by a violent partner and an unjust legal system.

My study stresses the distinction between narcissistic idealization and idealization-at-a-distance because the two processes have such radically different effects on the way mothers see themselves. While classical idealization is conducive to self-hate (mothers can never be good enough), idealization-at-a-distance is conducive to self-love. Drawing on Silverman's analysis of love, I define love as a process that respects the differences of the other. Third-wave narratives promote love for mothers in the sense that they present them as individuals whose differences should be respected and who deserve our compassion. Rotberg's *Angel de fuego* exemplifies this kind of generous love by asking

that the protagonist be loved for her attempt to be herself, in her desire to bear her child despite its incestuous origins.

My analysis also contrasts classical and third-wave narratives in the area of individuation. In Chapter 2, I argued that classical mothers are directed to see themselves as always linked to and mediating between other people. The protagonist of *Una familia de tantas* is a good example of this; her psychic space is filled with links to her husband and children. Mexico, with its Catholic traditions and in particular its construct of the Virgin Mary, is particularly susceptible to this notion. In classical films women who individuate, who have a sense of themselves as separate individuals, are forced to take down their boundaries. A case in point is the protagonist of *Doña Bárbara*, who in the end has to literally take down her fences, representative of her psychic space.

In contrast, post-1986 films encourage their female characters to occupy a space of their own, separate from the members of their families. In Cortés' *Las Buenromero*, *Un frágil retorno*, *El lugar del corazón*, and *Hotel Villa Goerne*, the physical space occupied by the female characters becomes a metaphor for their psychic space, for their independence and individuation. In Novaro's *Una isla rodeada de agua*, the protagonist is encouraged to maintain an identity that has limits, represented by the contours of the island. Third-wave films create psychic space for women whereas classical melodramas flatten it.

The three aspects of mother images that I analyze—idealization, self-love, and individuation—are interrelated. A mother's ability to create an individuated, separate sense of self depends on her ability to love that self, an ability which is encouraged by loving acceptance by a society free of unrealistic, idealized expectations.

My analysis of mother images in Mexican film in the 1980s and 1990s shows that third-wave films were created during a time of social transition. On the one hand, women were still exposed to a patriarchal system that treated them as abject subjects. Motherhood was idealized, but mothers themselves were alienated. My examination of Cazals' *Los motivos de Luz* shows that blame can all too easily be placed on mothers rather than on the social conditions which surround them. Likewise, Foster's analysis of *Lola* places the blame for the protagonist's depression on personal, rather than social, pathologies. And the responses of film critics to *Angel de fuego* reveal the resistance of the Mexican public to a film which challenges them to respect and love a protagonist who does not conform to normative ideals.

However, the reception given third-wave films was not all negative. In calling for a reconsideration of motherhood, third-wave filmmakers touched a chord with some film critics and gained international recognition for their message and their art. The fact that they were able to create and exhibit their challenging films also speaks to the changing cultural milieu. Their films, in turn, may add momentum to changes in Mexican society. The loving portrayal of imperfect mothers by third-wave filmmakers may help Mexico "imagine" and thus create a society in which mothers are better able to love themselves and freer to develop their inner life.

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