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Imagining a Festive Nation: Queer Embodiments and Dancing Histories of Mexico

By

Manuel Ricardo Cuellar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Hispanic Languages and Literatures

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in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Estelle Tarica, Chair  
Professor Ivonne del Valle  
Professor Juana María Rodríguez  
Professor Robert McKee Irwin

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## Abstract

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by

Manuel Ricardo Cuellar

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

with a Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Estelle Tarica, Chair

This dissertation analyzes how embodied cultural performances of the nation complicate the construction of Mexicanness, *lo mexicano*, as mestizo and heteronormative. My research takes us back to the notion of *lo mexicano* to show how from the beginning it had an embodied, performative element that materialized the idea of national identity. By focusing on the role that performance has played in the emergence of a national imaginary, I draw attention to the body's capacity to represent norms but also to play with them, inscribing new, if ephemeral, meanings and archives within hegemonic identities. In my research I understand staged instances of *lo mexicano* as festive practices that created contested, polyphonic fields of action. Highlighting embodied knowledges and practices enables me to add a new dimension to analysis of Mexican cultural production, which has generally privileged discursive and visual modes of representation, such as muralism, golden age cinema, and the novel of the Mexican Revolution. The performance of bodies in public places reveals a much more complex picture, articulating female, indigenous, and queer embodiments of *lo mexicano* alongside the dominant embodiment of monumental masculinity. My work underscores how festive cultural performances create a sense of corporeal expression, impacting the ideas, practices, and institutions that have shaped Mexican citizen formation and national belonging, particularly in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. The festive performances I explore ultimately draw attention to the multiple ways Mexican citizens have embodied the nation, from the post-revolutionary period to the present.

Chapter one looks into "La Noche Mexicana," a two-day event that took place in Chapultepec, Mexico, in 1921 during the centennial festivities of Mexican Independence, in order to analyze the significance of the embodiment of the "popular" as it was staged during this massive fiesta celebration. By looking at photographs, programs, and newspaper articles, I examine how the contrast between imaging, imagining, and embodying the nation created different publics and hence iterations of *lo mexicano*. I propose to think of *lo mexicano* as an assemblage in order to focus on the contingency of the temporal, spatial, and corporeal registers that render the nation legible and consumable. In this sense, the chapter highlights the ways bodies in motion bring to the fore the limits and the excesses of the fiction of the

nation. Performing the nation through bodies calls attention to how corporeal actions reveal the contingent nature of re-presenting Mexico. If the staging of cultural performances of Mexico during the centenary aimed to form a national body, the actual embodiment of the nation complicated the coherence, legibility, and even unity of the “popular” character of the nation. Yaqui Indians, tehuanas, jaraneros, chinas, and charros were summoned to embody Mexico, yet in so doing, their own bodies conjured other Mexicos.

Chapter two focuses on the consolidation of dance, especially *folklórico*, as a festive mode of representation of Mexican culture and how it contributed to the formation of Mexican citizens. In particular, I consider the work of Nellie Campobello and her impact on the emergence of *folklórico* dance as a form of pedagogy through which the state formed its citizens and a means to understand, read, and consume Mexican imaginaries of the nation. As a dancer herself and an influential choreographer along with her sister Gloria Campobello, Campobello’s career at once contributed paradoxically to the consolidation of *lo mexicano* as hyper-masculinized and mestizo while creating spaces for female and queer enactments of national subjects. This chapter thus considers her collaboration with the *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)*, her work at the *Escuela Nacional de Danza (END)* as a founding member and director from 1937 to 1985, and the publication of *Ritmos indígenas de México* (1940) in order to examine how Nellie Campobello’s own rendition of *lo mexicano* complicated hegemonic understandings of the nation through her own body. Her corporeal and choreographic practices performatively challenged and undid what she purportedly aimed to represent, particularly in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. Campobello’s work and bodily actions therefore underscored the ambiguities and tensions that I read as queer, particularly in this period of the consolidation of a unified, masculinist, mestizo nation.

Chapter three explores the performance of discourses of the nation as lived experiences. In this chapter, I analyze the “danza de los *mecos*,” which is performed annually by approximately twelve young Nahua males—half dressed as women and two dressed as devils—during the fiesta-carnival in honor of *Tlacatecolotl*—the “owl man” deity who embodies good and evil. I argue that the dancing of the *mecos* functions as a way for them to mark ethnically their space while simultaneously allowing for performers to gesture towards queer imaginaries that challenge hetero-patriarchy. I explore how indigeneity produces and is produced through the festive bodies of the *mecos* in relationship to the folklorization of the nation, of *lo mexicano*. This chapter draws heavily from ethnographic performance research and the interviews I conducted in the Nahua-speaking community of Tecomate, Chicontepec, Mexico in the spring of 2014 and 2015. In this chapter, therefore, I advance an approach that queers the archive of conventional studies on indigeneity in the humanities by engaging the topic as a lived experience and an embodied problematic and not just as an ideological manifestation. I examine bodily acts as the intersection between imagination, ritualized behavior, and playfulness in order to interrogate how the *fiesta-carnaval* operates as a conduit for the transmission of knowledge, social memory, and norms in the construction of indigenous subjects vis-à-vis *lo mexicano*. I contend that the moving bodies of the *mecos* conjure not only normalizing regimes of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but also a sociality and a world-making praxis that operate as a means of indigenous knowledge production and transmission of social memory. The chapter concludes with the current process of folklorization that has recently impacted the municipality of Chicontepec, thereby influencing communal indigenous ritualistic practices. The recent and ongoing *folklórico* rendition of the *mecos* by the municipal *folklórico* group, Meztli, at once demonstrates the

tensions and contradictions of claiming a Nahua sense of identity while simultaneously proclaiming a sense of regional and national belonging through dance.

A mis eternos maestros: mamá y papá. A mi familia, gracias a la cual soy y estoy.  
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Life is a learning journey and I am blessed to be surrounded by inspiring friends who  
continuously challenge me to be better and nurture me. Gracias.

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*Esta también es una práctica de comunalidad.  
Como todos los textos, este también fue escrito junto  
con y a partir del trabajo imaginativo de otros, justo en  
el horizonte de esa mutua pertenencia al lenguaje que  
nos vuelve a veces, con suerte, parte de un estar-en-  
común que es crítico y festivo. Aquí también, pues, su  
devoción. Aquí su tiempo. Y el nuestro.*  
Cristina Rivera Garza

Esta tesis doctoral es ante todo un voto de confianza.

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## **Imagining a Festive Nation: Queer Embodiments and Dancing Histories of Mexico**

In 1921, Mexico celebrated the centennial of its Independence from Spain for the first time after the Revolution of 1910. Before the festivities, which took place in late September, *El Universal*, one of Mexico's most widely circulated newspapers, published a short piece in May announcing the "popular" character of the centennial celebrations. "Serán populares las fiestas del Centenario" read the title of the piece listing the name of the committee members, including Emiliano López Figueroa as the president and Martín Luis Guzmán, the soon to be great novelist of the Mexican Revolution, as the secretary. The insistence on the "popular character" of the festivities suggested both a change and a continuation of how Mexican national celebrations were to take place. Like the Porfirian regime that had previously celebrated Mexico's glorious indigenous past while systematically ignoring the majority of its present indigenous and rural populations, post-revolutionary Mexican political leaders had decided to continue with the public performances of Mexican nationalism. But they also attempted to reach out to the vast numbers of the population recently impacted by the Revolution. The aim was to attract people from all "social classes" to participate, according to the article.

A second article, published two weeks later in early June, emphasized once again the importance of the accessibility of such festivities, which had previously been designed exclusively for the privileged classes. It stressed that the celebrations were to be both festive and educational, and furthermore, that they would include a "physical" component:

Por primera vez en México, el pueblo tendrá acceso a espectáculos que siempre habían sido dedicados a las clases privilegiadas; esta disposición que es muy acertada, tendrá por objeto además de un carácter festivo, el de educación, ya que muchos de esos espectáculos consistirán en conciertos, funciones teatrales, representaciones de ópera, juegos florales, sin olvidar los torneos de viriles deportes que seguramente serán el ejemplo para que se instituyan en nuestro país agrupaciones que procuren el desarrollo de nuestro [sic] cultura física. ("El pueblo tendrá acceso" 12)

For the organizers of the centennial celebrations, the spectacles and public events were to be considered examples of citizen formation; they would be festive and educational instances, particularly those related to physical or embodied culture, "cultura física," for the public to develop a sense of national belonging. As this quote demonstrates, Mexico's post-revolutionary nationalist thinkers emphasized shaping national bodies masculinized through exercise or "viriles deportes" but also, and perhaps more profoundly, through the embodied performance of cultural identity.

My research takes us back to the notion of Mexicanness, *lo mexicano*, to show how from the beginning it had an embodied, performative element that materialized the idea of national identity. By focusing on the role that performance has played in the emergence of a national imaginary, I draw attention to the body's capacity to represent norms but also to play with them, inscribing new, if ephemeral, meanings and archives within hegemonic identities. I show that the moving bodies of festive productions, such as the centenary celebrations I mentioned, contrast with our more conventional image of *lo mexicano*, understood as static,

hyper-masculine, and mestizo—monumentalized, for instance, in the stoic figures depicted in David Alfaro Siqueiro's mural, *From Porfirianism to the Revolution*, and metaphorically exemplified by Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. Post-revolutionary Mexico intensified the Porfirian expansion of the "national" to include popular sectors, particularly during the 1920s and 30s. Parades, beauty contests, massive performances, exhibitions, music festivals, and other such festivities aimed at reconfiguring the notion of the popular and the indigenous to be included by the idea of the national. The performance of these bodies in public places revealed a much more complex picture, articulating female, indigenous, and queer embodiments of *lo mexicano* alongside the dominant embodiment of monumental masculinity.

Throughout this work, I analyze these events and practices as cultural performances in order to examine how they produce a particular meaning of Mexicanness, and also how that meaning is consumed and reproduced by participants and spectators. David Guss, in his work on the impact that public events play in the construction of national imaginings, says of "festive forms" that they help us better understand the shifting nature, actors, meanings, and scenarios and show how a given group of people responds to "contemporary historical and social realities" (23). I take Guss's idea that festive forms have the capacity to "produce new social imaginaries," a perspective that allows me to reflect upon the undoing, redoing, and simply doing of discourses of *lo mexicano* (13). In my research I think of staged instances of *lo mexicano* as festive practices that created contested, polyphonic fields of action. Highlighting embodied knowledges and practices enables me to add a new dimension to analysis of Mexican cultural production, which has generally privileged discursive and visual modes of representation, such as muralism, golden age cinema, and the novel of the Mexican Revolution. My work ultimately underscores how festive cultural performances created a sense of corporeal expression, impacting the ideas, practices, and institutions that have shaped Mexican citizen formation and national belonging, particularly in terms of race, gender, and sexuality.

My dissertation project, therefore, draws from contemporary scholarship on performance, queerness, and indigeneity to propose an alternative reading to studies about Mexican national culture. Rather than thinking of *lo mexicano* as an over-determined, monolithic notion, I trace a genealogy of Mexican nationalism focusing on dancing bodies in public spaces in order to bring out the importance of memory, imagination, and movement. I draw attention to how embodied iterations of the nation complicate the construction of *lo mexicano* as mestizo and heteronormative. Festive practices underline to what extent contested ideas of race, gender, and sexuality have built and mediated social imaginaries of Mexico. I analyze how written, photographic, and choreographic renderings of a festive Mexico highlight the role of dance for processes of citizen formation and national belonging from the immediate post-revolutionary era to the present. Thus, my dissertation proposes these festive instances as hermeneutic tools to underscore the contested and unstable process of the configuration of *lo mexicano*.

In my work, I address cultural performances of *lo mexicano* in order to trace a genealogy that is both more cosmopolitan and more local/indigenous than generally acknowledged—one that contests normative ideas of race, gender, and sexuality and, therefore, political and cultural ideologies in modern Mexico. Chapter one looks at the period of 1920s and at elite artists and choreographers who staged a "popular" version of *lo mexicano* in public places and developed festive renditions that operated as the State's

pedagogical practice in the creation of national subjects. Analyzing photographs and periodicals from the period, I examine how “La Noche Mexicana,” a massive celebration in Chapultepec during the centennial festivities in 1921, shaped understandings of the embodiment of the popular and the mestizo—of *lo mexicano*. Chapter two then moves to an examination of *folklórico* dance and the work of renowned novelist and choreographer Nellie Campobello. I show how Campobello’s dance career contributed simultaneously to the institutionalization of *lo mexicano* as hyper-masculinized mestizos and to the creation of spaces for female and queer embodiments of national subjects. Finally, chapter three looks at festive forms as a lived experience through the study of a contemporary carnival celebration in a Nahuatl-speaking community in Chicontepec, Veracruz. My fieldwork there demonstrates how indigenous subjects resort to their imagination, memory, and ritualized behavior during the *fiesta-carnaval* as a conduit for the transmission of knowledge and norms of indigeneity vis-à-vis *lo mexicano*.

I therefore consider the festive as an analytical category to argue for the significance of our methodological frameworks in shaping objects of study. I think of my work as a “queer assemblage” in order to suggest a different embodied register of *lo mexicano* that complicates dominant models of subordination and resistance. Therefore, my dissertation addresses the methodological implications of privileging embodied practices found in dance performance and popular rituals, highlighting other means of knowledge circulation beyond the written word. Critics have long privileged literary and visual representations of *lo mexicano* as objects of study, but they have ignored the importance of performance in the process of nation formation. My dissertation argues that performance, especially the experience of the festive as a physical and corporeal manifestation, played an equally important role in shaping political and cultural ideologies. It addresses the intersection between the literary, the visual, and the performative. In doing so, it argues for a re-articulation of *lo mexicano* that re-positions the body at the center of Mexican identity construction.

In this introduction, I make a case for the importance of looking at performances and embodiments of *lo mexicano* as contested, ambivalent sites. First, I will provide a brief historical overview of the consolidation of *lo mexicano* as mestizo and heteronormative and the attendant dominant narrative of the emergence of a mestizo State in the aftermath of the armed and cultural phases of the Mexican Revolution. Second, I will move to a discussion of the performative elements that have conditioned Mexican cultural expressions, particularly festive State rituals and its relationship to power, which were already present since pre-Hispanic times and during the colonial period. Then, I will address the theoretical implications of a methodological approach centered on gestures, dance, and embodiment—the lived experience of a national cultural identity. Finally, I will queer the archive of *lo mexicano* in order to explore the tensions highlighted by embodied iterations of the nation. Through my examples in this dissertation, I show how the consolidation of a festive nation functioned as a central mode of meaning-making for Mexico’s post-revolutionary project of modernization.

### **On the Cultural Politics of *lo mexicano* and the Mestizo State**

The active promotion and celebration of a performative nationalistic ritualized behavior is perhaps best exemplified by the Porfirian regime between 1876 and 1910. The *Porfiriato* consolidated what has since become the primary means of performing *lo mexicano*

as well as Mexican history. It inaugurated the co-optation by the nation of certain aspects of indigenous populations and the establishment of a particular narrative to tell its past. Barbara A. Tenenbaum claims that the “reevaluation of the Aztecs,” which inaugurated a “neindigenist style” was central to the configuration of (creole) nationalism during the *Porfiriato* (140). According to the author, “[t]he official historians not only used the symbolism of the Aztecs to validate Díaz’s stewardship of the country but also intended to use the monument of Cuauhtémoc and the official veneration of the ‘Aztecs’ to reconfirm the power of Mexico City and its right to rule the nation by inheritance” (141). Claims to Aztec imperial legacy helped promote a centralization of the State. However, the Porfidians also resorted to France for inspiration and legitimation. Reforma Avenue, for instance, aimed to impress foreign capital imitating Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s restructuring of Champs Elysées, which contrasted with the Alameda, a space for the people (143). Díaz’s regime was therefore characterized by two fronts: the Francophile progressives and the nationalist mythologizers (147). Indeed, Reforma Avenue became the epitome of the cosmopolitan, modern city, while showcasing the monumental indigenous history of Mexico’s past.

The Díaz’s regime attempted to unify the ethno-racial diversity of Mexico, thereby prompting the emergence of a “mestizo State.”<sup>1</sup> As Joshua Lund contends in “The Mestizo State: Colonization and the Indianization in Liberal Mexico,” the establishment of the “mestizo State” would be characterized by a double bind: “On the one hand, Mexico’s indigenous inhabitants are the authentic source for a cultural patrimony that has coalesced into the nation; on the other hand, that same nation is founded on their abandonment” (1418). This conflict brought to the fore the so-called “problema del indio” that became the racial trademark of Mexican nationalism. The Mexican Revolution, paradoxically, continued with the construction of a mestizo nationalistic narrative, consolidating it as the meta-discourse that articulated the nation. Even though it rhetorically aimed to recognize the contribution of the diverse ethnic and popular sectors of the population, the post-revolutionary government resorted to the *mestizaje* as a “national fiction,” thereby erasing and excluding other ethno-racial configurations. Post-revolutionary Mexico then launched a cultural campaign to produce, circulate and unify the nation. Two important works further consolidated *lo mexicano* as mestizo: *Forjando patria* by Manuel Gamio in 1916 and the promulgation of the Constitution of 1917. In *Naciones intelectuales: la fundación de la modernidad literaria mexicana*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado argues that unlike the thinkers that proposed colonial Mexico, “criollo” and Catholic, as the ideal nation, Gamio’s seminal study best articulated the integration of the indigenous populations into the project of *mestizaje* and attended to the “secularizing spirit” of the Constitution of 1917 by “synthesizing” the values and demands of a movement that had until then lacked a “clear intellectual guidance” (22).<sup>2</sup> The emergence of *mestizaje* was, in effect, the result of a cultural and political enterprise. In *Forjando Patria*, Gamio gestured towards the incorporation of the indigenous populations and as a strategy to deal with the numerous indigenous groups. He maintained that in order to

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<sup>1</sup> According to Peter Wade, “ethnicity is...about cultural differentiation, but it tends to use a language of *place* (rather than wealth, sex, or inherited phenotype)... On a more practical level, if ethnicity invokes location in a cultural geography, it may be the case that the phenotypical traits used in racial discourse are distributed across

<sup>2</sup> Rick López reminds us that contrary to the presumption that Hispanophobia dominated the cultural politics, particularly immediately after the Revolution, “the mainstream perspective among the elite and middle class in Mexico City remained focused on Spanish Colonial heritage” (68).

“incorporar al indio no pretendamos ‘europeizarlo’ de golpe; por el contrario, ‘indianicémonos’ nosotros un tanto, para presentarle, ya diluida con la suya, nuestra civilización, que entonces no encontrará exótica, cruel y amarga e incomprensible” (96). Gamio’s idea of a “national culture” could only be derived from a “cultura intermedia” or “mestiza,” which “acabará por imponerse cuando la población, siendo étnicamente homogénea, la sienta y la comprenda. No hay que olvidar que esta cultura es la resultante de la europea y de la indígena, o prehispánica reformada” (98). The emergence of a national culture, following Gamio’s ideas, presumed the seamless integration of the indigenous culture to the European values. Despite insisting on the “Indianization” of Mexican society, Gamio clearly believed that it was the “Prehispanic” culture the one that needed to be acculturated in order to partake in the future of *mestizaje* as the metaphor, discourse, and mechanism that were to define the Mexican nation.

José Vasconcelos was the other great ideologue of the philosophy of *mestizaje* as the principal marker not just of Mexico, but of Latin America. In 1925, he published *La raza cósmica*, where he advanced a theory of Pan-Americanism celebrating the fusion of multiple races: “En la América española ya no repetirá la naturaleza uno de sus ensayos parciales, ya no será la raza de un solo color, de rasgos particulares...; lo que de allí va a salir es la raza definitiva, la raza síntesis o raza integral, hecha con el genio y con la sangre de todos los pueblos y, por lo mismo, más capaz de verdadera fraternidad y de visión realmente universal” (98-99). Vasconcelos embraced an “assimilationist” stance in regards to the “raza cósmica” o “raza síntesis.” Whereas Gamio proposed to think of *mestizaje* as the future of Mexico, Vasconcelos took it a step further to transcend the geographical boundaries of the nation in order to suggest the *mestizaje* as the future not of Latin American, but of the human race. His notion of *mestizaje* encompassed a merging of all races that would engender the “cosmic race” or the “race of bronze.” At the national level, this became crucial as the racial ideology of *mestizaje* privileged the mestizo as the principal marker of Mexican nationalism.

Members of the intellectual, cultural, and political elites constantly marked indigenous people as non-contemporaneous subjects, “Pre-Hispanic,” and, therefore outside of a shared spatio-temporal historical conjunction. Their ambivalent role signaled the contradictory consequences of the process of modernization: on the one hand, indigenous groups aimed to represent the “essence” of *lo mexicano*, on the other, they needed to be domesticated and modernized to be part of the nation. Alan Knight argues that post-revolutionary leaders understood the armed indigenous mobilizations as a commitment to the State and to the process of nation building. Such indigenous agency, however, needed to be coordinated and directed by the State, which operated as a “social arbitrator” among the various ethnic groups that formed the Mexican nation (83). Once the armed conflict stopped, the “social arbitration” was carried out by the political and intellectual elites. Both Gamio and Vasconcelos operated as cultural and social mediators between the people and the State. In fact, they “confiaban que el humanismo, la estética mestiza y la ciencia antropológica podrían redimir una sociedad injusta... [Ambos] impulsaron la ‘mezcla racial y cultural’ como la única vía para crear la homogeneidad a partir de la heterogeneidad” (Alonso 176). The consolidation of an “estatismo estético” was the direct result of these cultural mediations, which inaugurated a “mestizo aesthetics” characterized by a visually indigenous culture (173).

Perhaps the most well recognized example of the cultural politics of a “mestizo aesthetics” is the development of Mexican muralism. During the presidency of Álvaro

Obregón, José Vasconcelos initiated as president of the Ministry of Education a national campaign of educational and cultural reforms. With the sponsorship of the State, he summoned Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco y David Alfaro Siqueiros, among others. Cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis rightly asserts that muralism was crucial for the creation of a national public due to its pedagogical function: “el muralismo traslada a la vista del público o la sociedad, las ideas de Nación y Humanidad. Según [los muralistas] lo que hacen es Historia, es alegoría mítica, es democratización de la belleza” (*La cultura* 96-97). It is through the “democratization of beauty” that the notions of a “Pueblo” as well as “Arte” and “Historia” are transmitted to the masses who were mainly illiterate. In fact, the muralists resorted to nationally significant buildings, such as the National Palace and the Ministry of Public Education, where “they idealized the pre-Hispanic past, empathized with Mexico's masses, heaped derisive scorn on Spanish conquerors and Yankee capitalists, and elevated popular leaders like Zapata to a pantheon of heroes” (Skidmore and Smith 232). Even though not all murals centered around the representation of the indigenous, those that portrayed them emphasized the Pre-Hispanic civilizations and/or the conquest. The emphasis of these cultural projects therefore underscored the creation of a mestizo visual narrative that simultaneously recognized the contributions of indigenous peoples (but those that existed before the colony) and emphasized the emergence of the “Pueblo” as the bearer of Mexican History.

Hence, the Mexican Revolution emerged as a process of national reconstruction that foregrounded *mestizaje* as a “national fiction” and as a cultural “aesthetics” that would also impose an understanding of *lo mexicano* as heteronormative.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use the term *lo mexicano* instead of *mexicanidad* in order to signal not only the racial implications of the term, as I already discussed them, but also the gender and sexual inscriptions that it enables. The Revolution of 1910 inaugurated a period in Mexican history where hypermasculinity became the national heteronormative paradigm. This period was characterized by a reconfiguration of masculinity. According to Jean Franco, the Revolution promoted a “messianic spirit” that transformed men into supermen, relating virility with the promise of social renovation, marginalizing women as a result (102). Rebellion and machismo became synonyms with the aggressiveness of the popular resistance to oppression (Parra 16). Max Parra claims that machismo became “socially acceptable” because it symbolized an expression of individual and political power (16). The idea of a (masculinized) rebellion and nationalism therefore became the dominant modality to express a notion of political power and mestizo national imaginaries in the cultural and political realms, underscoring how race, gender, and sexuality impacted the “narration of the nation,” to use the words of Homi K. Bhabha.

Mexican masculinity has been fundamental to understand the construction of a national identity. The hypermasculine mestizo man came to represent the national character. Robert McKee Irwin, in *Mexican Masculinities*, contends that “male homosocial bonding” has come to allegorize national unity. Nevertheless, homosexuality and male effeminacy constantly threaten such unity. Irwin recalls the arrest of the “famous 41” in 1901 as a pivotal moment that inscribed transvestism, homosexuality, and male effeminacy at the core of

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<sup>3</sup> I follow Lauren Berlant’s and Michael Warner’s definition of heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms” (548).

Mexican nationalism. According to the author, the arrest of the transvestites in 1901 “introduced male effeminacy and homosexuality as both the other that would define a macho heterosexual national model and an other that in fact was itself intrinsically Mexican, and that from that moment on would be viewed, albeit reluctantly by many, as an undeniable element of national culture” (xii). Thus it is not surprising that two of the most iconic archetypes of the Mexican character are *el pelado* and *el chingón*, proposed by Samuel Ramos in 1934 and Octavio Paz in 1950, respectively. In *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*, Ramos proposes *el pelado* as “la expresión más elemental y bien dibujada del carácter del mexicano” (119). Defined by his lower class status and his precarious living conditions, *el pelado* pretends to be invincible and untouchable, or as Ramos describes him, “un animal que se entrega a pantomimas de ferocidad para asustar a los demás, haciéndole creer que es más fuerte y decidido. [Sin embargo,] tales reacciones son un desquite ilusorio de su situación real en la vida, que es la de un cero a la izquierda” (119). His hypermasculine performance, however, simply reveals his status of inferiority, of being “un cero a la izquierda.” In *El laberinto de la soledad*, Octavio Paz further elaborates the idea of Mexican hypermasculinity as derived from an inferiority complex by attributing it to the physical and spiritual rape of Mexico at the time of the conquest. Mexico’s *chingón*, indeed the symbol of *mestizaje*—“el hijo de la chingada,” is the product of a rape, and consequently he must constantly reassert his masculinity. Paz insists that *el chingón* must prove his hypermasculinity as the one who dominates, transgresses, as “el que chinga”: “El que chinga jamás lo hace con el consentimiento de la chingada.... Lo chingado es lo pasivo, lo inerte, lo abierto, por oposición a lo que chinga, que es activo, agresivo y cerrado” (85). Paz succinctly captures the precariousness of Mexican masculinity: “Para el mexicano la vida es una posibilidad de chingar o de ser chingado” (86). Both *el pelado* and *el chingón* engage in hypermasculine performances in order to reaffirm a constantly threatened sense of masculinity. In fact, “they pose as virile men,” to quote Irwin once again (192).

As a means to organize human difference, configure an aesthetic vision, and foster group identification, the mestizo as a racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized category has thus been paramount in the development of Mexican national narratives. The emergence of a mestizo State cannot be disentangled of the cultural politics I have briefly explained. In *The Mestizo State: Reading Race in Modern Mexico*, Joshua Lund proposes race as a means to rethink the cultural history of Mexico. He conceives race as both a discursive and material practice and utilizes it to discuss the notion of the “mestizo State.” According to Lund, the mestizo State names “Mexico’s institutions of sovereignty,” “resonates symbolically as a way of indicating a ‘state of being’ that can define a national subjectivity and a national family,” and “resonates materially as a historical-political process of state formation and capitalist penetration . . . , by drawing on a discourse of race” (xv). I engage Lund’s theorization of the mestizo State in order to offer a different dimension of the cultural history of Mexico. This study foregrounds and expands the embodied dimension of the racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized process of nation formation, which has been predominantly absent in literary and visual analyses of Mexican nationalism. Even though the mestizo State may operate as the primary frame of reference for the enactments of *lo mexicano*, I ultimately want to draw attention to how its very own embodiment allows for the possibilities of imagining and even inhabiting it otherwise.

### **State Rituals, Fiestas, and Power**

Embodied cultural performances, such as rituals, celebrations, and other public cultural manifestations, have dominated the public scene since pre-Colombian times in Mexico. Mesoamerican rituals, especially among the Nahua communities, structured indigenous daily lives. Indigenous communities engaged in ritualistic celebrations in order to form and organize spatial and temporal references and mark key moments in their collective lives. The arrival of the Spanish and eventual conquest of the Triple Alliance or the so-called Aztec Empire impacted the relationship of Mesoamerican populations to their environments, their gods, and themselves. This drastic episode would eventually change how they perceived and understood time and space. There was a radical difference in regards to native ritual manifestations: “native performances seem to have been both a representation *of* and a presentation *to* the gods” (Taylor and Townsend 3, emphasis in the original). Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend remind us of the importance that performance had in Mexico and in other parts of Latin America, “as a means of physically and symbolically incorporating audiences into the national framework” (15). With the arrival of Europeans, performances operated as an epistemological means for both groups to make sense of each other and an important mechanism to “maintain and contest social authority” (4). William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French state that “Spaniards legitimated their right to rule through language and ceremony” (xiii). Despite the fact that Spaniards held power, the indigenous people actively participated in ceremonies and rituals, which continuously offered the possibility for re-signifying such practices.

Rituals and ceremonies contributed to the formation of communities. As “meaning making systems,” to borrow the terminology of Taylor and Townsend, performances allowed for the (re)configuration of “cultural memories and political identities” (25). Simply stated, these embodied cultural expressions acted as a means to transmit “local knowledges.” I follow Eric Van Young’s definition of “local knowledges” as “the contingent, historical, and even personalized understandings that groups of people and communities bring to ideas and cultural complexes shared in a general way with other groups” (344). These forms of knowledge shape local understandings about socio-cultural and politico-economic processes at play in the configuration of a given community and nation. At stake is the relation between hegemonic structures of community making through ritual performance and its local workings. One of the key features of the consolidation of the Mexican nation-state is precisely its performative character as rituals have long marked its formation. According to Van Young, “the partial transfer of sacrality from systems of religious ideas and forms of worship to the cult of the nation-state marks the passage of Mexico from colony to nation” (345). He further argues that the “*policía* (state regulation of public life) went hand in hand in independent Mexico with that of public ritual and ceremonial, both converging in heightened state power legitimated by affective loyalty to a nation and by material advancement; or, at least, that was the ideal scenario” (353-54). A ritualistic organization of social structures facilitated the transmission and policing of symbolic and material culture and knowledge.

In effect, a quasi-ritualistic mode of “presentation and representation” of *lo mexicano* characterized its circulation as symbolic and material culture. In this sense, I agree with Claudio Lomnitz’ analysis of the importance of rituals in relation to the construction of Mexico. Lomnitz points out that rituals provided the means for the appropriation of the State while simultaneously creating a hegemonic order (“Ritual, Rumor, and Corruption” 155). Their importance derives precisely from the construction of an arena that positions “a

collectivity vis-à-vis the state” and the creation of a discursive space in which “subjectivities [are formed] by the state” and “state institutions are locally appropriated” (162-63). Cultural performances functioned as sites to rehearse often-contradictory renderings of the nation, highlighting the significance of the hegemonic representational framework of *lo mexicano* with respect to its local and eventually national iterations. Though State rituals aimed at imposing a hegemonic frame of reference, for instance through the performance of “el jarabe tapatío” at official events, local iterations facilitated the incorporation of local knowledges, thereby revealing the power of local agency vis-à-vis the State. Each rendition of “el jarabe tapatío” may have been citing an idea of the nation, yet there were always competing interests at play; it was not the same to perform the so-called national dance in a city such as Guadalajara, as it was in a rural community in the north or south of the republic. In what ways did “el jarabe tapatío” interpellate citizens of Mexico? What was at stake in citing the nation as an indigenous woman and a rural *campesino*; a bourgeois urban female or a Hacienda male? In this dissertation, I explore how embodied performances of the nation served to negotiate the tensions between the production of cultural difference and its local and national renditions and appropriations focusing on moving bodies in public spaces.

Focusing on cultural performances also draws attention to the unstable meanings and functions of embodied practices of nationalism. David Guss emphasizes the role that festive forms play in the construction of new national imaginings but warns us not to take them to represent “the uniform expression of a collective consciousness” (3). Each individual experiences differently these events or performances (173-74). Multiple factors impact the enactment and reception of each performance of the nation. For example, Campobello’s performance of a “tehuana” was not the same at the national stadium as it was at a local plaza or a local theater. However, Guss insists on approaching these festive practices as “cultural performances,” as they enact a specific sociopolitical reality (7). These performances capture the changing nature of the nation’s sociopolitical reality, as they have to be continuously cited and renewed. Among the various characteristics of a cultural performance, Guss emphasizes four. First, a cultural performance is a “framed event,” taking place at a particular time and place (8-9). Going back to the example of “el jarabe tapatío,” each one of its interpretations, such as the one by Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova or by Nellie and Gloria Campobello, represents a concrete instance or frame of reference of the nation. Each event is porous but it can be separated from other events of daily life. Second, he suggests that cultural performances are “dramatizations” that “enable participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live” (9). It thus adds a self-reflexive quality (9). For instance, each celebration of Mexican nationalism during which “el jarabe tapatío” is performed requires the local audience to examine and re-interpret what it means to be part of the nation. Third, a cultural performance is “a profoundly discursive form of behavior,” in which events are used to “argue and debate, to challenge and negotiate.” As a result, they are dialogical and polyphonic (10). Each cultural performance enacts a field of action that allows different individuals to actively participate. Nellie and Gloria Campobello’s interpretation of “el jarabe tapatío,” as I will discuss later, challenged conventional understandings of gender and sexuality, thereby allowing them to negotiate the role of women within the masculinist and heteronormative frame of the nation (especially given the fact that Nellie performed it as a *charro*). Finally, a cultural performance offers “the ability to produce new meanings and relations” (11). Performances do produce new cultural meanings. “El jarabe tapatío” is the primary example of the creation of a national imaginary. As an invented tradition elevated to

the realm of the national and even international circuits by Anna Pavlova's performance in 1919, "el jarabe tapatío" has come to re-present the nation at home and abroad. In sum, cultural performances are "sites of social action, where identities and relations are continually being reconfigured" (12). Analyzing festive behaviors as cultural performances allows Guss to juxtapose notions of authenticity and tradition vis-à-vis "the socially constructed and contingent nature of festive practices" (15). His work enables me to interrogate how aesthetic practices, both "modern" and "traditional," are co-constitutive and respond to various social realities. In this study, I thus insist on the performative element of these embodied experiences to underscore the ambivalence and contingency of the emergence and dissemination of *lo mexicano*.

Throughout my dissertation, I also engage Diana Taylor's theorization of performance. Taylor proposes performance not only as *praxis* or object of study, but also as an epistemology—a way of understanding and being in the world. Her emphasis centers on the notion of knowledge: its production, transmission, reception, and circulation. For Taylor, performances "function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" (*Archive* 2). Furthermore, and following Richard Schechner, Taylor also claims that any event can also be studied *as* a performance (*Performance* 24). As building blocks of individuals and communities, she prompts us to think about the ways in which "communal identity and memory" come to constitute "valid forms of knowledge." Thinking of performance not only as a methodology, but also as an epistemology, allows me to elaborate an intellectual project that accounts for the plurality and multidimensionality of Mexican cultural production. As local cultural production becomes entangled with national and even international debates over the meaning and agency of knowledge and community, it is imperative that we recognize the impact of embodied cultural performances. The Huichol Indians are a paradigmatic example of how cultural performances are both a communal praxis but also a form of epistemology. Their ritualized dances and pilgrimage captures the multidimensionality of how knowledge, memory, and identity are transmitted, but also how they operate as means to engage in inter-national debates over land rights, indigeneity, and Mexican citizenship, as they fight to preserve their natural and cultural habitat threatened by mining companies.

My dissertation therefore builds upon Taylor's and Guss's theorization of performance to engage these festive expressions as contested, contingent, and ambivalent sites that allow for a thorough interrogation not only of discursive and visual modes of representation but also of embodied knowledges and practices. Re-positioning the body at the center of the workings of *lo mexicano*, I draw attention to how the festive body operates as a medium for/of contesting discourses of the nation. Bodily acts underscore the tensions with which cultural performances inscribe, negotiate, and reformulate Mexican nationalism. As in the case of the Huichol Indians and increasingly more with the Nahua, local festive practices become progressively intertwined with State rituals of the nation. In fact, the Huichol and the Nahua borrow from and negotiate with State frameworks of indigeneity. Just as the Huichol Indians, the Nahua from the Huasteca gradually resort to cultural performances of indigeneity to mark their territory currently threatened by fracking companies, such as the recent campaign launched by the "Alianza Mexicana contra el Fracking" denouncing

fracking where artists appear alongside indigenous people.<sup>4</sup> They use their own local forms, their popular fiestas such as the carnival, to signal their indigeneity but also as a gesture to interpellate the State to recognize their physical and cultural habitat. More than focusing on the representation of festive instances, I thus propose festive practices as a mode of representation. In *Culturas populares en el capitalismo*, Néstor García Canclini defines (popular) *fiestas* in modern México as “síntesis de la vida entera de cada comunidad y por tanto de sus interacciones con ‘lo moderno’,” emphasizing “sus modos de elaborar simbólicamente las tensiones entre lo propio y lo ajeno, los conflictos entre la tradición y modernidad dentro del grupo” (22). However, he further states that *fiestas* are not only a staging of *lo tradicional/popular* and *lo moderno*, but rather operate as an “educación sensible de las masas” (201). Although García Canclini understands the *fiesta* as a realm that represents “una continuidad profunda con el orden habitual” (195), I argue that it may be through a re-positioning of the body through cultural performances that a more radical possibility of re-signification exists. By privileging embodied practices and knowledge associated with these festive cultural performances, I point out the tensions enacted by racially and sexually marked bodies in contemporary Mexico. The performance of indigeneity enacted by Huichol and Nahuatl Indians during their cultural performance capture the ambiguities and contradictions of being an indigenous person in and a citizen of a neoliberal nation.

As a historical and historicizing entity, the festive body can signal toward (at times diasporic) trajectories of the nation negated, erased, and excluded in contemporary Mexican cultural production. I see the body in movement as crucial to reflect upon the tensions and contradictions of Mexican nationalism—from the continuous exclusion of indigenous populations to the celebrations of indigenous performances as symbols of the nation like the Yaqui Indians; from the disavowal of blackness to the embrace of Jarocho culture. The body, as I read it, operates as an archive but also as a means for archiving. To borrow the words of dance scholar Jane C. Desmond, the movement prompted by the “historical materiality of the body” functions as a “historically particular register of meaning.” As she goes on to claim, “[t]he complexity of writing selves with and through the body is always framed by the social formations within which the work and its reception takes place” (*Meaning* 12). By focusing on how moving bodies re-write the idea of the nation, I want to draw attention to the dancing histories of Mexico they embody in order to highlight on the one hand the frames of reference of different social formations of *lo mexicano*, but on the other, the excess produced by the act of framing itself. Let me further elaborate on this point. I am interested in how bodies are required to constantly signify different social formations, i.e. gender, class, sexuality, and race vis-à-vis *lo mexicano*. At the same time, the very act of embodiment of these social formations opens up the possibility for excess to the norms they are purported to embody and/or its eventual resignification. The dancing bodies I study in this dissertation while performing an ideal of *lo mexicano* may actually embody an excess that showcases the constructiveness of what bodies are required to perform. Even though what I read as an excess of these multiple performances of *lo mexicano* may not necessarily lead to its resignification, it opens up the possibility for its imagining it otherwise.

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<sup>4</sup> The Nahuas appear in the campaign “Di NO al fracking” alongside Rubén Albarrán, Julieta Venegas, and Lumi Cavazos. Their indigeneity, marked through their bodies, is performed through the use of the Nahuatl phrase—“amo quitlapanaz tetl.” See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1Yu\\_h\\_nc\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1Yu_h_nc_Q)

### **Gestures, Dance, and Embodiment: A Reflection on Methodology**

This dissertation constitutes an attempt to queer studies on Mexican nationalism by attending to embodied practices and knowledges. In framing my own ideas regarding the actual embodiment of *lo mexicano*, I draw heavily from three different scholars that theorize embodiment, queerness, gestures, and assemblages. I conceive the body as an archive but also as an agent whose movements have the capacity to trans-form itself and the archive. Bodily actions carry a historicity that registers the power alignments that enable them. In her insightful analysis of queer gestures, Juana María Rodríguez explores the intricate connections between the material and ephemeral references a gesture evokes. To give an example, the raised fist on the podium of the African American athletes, Tommi Smith and John Carlos, in the 1968 Olympics in Mexico illustrates the interconnection between an embodied gesture and its cultural meaning. According to Rodríguez, a “gesture functions as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice that is differentially manifested through particular forms of embodiment” (6 *Sexual Futures*). Rodríguez calls attention to the legibility of this cultural practice—its discursive construction—but also to the materiality of this locomotive phenomenon—its embodied manifestation. By raising a black-gloved fist during the intonation of the national anthem of the United States, for instance, these African American athletes cited Black Power, symbolizing protest, defiance, and unity among marginalized people. Furthermore, and crucial for my analysis, she insists on the indexing qualities of our corporeal movements: “If it is true that gestures signal the potentiality of our body, they also make public the imprint of our past. Gestures reveal the inscription of social and cultural laws, transforming our individual movements into an archive of received social behaviors and norms that reveal how memory and feeling are enacted and transformed through bodily practices.” She goes on to claim that: “[a]s we produce these affective and deeply political forms of corporeality, we are likewise subjugated through the relations of power that they also expose” (5). Pointing towards the archiving potentiality of our bodies, Rodríguez emphasizes the historicity linked to our movements, but most importantly, reveals how power dynamics condition and enable differentially profound affective and political forms of bodily expressions. The same bodily movement that enacted a Black Power salute in 1968 Mexico has allowed other individuals, such indigenous, undocumented, and queer people, to protest and defy oppression, thereby exposing the systemic power dynamics that continue to make such a gesture legible. In this sense, I follow Rodríguez’s theorization of gestures as both a register of meaning and a means of exposing and engaging different configurations of power.

The exposure by gestures of power relations and our own investments in them offers a more nuanced understanding of how bodies signify and even alter such relations. This particular revealing feature of what gestures signify and do is central in the work of Carrie Noland. Noland attributes a formative and transformative quality to gestures fundamental for the body that performs them. As she claims, gestures, “learned techniques of the body, are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to test” (2). On the one hand, following Noland’s argument, gestures “are a type of inscription, a parsing of the body into signifying or operational units; they can thereby be seen to reveal the submission of a shared human anatomy to a set of bodily practices specific to one culture.” On the other hand, “gestures clearly belong to the domain of movement; they provide kinesthetic sensations that remain in excess of what the gestures themselves might signify or accomplish within that culture” (2). To illustrate this point, I would like to go back to the

example of “el jarabe tapatío.” Anna Pavlova elevated it from its popular origins to the modern, international stage, offering a balleticized rendition of it. Dancing en pointe, on her toes, Pavlova captured a complex interconnection between femininity, Mexicanness, and cosmopolitan dance, when she first performed it in 1919. The *chinas* that performed “el jarabe tapatío” during “La Noche Mexicana” in 1921, while probably imitating Pavlova’s balleticized version, danced it also appealing to femininity, Mexicanness, and cosmopolitan dance, yet, I would argue, their kinesthetic experience allowed for an excess that differentiated their embodied experience of “el jarabe tapatío” from that of Pavlova’s.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, I would like to reiterate the importance of the material and locomotive workings that bring to the fore the actual enactment of any gesture and the sensations that the body experiences upon performing them. These sensations are crucial to understand how gestures signal at set of cultural practices and also how they inscribe the body—which is the second point advanced by Noland. This idea is key to comprehend the potentialities of movement. Noland insists that “kinesthetic experience—the sensory awareness of one’s own movement—can indeed encourage experiment, modification, and, at times, rejection of the routine” (3).<sup>6</sup> How did it feel to perform “el jarabe tapatío” for Cristina Pereda, the prima ballerina, and the other *chinas* during “La Noche Mexicana”? What did it mean for the *chinas* not only to represent the nation but also to actually embody it? Ultimately, what did it mean to shape society through dance, to borrow words of Zoila Mendoza? What is at stake here is the emergence of an instance that allows for the possibility of a different and differing experience of our bodies in motion when performing gestures.

The repeated performance of gestures, indeed their embodiment, draws attention to the continuous ambivalence and tensions that arise from their contingent nature. The same gesture signifies different things in different contexts. Dancing “el jarabe tapatío” produced different meanings when performed en pointe by Pavlova on a stage or in Mexican “huaraches” by Nellie and Gloria Campobello in a public arena. The meaning produced by the same embodied gesture is always contingent and puts in motion a different set of power dynamics. It is in this sense that I approach the notion of embodiment. I understand

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<sup>5</sup> Even though it is beyond the scope of this introduction, I want to call attention to how the kinesthetic experience of “el jarabe tapatío” involved not only the dancers, but also the public that witnessed it. I would like to think of the role of the public as both spectators and actors. In *Choreographing Empathy*, Susan L. Foster calls for an understanding of “kinesthetic” empathy, which she defines as “a process through which one experience[s] muscularly as well as psychically the dynamics of what [is] being witnessed” (177). In this sense, each spectator experienced corporeally and symbolically “el jarabe tapatío” in different ways when partaking in a performance by Pavlova versus by Mexican dancer Cristina Pereda, the prima ballerina during the events of “La Noche Mexicana.” Jeronimo Coignard captured the ambivalence with which the Mexican public received “el jarabe tapatío” performed during “La Noche Mexicana” and eventually at the Teatro Arbeu, where Pavlova had danced two years before: “Porque el público metropolitano, aun haciendo un gesto ‘snob’ de incredulidad cuando se le dice que aquello es ‘ballet’, se rinde a la seducción del baile, popular como ninguno entre nosotros, y olvida por un momento que los bailarines no se sostienen en la punta de los pies, que no visten a la rusa...; que aquello es cosa nuestra, estilizada, ‘elegantizada’, refinada todo lo posible, para que pueda exhibirse, decorosamente, en el escenario en que se balanceó, admirablemente, por cierto, la señora Pawlova” (33).

<sup>6</sup> Noland sustains that the sensations of our bodies executing a gesture are mediated by culture in order for individuals to process them as an experience. She states that “the kinesthetic body sense, then, is vulnerable to the intervention of culture at every moment when the situated subject must make propositional sense (meaning) of what she feels. That is, it is precisely when sensations produced by holding a posture or executing a gesture become available to ‘introspection,’ or conscious awareness, that they must be mediated by language or by equally culture-specific systems of visual imagery. The intervention of culture is necessary to transform the inarticulate workings of the nervous system into the *experience* of a particular subject” (10).

embodiment as “the process whereby collective behaviors and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and ‘lived’ at the level of the body” (9). Following Noland’s definition of embodiment allows me to simultaneously engage the cultural practices enacted through bodily movement while addressing the kinesthetic experience conjured and “lived” at the individual level. This particular approach is crucial to understand the embodiment of indigeneity in contemporary Mexico, for example, as I discuss it in the chapter on *mecos*. Each dancer kinesthetically experiences a unique sense of indigeneity despite sharing and citing a collective understanding of Nahua indigeneity in their dances. Therefore, it is precisely at this intersection where there lies the critical potential of focusing on embodied performative gestures:

If performing gestures affords an opportunity to sense the discrepancy between what gestures *mean* (the meaning bestowed by cultural convention on them and therefore on the subjects performing them) and what gestures make us *feel* (the sensations we experience while performing them)—if, in other words, gesturing widens the gap between meaning and sensate being—*then gesturing can have the valence of critique*. This is the full meaning of the ‘gestural performative’: on the one hand, gesturing can performatively bring a body into being; on the other, the performing body can critically bring a gesture into being, one that draws from the body’s ability to differentiate, swerve, and remark. (212, emphasis in the original)

I engage Noland’s model of analysis to draw attention to the contingent nature of bodily practices. The significance of the model relies on the fact that we cannot longer take at face value cultural embodied representations. All *meco* dancers engage in a performance of indigeneity, yet each experiences a different kinesthetic sensation of it. The dancers dressed as women, for instance, may reveal the discrepancies between what their feminine gestures mean and how performing these gestures make them feel, thereby signaling the possibility of inhabiting queer imaginaries.

This model of inquiry thus allows me to signal the slippages and the continuous threat of failure that embodying *lo mexicano* entails. Unlike the representations of Mexican nationalism crystallized through muralism, golden age cinema, and even the novel of the Mexican Revolution to name a few examples, the performance of *lo mexicano* by and through bodies always runs the risk of signifying or, rather, gesturing, literally and metaphorically, otherwise. Both Noland and Rodríguez constantly remind us of not taking for granted the particularities of each individual body required to perform any given set of cultural practices. In this sense, and for the purposes of my analysis, it is crucial not to take for granted the ways the State required its citizens to perform a sense of *lo mexicano*, distinctively and perhaps contradictorily embodied and lived by the different actors and spectators I discuss throughout my dissertation.

Finally, I would like to address the methodological implications of discussing *lo mexicano* as an embodied problematic and not just as a question of representation. As I mentioned, discursive and visual practices have been privileged in the analysis of Mexican nationalism. I would like to challenge these approaches by insisting precisely on the body as a site where the ideological imperatives of *lo mexicano* materialize and simultaneously are challenged (if only ephemerally). I am interested in exploring the lived consequences of

embodying a sense of nationalism. By gesturing towards the possibilities of adopting a model that does not only take into account resistance and oppositional stances against the hegemonic construction of Mexican nationalism, I draw attention to how bodily practices enable different modes of belonging that are at times complicit and/or resistant but that always cite a differentiated mode of *lo mexicano*. Instead of focusing on oppositional iterations of the nation, I approach these instances of Mexican nationalism attending to the fissures, excesses, and contractions of the embodiment of *lo mexicano*. Thus, I engage a queer methodology that gestures towards the construction of an assemblage of *lo mexicano* that does not presuppose a linear and teleological construction of and hetero-normative rendering of the nation; rather, it privileges the contingent, yet concrete ways bodies signify within specific contexts of nationalism.

### ***Lo mexicano as an Assemblage and the Queering of the Mexican Archive***

In this dissertation, I think of *lo mexicano* as a queer assemblage. The dancing histories of Mexico I explore in my work reveal queer instances in which imagining the nation engenders at times conflicting yet at times redeeming embodiments of *lo mexicano*. I use Jasbir Puar's theorizations of queerness as an assemblage. Puar questions identity and anti-identity models of queerness to advance an approach that does not demand a priori a legible construction and instead embraces the contingency of any queer configuration as the product of a becoming. According to Puar, "[d]isplacing queerness as an identity or modality that is visibly, audibly, legibly, or tangibly evident—the seemingly queer body in a 'cultural freeze-frame' of sorts—assemblages allow us to attune to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivity's, and textures as they inhabit events, spaciality, and corporealities" (215). Rather than approaching queerness as a readily legible and material formation, she proposes to think of queerness as a temporal, spatial and corporeal contingent convergence—an assemblage. "Queerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does), it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations" (205). It is precisely this latter point that interests me the most. Although it is extremely important to continue to signal the important work of analyzing the oppositional and alternative modalities to hegemonic cultural identity formations—what queerness in effect "is and does"—, it is as vital to recognize other modalities of queerness that also suggest how embodied gestures can and do operate as contingent and complicit with dominant formations as Puar rightly asserts. Understanding queerness as an assemblage enables me to underline the queer configurations of the moving bodies that I study. Queering *lo mexicano* does not just mean showing the fissures in its heteronormativity; it also means seeing it in terms other than identity politics—beyond an identity paradigm. In other words, I understand *lo mexicano* not as an identity (what it is and what is not), but as an assemblage, as a gesture. Due to the ephemeral nature of embodied performances, archives of Mexican cultural production have not systematically attended to the contributions of multiple actors, from elite choreographers such as Nellie Campobello, to indigenous dancers such as the Yaqui Indians present at "La Noche Mexicana" or the Huastecan *mecos* in contemporary times. The imperative to look exclusively for visually, tangibly, and corporally legible resistant or alternative constructions of *lo mexicano* has long prevented the recognition of the

contributions, contingent or otherwise, of moving bodies in public spaces and their attendant repercussions for the configuration of Mexican nationalism.

By thinking of *lo mexicano* as an assemblage, I want to draw attention to the generative possibilities that arise from privileging embodied cultural practices. My work therefore seeks to recognize the “contingencies of belonging” that imagining and embodying a nation bring to the fore. In a sense, I too share Puar’s emphasis on the assemblage as a modality of thought and as a methodological intervention. As Puar contends,

an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, relying on the logic of equivalence and analogy between various axes of identity and generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative aspects of identification: you become an identity, yes, but also timelessness works to consolidate the fiction of a seamless stable identity in every space. (212)

I acknowledge the challenges and dangers but also the possibilities and potentialities of this kind of approach. As the case of cross-dressing in the performance of *mecos* shows in regards to indigenous queer imaginaries, assuming a position that reinforces a coherent and even permanent point of articulation is not always a viable choice. Though non normative subjects live in indigenous communities, they are constantly threaten and at times become invisible and disposable. It is imperative that we recognize the ways indigenous male embodiments of queerness constantly occupy contradictory positions. Their own positionality as males in regards to gendered identification practices forces them to occupy at times contradictory and complicit locations with respect to dominant positions of heteropatriarchy within indigenous communities. An intersectional approach would insist on naming the presence queer indigenous subjects. At the same time, however, I want to draw attention to two aspects Puar astutely signals: one is the fictive and performative qualities of identification and two is the urgency to question the imperative of assuming only “linear,” “coherent,” and “permanent” positions as the only ones capable of offering a critique. Gestures of queer indigeneity therefore become more relevant to offer a critique of heteropatriarchy.

Thinking of queer assemblages as theorized by Puar thus enables me to adopt a more generative approach that does not readily ignore non dominant, non permanent, and non easily legible embodiments of *lo mexicano*. It allows me to recognize the workings of other contingent corporeal and cultural alignments that would otherwise be ignored and invisibilized in studies on Mexican nationalism or considered too complicit and celebratory of hegemonic representations of the nation, such as *folklórico* dance to name the most visibly legible example. These configurations of the nation, like the choreographies of Nellie Campobello, may advance a nationalistic normative agenda; yet, they allow for iterations of *lo mexicano* that performatively undo it, exceed it, and even deconstruct it. Ultimately, what is at stake is precisely the exposition of *lo mexicano* as a construction that, as any other cultural form, needs to be continuously enacted to remain as a constitutive frame of reference, such as it is in the case of sex, gender, class, and race, to mention the most pervasive examples. As Juana María Rodríguez discusses in regards to sexual practices, one can say that *lo mexicano* “like other forms of cultural production, emerges in a social context

wherein preexisting narratives circulate around available forms of representation, forms that must be legible in order to acquire social meaning” (*Sexual Futures* 155).

It is the recirculation of “preexisting narratives” that grant any cultural practice social legibility and thus meaning that most interests me in the case of contemporary Mexico. Imagining, imaging, and eventually embodying *lo mexicano* required the circulation of narratives about the nation, its citizens and its colonial and indigenous past. But it also required the creation or invention of a new vision of Mexico—a modern yet indigenous nation. The queer embodies of Mexican nationalism that I explore reveal the fantasies projected by intellectual and political elites onto the emergence of the “popular” as the idea of the nation. Although not all of the fantasies were materialized, I want to remind us of the potentiality that fantasy has played in the imagining of a festive nation and the tensions that the body as a point of convergence signals. I assert that fantasy plays a crucial role in the configuration and transmission of embodied knowledge. As Judith Butler contends, fantasy questions the limits of the real to allow for new imaginings of what it can apprehend, disarticulating the “field of reality” constituted by norms that regulate our understanding of it. For Butler, “[t]o posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not constrained by the body as it is” (*Undoing Gender* 28). Butler re-positions the body as that through which norms can be re-configured and fantasy as the modality that can help us expand the limits of the real—what is present to the senses. As she argues, “[f]antasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home” (29). Butler points towards a questioning not only of the real, but also of what constitutes as intelligible within its realm. The critical promise of fantasy, therefore, resides in the possibility of questioning, expanding, or destabilizing our normative field of reality. Juana María Rodríguez, however, reminds us of the ways fantasy allows for other forms to occupy and expand “the possible.” She rightly contends that “[f]antasy here functions not as an escape from the real-world materiality of living, breathing bodies, but as a way to conjure and inhabit an alternative world in which other forms of identification and social relations become imaginable” (*Sexual Futures* 26). Fantasy then simultaneously repositions the body at the center of its workings, as it opens up the possibility of embodying that excess of the real or that elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

*Imagining a Festive Nation: Queer Embodiments and Dancing Histories of Mexico* advances a methodological approach that centers on the embodied performances of *lo mexicano* and the complex interplay of cultural and corporeal configurations they summoned that are always already contingent and contextual. My work engages performance as an aesthetic, embodied, and political practice and a methodology that account for the conflicting social systems at play in Mexico. Indeed, it is precisely at the center of the aesthetic, the

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<sup>7</sup> As my dissertation engages with the cultural practices of a Nahua community, where practices that may not be reduced to the notion of the modern, hence nonmodern, are summoned, I also understand “elsewhere” as José Rabasa has defined it in *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You: Elsewheres and the Ethosicide in the Colonial Mesoamerican World*. According to Rabasa, “elsewheres” signal “spaces and temporalities that define a world that remains exterior to the spatio-temporal location of any given observer... They consist of forms of affect, knowledge, and perception underlying what a given individual in a given culture can *say* and *show* about the world... *elsewheres* that disrupt the assumption that Western thought exhausts what can be said and thought—or, by extension, what must remain unsaid and unthought—about the experience humans may have of the world” (1, emphasis in the original).

political, and the personal that I would like to position the body and explore the possibilities it opens up beyond the confines of textual and visual analysis. The festive performances I explore draw attention to the multiple ways Mexican citizens since the Porfirian regime, but particularly during the post-revolutionary period, were to embody the nation. Festive instances, according to Marino, Riggio, and Vignolo, “may be considered a privileged time for participants to shape a social role, re-significate and re-enchant the world, build up social structures and relations” (12). They constitute a socio-temporal contingency not only to symbolically negotiate tensions between the quotidian and the possibility of imagining ourselves otherwise, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to feel and experience the world differently, to embody an “elsewhere” within our own field of reality, and to expand and re-educate what and how our senses apprehend. In what ways does a performing body conjures other imaginaries and embodies a potentially different sensorial reality expanded through festive dances? What is at stake with the (re)visualization of normative paradigms of *lo mexicano* through cultural performances of the nation? How can our understanding of festive forms help us better understand the role of kinesthetic memory, intelligence, and empathy in the configurations of symbolic and national normative realms?

### **On Academic Disciplines and Indigenous Epistemologies**

The tension between knowledge production and transmission vis-à-vis its disciplinary academic institutionalization has been central in the elaboration of this dissertation. I follow the lead of both Diana Taylor and Lawrence Grossberg. Taylor, on the one hand, explores the conflictive and often contradictory relationship between “embodied behaviors” as a means for the transmission of socio-cultural knowledge and memory vis-à-vis sanctioned forms of transmission of knowledge and memory associated with writing, conventionally deemed more legible and trustworthy by the State and Western epistemologies. In fact, the examination of embodied behavior in the consolidation of identities and preservation of memory and knowledge is paramount among societies that do not rely on written forms as their primary means to do so. Since the conquest of the Americas, Western scholars have often disregarded indigenous forms focused on embodied practices as legitimate and legible mechanisms of knowledge transmission. Taylor takes on the task of analyzing what happens when the process of an uneven modernity in the Americas has not necessarily implied the disappearance of such indigenous epistemic forms. How does one explore and understand processes that are neither contained nor necessarily outside an increasing globalizing world?

Lawrence Grossberg, on the other hand, challenges the confines of academic disciplines and the institutionalization of knowledge through the rhetoric of cultural studies. He understands cultural studies as a project “which binds different people and work together, involves a commitment to a particular practice of intellectual-political work, and to the claim that such intellectual work matters both inside and outside the academy” (9). Grossberg departs from the premise that “ideas matter” and as scholars, we must continually scrutinize the questions we pose as well as the disciplinary or institutional position from which we raise them. He believes that knowledge production and politics are “contextually bound.” It is our responsibility to establish a “collective and collaborative” enterprise to engage with other “knowledge producers,” a call very much in dialogue with Taylor’s emphasis on the repertoire—which forces us to simultaneously consider not only the means of knowledge

production, but also the producers of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> As “scholar-subjects,” individuals within and outside the boundaries of institutional knowledge, Grossberg invites us to start a conversation with those “producing other kinds of knowledges (a trans-epistemic conversation); located elsewhere... (a trans-national and trans-regional conversation); living in different relations to the world, respecting that the world as such is not simply answerable to our theory and desires (a trans-ontological conversation); and finally, in other disciplines... (a trans-disciplinary conversation)” (291). Although I am very aware that not all academic projects can subscribe to the lines of inquiry that cultural studies establishes, I would like to follow his lead as a gesture to engage in a conversation that is trans-national, trans-epistemic, and trans-disciplinary—across the humanities and social sciences.

I emphasize these two aspects of my work aims to engage to acknowledge the challenges of working with a contemporaneous indigenous Nahua speaking population to explore debates regarding the production of subjectivities vis-à-vis contemporary constructions of indigeneity that have long informed and sustained Mexican nationalism. Approaching embodied manifestations and knowledge production, as well as the implications of their historical construction, requires expanding normative notions of what counts as evidence. Following the gestures of queer of color scholars, particularly Juana María Rodríguez and José Esteban Muñoz, I analyze not only periodicals, photographs, and cultural and literary texts, but also lived ephemeral experiences of Nahua indigenous youth as legitimate sites of evidence, and consequently knowledge production and circulation. Muñoz thinks of queer evidence as “an evidence that has been queered in relation to the laws of what counts as proof.” And he goes on to state that evidence is queered “by suturing it to the concept of ephemera... Ephemera are the remains that are often embedded in queer acts, in both stories we tell one another and communicative physical gestures” (*Cruising* 65). By queering the Mexican archive, my dissertation ultimately attends to the ephemera, the stories and the physical or rather embodied gestures, that *lo mexicano* as an assemblage brings to the fore. The excess, what remains and lingers, highlights the importance of bodily practices for the configuration of Mexico as a nation-state.

### **Performing a People—Imagining a Nation**

Thus far, I have highlighted the importance of embodied practices in the configuration of Mexico as a nation-state. I have also explained why focusing on embodied performances of contemporary Mexican cultural practices could offer alternative readings of the discourse of *lo mexicano*. Finally, I have suggested how my dissertation attempts to challenge methodologically conventional approaches to Mexican nationalism articulating the notion of a queer assemblage. I conclude with a brief description of the three chapters of this dissertation. Chapter one looks into “La Noche Mexicana,” a two-day event that took place in Chapultepec, Mexico, in 1921 during the centennial festivities of Mexican Independence, in order to analyze the significance of the embodiment of the “popular” staged during this

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<sup>8</sup> For Taylor, the archive constitutes the “memory [that] exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDS, all those items supposedly resistant to change” (*Archive* 19). One of the main characteristics of “archival memory” is that it separates the “source of ‘knowledge’ from the knower” (19). In contrast, the repertoire “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” (20). Unlike the archive, the repertoire needs the “presence” of the people, the knowers for knowledge to be (re)produced and (re)presented.

massive fiesta celebration. Through the analysis of photographs and periodicals, I examine how (trans)national processes operated in the configuration of the nation formation. This chapter addresses how key players of the centennial celebrations, particularly intellectuals but also indigenous groups and dancers, participated in national and transnational circuits—cultural, economic, and political. Indeed, these cultural exchanges in post-revolutionary Mexico forced them to position themselves in, against, or outside a nationalistic discourse of *lo mexicano*. This chapter thus documents how embodied practices such as regional dances performed by the Yaqui Indians, *Tehuana*s, *Jaraneros*, *Chinas Poblanas* and *Charros* at “La Noche Mexicana” contributed to the configurations of new social imaginings of *lo mexicano*.

Chapter two focuses on the consolidation of dance, especially *folklórico*, as a festive mode of representation of Mexican culture and how it contributed to the formation of Mexican citizens. In this chapter, I study the significance of *folklórico* dance performance as a modality through which the notion of *lo mexicano* was transmitted and consumed. In particular, I consider the work of Nellie Campobello and her impact on the emergence of *folklórico* dance as a form of pedagogy through which the state formed its citizens and a means to understand, read, and consume Mexican imaginaries of the nation. Campobello’s work was crucial for the institutionalization of dance and the public embodied performances of the “popular,” yet it allowed for female and queer embodiments of *lo mexicano*. This chapter thus considers her collaboration with the *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)*, her work at the *Escuela Nacional de Danza (END)* as a founding member and director from 1937 to 1985, and the publication of *Rítmos indígenas de México* (1940) in order to examine how Nellie Campobello shaped the emergence of *folklórico* dance as a lens to understand the ethnic, sexual, and racial diversity of Mexico.

The last chapter of my dissertation addresses festive forms as a lived experience. In this chapter, I analyze the “danza de los *mecos*,” which is performed annually by approximately twelve young Nahua males—half dressed as women and two dressed as devils—during the fiesta-carnival in honor of *Tlacatecolotl*—the “owl man” deity who embodies good and evil. I argue that the dancing of the *mecos* functions as a way for them to mark ethnically their space while simultaneously allowing for performers to gesture towards queer imaginaries that challenge hetero-patriarchy. I examine bodily acts as the intersection between imagination, ritualized behavior, and playfulness in order to interrogate how the *fiesta-carnaval* operates as a conduit for the transmission of knowledge, social memory, and norms in the construction of indigenous subjects vis-à-vis *lo mexicano*. At stake is the performance of indigenous knowledges through racially and sexually marked bodies in contemporary Mexico. Through the analysis of bodily movements and oral histories I recorded, as well as the process of the folklorization of *mecos* that I discussed with both Nahua and non-indigenous dance practitioners, this chapter ultimately analyzes the underlying tensions of different embodiments of indigeneity and the claims to a sense of (national) belonging.

## Chapter 1

### “La Noche Mexicana” and the Staging of a Festive Nation

The morning of September 28, 1921, *El Demócrata: Diario independiente de la mañana* announced in bold red letters on the front page the following: “La ‘Noche Mexicana’ congregó en Chapultepec ayer, a muy cerca de quinientas mil personas” (Plate 1). The subtitle further emphasized the success of the evening: “Esta Noche Será Memorable Siempre que se Recuerde Algún Gigantesco Regocijo Genuinamente Popular” (“La ‘Noche Mexicana’ congregó”).<sup>9</sup> The article included an image by the newspaper’s illustrator “Neve” of two “trajineras,” the typical decorated boats from Xochimilco, with *charros* and *chinas* singing and paddling as well members of the bourgeoisie. In addition to enthusiastically summarizing the events, the author of the piece emphasized this point precisely: the coming together of different classes, “los tranquilos burgueses” and “el pueblo,” converging en masse in a scene described as one taken from the *Arabian Nights* or from the royal gardens of Versailles, yet profoundly “Mexican.” The article’s cosmopolitan *and* popular references gestured towards the need to describe the configuration of a Mexican imagery as one that shared the same cultural grammar and vocabulary of modern times. The newspaper article, therefore, invited readers to literally image and imagine a festive nation, that is say to construct a visual and abstract idea of a Mexico that celebrates the diverse groups that make it modern and popular, by resorting to visual designs and figurative illustrations.

Manuel Palavicini, on the second page of *El Universal*, in a short article summarizing the same event shared his experience with just as much amusement and enthusiasm. In fact, he began his article with an affirmation: “Mucha luz y mucha gente. Nunca he visto tanta en un solo lugar. Más de doscientas mil personas rodeando el lago de Chapultepec, y llenando el resto del pintoresco bosque en una completa amalgama de clases” (2). Although Palavicini offered a significantly different estimate of the number of people who attended the event, one cannot deny that “La Noche Mexicana” was a successful gathering of thousands of people converging at a specific time and place in “una completa amalgama de clases.” Palavicini opened and closed his article with the same affirmation: “Mucha luz y mucha gente.” People and lights or rather lighting made the event national and modern. A spectacle described as “genuinely popular” where an evolving image of Mexico was not only imagined but also staged.

“La Noche Mexicana,” a massive fiesta celebration, took place in Chapultepec during the centennial of the Mexican Independence in 1921 and recreated regional “ferias” featuring both indigenous and *mestizo* dances from all over the country, including the Yaqui dancers from Sonora, the *Tehuana*s from Oaxaca, and the *Jaraneros* from Yucatán in addition to the traditional *chinas poblanas* and *charros*. Although the *mestizo* has come to embody the modern Mexican national subject, the meaning of embodiment in the post-revolutionary context of modernization has yet to be carefully examined.<sup>10</sup> By analyzing photographs and periodicals, I study how the fiesta impacted the embodiment of the popular and the *mestizo* on the national stage, while simultaneously considering how transnational cultural processes

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<sup>9</sup> I follow the use of capital letters as in the original.

<sup>10</sup> See Pedro Ángel Palou’s *El fracaso del mestizo* for an insightful and succinct analysis of the figure of the *mestizo* as the political embodiment of the State project of Mexicanness. I engage Palou’s analysis on the construction of the *mestizo* in the conclusion.

also operated in the formation of the nation. These nationalistic and popular renditions of the nation, in fact, attempted to re-present Mexico as cosmopolitan. In this chapter, I therefore highlight how by focusing on bodies in public spaces, we can further complicate how an image—or rather imagery—of Mexico emerged not only discursively, but also visually, gesturing towards the importance of movement and embodiment for the configuration of a shared national cultural background. “La Noche Mexicana’s” recreation of a regional feria and indigenous and mestizo dances functioned as a State pedagogical practice. These feria and dances became the performance of an embodied nationalistic discourse of *lo mexicano* that came to configure processes of citizen formation and national belonging in post-revolutionary Mexico.

In this chapter, I examine the staging of “La Noche Mexicana” as a paradigmatic event in order to explore the kind of cultural exchanges that took place within Mexico, on the one hand, and the way the configuration of *lo mexicano* also responded to complex transnational phenomena on the other. I propose *lo mexicano* as a stage and as an assemblage in order to interrogate how we approach embodied and imagined renderings of the nation. As Michelle Clayton reminds us, artistic expressions at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century often blurred the boundaries between languages, disciplines, and spatio-temporal frames of reference.<sup>11</sup> By focusing on the staging and the embodied performance of a national identity, I argue that the shifting and ambivalent scenario of *lo mexicano* helped crystallize a “popular” idea of the nation. In what follows, I analyze the Porfirian influences of “La Noche Mexicana” and trace its discursive, visual, and embodied staging as a State-sponsored event. Although “La Noche Mexicana” was the creation of intellectual and cultural elites, I demonstrate that the actual bringing together of individuals to embody a national corpus performatively undid and/or exceeded the State-sponsored project. As I contend, the establishment of a national identity was ultimately an “assemblage” of what became a cosmopolitan sense of *lo mexicano* that at once reinforced and disavowed the fiction of a national unity.

### **History and the Staging of a Modern Nation**

The celebrations of the consummation of the Mexican Independence in 1921 had been predated by the centenary celebrations of the Porfirian regime in 1910.<sup>12</sup> Though the emphasis was to showcase a modern Mexico for foreigners, numerous cultural performances took place throughout the festivities in 1910 that allowed people from different classes to witness and experience the staging of a so-called modern Mexico. As John Mraz claims in *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*, the centennial celebrations organized by the Porfirian regime in September of 1910 “paraded a vision of Mexican development and cosmopolitanism for the world to see, displaying to foreign guests an exotic land in the midst of feverish modernization.” By privileging the public display of his constructed idea of a modern Mexico, however Díaz “gave his own *pueblo* their first public lesson of visual culture” (54). Although Mraz examines the “ocular strategies” that the State apparatus implemented to mediate, determine, and envision the imagery to represent a

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<sup>11</sup> See Clayton’s “Modernism’s Moving Bodies” for a discussion of the porosity and mixing of languages of various art-forms at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a crucial characteristic of cultural modernity.

<sup>12</sup> Although a thorough description of the centennial celebrations of 1910 is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is still important to mention them as a crucial antecedent that informed the festivities of the post-revolutionary government.

national idea of Mexico, I want to focus precisely on the importance of such a “vision” to be displayed, “paraded,” and hence performed. In this sense, I share Mraz’s idea of the pedagogy behind the Porfirian project: the *pueblo* was taught to “see” and therefore consume a “vision” of Mexico that was displayed at the centenary.

One of the major events of the Porfirian centennial celebrations was in fact an actual parade where the history of Mexico was represented—*El desfile histórico*. The number of people who attended the event varies according to the source; some claim that between 50 and 70 thousand people witnessed the parade.<sup>13</sup> The importance of the parade, however, lies in the fact that it rendered Mexico’s history a visual and embodied discourse that was highly documented and photographed. According to Mraz, the parade was the main event of the festivities in 1910 that was specifically designed for consumption by local people (54). The Díaz regime privileged three moments of Mexican history: the conquest, the colony and the independence movement (55). The representation of the conquest rather than the contributions of pre-Hispanic civilizations led to the invisibilization of indigenous heritage prior to the arrival of the Spanish. In effect, the *Historia Patria* staged at *El desfile histórico* advanced a vision of Mexico where individuals such as Moctezuma, Cortés, Iturbide were celebrated as *caudillos* or leaders, which in turn placed Díaz as the heir and leader of the country’s legacy.<sup>14</sup>

The Porfirian cultural and political elite greatly invested in the development of a national historical narrative that would propel Mexico into a modern nation.<sup>15</sup> To explain the

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<sup>13</sup> Mraz cites three different sources: *El País* estimated 500,000; *El Tiempo* 100,000; the *Crónica oficial* coordinated by Genaro García between 50, 000 and 70,000 (55, 261).

<sup>14</sup> According to Annick Lempérière, “[e]n 1910, la memoria histórica del gobierno de Porfirio Díaz fue la de un poder piramidal y corporativo encarnado en un caudillo, mientras que la memoria propiamente política, fundada en los principios teóricos del régimen, república y libertad, se dejó a la apreciación de las élites regionales... Las procesiones, los homenajes a los héroes, el juramento a la bandera (único símbolo de la libertad nacional en las celebraciones, también el único mantenido para impedir que se estableciera una relación todavía más directa entre los ciudadanos y el caudillo), organizaban la participación de los ciudadanos según su pertenencia a sociedades mutualistas, asociaciones de empleados, escuelas, etcétera” (333).

<sup>15</sup> Even though the conceptualization of history as an analytical category merits further interrogation than what I can provide in this chapter, I want to underline how the writing of history as an act of power and knowledge production is crucial to understand this particular period in Mexican history at the turn of the century and before and after the Revolution of 1910. As Susan Buck-Morss reminds us in “Universal History,” “because the central question of history’s meaning cannot be asked outside of time but only in the thick of human action, the way question is posed, the methods of the inquiry, and the criteria of what counts as a legitimate answer all have political implications” (109). Beyond the fact that facts *are* political, what is at stake is the repercussions of the baggage each fact as a *concept* entails. Buck-Morss forces us to re-think and re-examine our own epistemological tools. She insists that each conceptual tool, category or mode of thinking “comes to us full of residues of the past, containing the sedimented history of utopian dreams and cultural blind spots, political struggles and power effects. Historically inherited concepts form the collective consciousness of actors who, in turn, create history” (110). The author, in a decolonizing gesture, insists that we interrogate the writing of history. According to her, “[t]he first step would be to recognize not only the contingency of historical events, but also the indeterminacy of the historical categories by which we grasp them” (111). Shelly E. Garrigan’s *Collecting Mexico: Museums, Monuments and the Creation of a National Identity* offers an excellent case study that attends to this particular approach to history and its writing. Analyzing the liberal revolutionary rhetoric of Justo Sierra, representative of the discourse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Garrigan underscores the importance of framing past events to convey an idea of “newness” in Mexican history. According to the author, “[i]t is not only Sierra’s framing of past events as historically over that confirms the newness of the Mexican nation, however. The nation’s newness is that of the arrangement, the historical perspective that rewrites the circumstantial phenomena of history into a selective cohesion” (14).

consolidation of a national history at this particular juncture, Paul Gillingham discusses how the past operated as a mechanism to shape national subjectivities and imaginaries by analyzing the figure of Cuauhtémoc. Drawing from Arjun Appadurai's notion of the past, Gillingham reminds us that the past "is a universal tactical resource" (6). As such, the past has been symbolically and materially manipulated in the configuration of Mexican nationalism. The emergence of Mexico as a modern nation, therefore, mobilized a series of discursive tactics that emphasized the "performance" of the nation as a whole. According to Gillingham, liberals and revolutionaries "adopted many of the forms of Catholic celebration, such as altars and carnivals for independence heroes" (7). The performance of the past became a means to connect the realm of the local with the national and to establish an imaginary and material connection among various national actors.

In effect, each iteration of a national history or "historia patria" responded to different and differing scenarios of the Mexican nation. In her article, "Los dos centenarios de la Independencia Mexicana (1910-1921): de la historia patria a la antropología cultural," Annick Lempérière proposes to look at the commemorations of Independence in Mexico as two related, yet dissimilar instances in which discourses about memory and history operated as sites for the legitimization of State power. She discusses a shift from the Porfirian regime to the post-revolutionary government: the change from an evolutionary understanding of history to that of cultural relativism. According to Lempérière, "[e]n la medida en que la historia se convierte en aspecto esencial de la política, la memoria misma se convierte en objeto de una política, ya que el dominio del futuro pasa por el del pasado" (318). The Porfirian regime resorted to history as a means to forge a sense of Mexican nationalism and also as a way to impose a teleological understanding of the historical progress of the nation, thereby operating as an "instrument of power." In a similar gesture as Gillingham, the author further states that: "[e]l pasado, en efecto, suministra el material para forjar el patriotismo de los ciudadanos, alimentar el orgullo nacional, cultivar el espíritu de sacrificio y esfuerzo por la patria y generar la conciencia de que la época presente es el feliz desenlace de una evolución histórica" (322). The configuration and eventual imposition of a "historical consciousness" that rendered Mexico a modern nation, governed by the ideal of progress and evolutionism, systematically ignored the presence and contributions of the indigenous and peasant populations in vast areas of the country. At the same time, the role of education became crucial for the dissemination and imposition of an evolutionary understanding of history. As Lempérière points out, "la insistencia con la que la educación se mezclaba con las fiestas [en 1910] recuerda el modelo de 1889: se trataba, en un mismo movimiento, de asociar a los futuros ciudadanos con un excepcional ejercicio de la memoria nacional, y de celebrar el recuerdo de la libertad conquistada y los esfuerzos del régimen por el progreso del saber y de la ciencia" (330). In effect, a pedagogical character marked the festivities of 1910 that would later characterize those of 1921: citizen formation was inculcated via the enactments of a nationalistic cultural identity based on a progressive and teleological understanding of history.

In the same way as its history, Díaz's Mexico was the result of a progression of major past events that were ultimately to propel Mexico to its modern future as symbolized by Mexico City. Díaz, in fact, "presented to the Centenario's visitors an 'ideal' Mexico City, which was meant to be taken as a synecdoche for the entire country: developed and cosmopolitan, ordered and progressive" (58). The new buildings and renovations of the city were to be signs of progress aimed to attract foreign investors. It is not surprising then that

the key element of the celebrations was the illumination of the city itself. As Mraz states, “[i]llumination was a central protagonist and visual metaphor of the Centenario.... Photographs of the luminous city must have offered a double whammy of the up-to-date: they testified to Mexico’s electrical capacity and they demonstrated the technical capabilities of the photographers who took the pictures” (57-58). Cinematic activity was also fundamental for “documenting the events and screening them the very next day, often to the foreigners who had participated in them” (58). At stake was not only what was represented but also how it was captured and presented to Mexican citizens and foreigners. The emergence of a national visual culture, the imagery produced by the State apparatus, aimed to form citizens, operating as a pedagogical mechanism to teach Mexicans to be part of a greater nation. The development of new technologies significantly contributed to the dissemination and consumption of imaginaries of the nation for both local and foreign audiences.

In addition to technology, the consolidation of anthropology as a modern science impacted the formation of Mexico as a modern nation. As a discipline and field of knowledge, it also led to a different understanding of history and therefore treatment of memory. Lempérière briefly reminds us that the “Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas” was a Porfirian project supported by Murray Butler from Columbia University, first proposed in 1906. Although it officially opened its doors in January of 1911, Justo Sierra had announced its approval in 1908. In 1910, in fact, the “XVII Congreso Internacional de Americanistas” took place during the centennial celebrations. It officially existed until 1922, but it had stopped operating in 1914, having had Eduard Seler as its first director and then Franz Boas as the second (338). Archeological discoveries led to a gradual re-evaluation of the contributions of indigenous populations, especially with the introduction of ethnological practices. However, these changes in the way history was conceived and practiced by the intellectual and political elites did not significantly alter its relationship with modernity: Mexico’s past needed to be understood and studied in order to be integrated and transcended in the future. Nevertheless, a more positive shift started to take place with regards to practices of memory before and during the celebrations of 1921. According to Lempérière, this change could particularly involved two aspects:

En primer lugar, el reconocimiento y la aceptación de la existencia, en un mismo territorio y una misma época, de temporalidades, niveles culturales y orígenes étnicos diferentes... En segundo lugar, la convicción de que la historia nacional aprehendida a partir de la condición contemporánea de los indígenas es resultado de una larga decadencia que subraya el contraste entre la grandeza de las ruinas de Teotihuacán y el deterioro de las viviendas contemporáneas. (343-44)

Mexico’s past needed to be rethought based on and as the result of the contemporaneous condition of the indigenous populations and not despite of it. If in effect needed to be revaluated, the past was recast as a “reserva de experiencias.” As such, “[l]a ‘tradicición’, la vestimenta, los productos culturales—danza, música, artesanías—de los estratos no europeos de la población ya no eran considerados como estigmas vergonzosos de la modernidad no consumada, sino como elementos indispensables de la identidad nacional” (345). By reconsidering indigenous cultural manifestations, particularly embodied practices, as crucial

to understand Mexico's past, the intellectual and cultural elites of post-revolutionary Mexico positioned indigenous populations as contemporaneous practitioners of ancestral "acts of transfer," to borrow Diana Taylor's words. Yet, simultaneously, this gesture did not ultimately question a teleological understanding of history, but rather it replaced it with the cultural relativism promoted by the institutionalization of anthropology and archeology as the sciences of the State.<sup>16</sup>

While the post-revolutionary cultural and intellectual elites did not radically transform the evolutionary approach to understanding history, they did embrace a form of cultural relativism that allowed them to incorporate the rural and indigenous populations that migrated en masse to Mexico City. More than cultural relativism, however, they embraced a form of multiculturalism that acknowledged the co-existence of indigenous populations without transcending the evolutionist imperative of progress and modernization, as exemplified by Manuel Gamio's *Forjando Patria*. As the planning of the centennial celebrations began, the intellectual, political, and cultural elites became concerned with promoting a sense of progress and accounting for modernity, but one that attempted to reach out to the populations the Porfirian regime had largely ignored—the indigenous and popular classes. Paradoxically the committee did not include a historian, and instead included a man who would become one of the greatest narrators of the Mexican Revolution, Martín Luis Guzmán. History became a means to read and understand the contradictions of the script of modernity. It ultimately functioned as a scenario in order to stage nationalistic "relatos," to use Néstor García Canclini's words, that significantly impacted the embodied enactments of *lo mexicano*.

### **1921: The Centennial Celebrations and the Staging of a Popular Nation<sup>17</sup>**

The centennial celebrations of 1921 at once shared the same Porfirian principles and departed from them in substantial ways. On the one hand, the post-revolutionary government wanted to present Mexico as a modern nation, cosmopolitan, yet with its unique ancient history. In this sense, the post-revolutionary government resorted to some of the same mechanisms of the Porfirian regime, particularly those related to the cultural performances and public displays of the ideal vision of the nation. They also resorted to the technological developments of the era to foster the consumption and circulation of imaginaries of a unified Mexico. On the other hand, however, it was precisely around the imagery of the nation where they differed from the Porfirian fiestas as well as in their understanding of historical events that helped to create a modern and diverse Mexico. It is at this juncture where I believe the body acquires paramount importance to understand the emergence of *lo mexicano*, especially as the case of "La Noche Mexicana" illustrates. The focus shifted from representing a cosmopolitan vision of Mexico primarily for foreigners, to staging a popular and therefore diverse image of Mexico. Though the post-revolutionary vision of Mexico was still the product of the intellectual and cultural elites, as in the Porfirian regime, borrowing from the cultural currents of the moment, its incorporation of the popular into the imagery of the nation led to ambivalent and at times conflicting scenarios of Mexico.

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<sup>16</sup> For an excellent discussion of the shifting paradigms regarding the complex and contradictory incorporation of indigenous people into narratives of the nation, see Paul Gillingham's *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico*.

<sup>17</sup> See Clementina Díaz y de Ovando's "Las fiestas del 'Año del Centenario': 1921" for a through description of all the festivities that took place during the centennial celebrations.

I analyze these events and practices as cultural performances in order to examine not only how they produce a particular meaning of *lo mexicano*, but also how that meaning is consumed and circulates by participants and spectators.<sup>18</sup> Néstor García Canclini reminds us in his work about popular culture that it was through the manipulation of cultural heritage that the State established its hegemony. As he argues in his seminal work, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, for traditions to serve as legitimizing for those who created them or appropriated them, it was necessary to put them on stage. García Canclini offers the idea of scenario to grapple with the complex interconnections that configure *lo popular* and therefore *lo culto*: “Cuando se trata de entender los entrecruzamientos en las fronteras entre países, en las redes fluidas que intercomunican a pueblos, etnias y clases, entonces lo popular y lo culto, lo nacional y lo extranjero, aparecen no como entidades sino como escenarios. Un escenario... es un lugar donde un relato se pone en escena.” He goes on to say regarding the symbolic operation that takes place in the process: “En el mundo de los símbolos... aparte de invertir, invertimos: depositamos energía psíquica en cuerpos, objetos, procesos sociales, y en las representaciones de ellos” (339). The patrimony exists as a political force so long as it is staged: in commemorations, monuments, and museums. García Canclini also asks us to reflect upon the way in which *lo popular* and *lo culto* shape and are shaped by trans-national processes, always already interconnected. By focusing on the scenario as the place where these processes are represented, García Canclini highlights the symbolic power of the staging of national narratives, popular or otherwise. In fact, he rightly calls attention to the ways individuals psychically and affectively “invest” a symbolic charge into bodies, objects, processes, and representations.

I follow García Canclini’s theorization of the staging of the popular as a “scenario” to understand how it is the result of trans-national historical processes that rendered it coherent and symbolically foundational. According to García Canclini, “[I]o culto y lo popular, lo nacional y lo extranjero, se presentan... como construcciones *culturales*. No tienen ninguna consistencia como estructuras ‘naturales’ inherentes a la vida colectiva. Su verosimilitud se logró *históricamente* mediante operaciones de ritualización de patrimonio esencializados” (emphasis in the original, 338-39). It was literally through a series of stagings of “relatos” of *lo mexicano* that the post-revolutionary government culturally constructed the idea of the nation. The affective and symbolic power of the trope of *lo mexicano* as the enactment of *lo popular* derived from this historically ritualized operation. I approach the cultural performances of the centennial celebrations as key instances to examine how the *escenificación* or staging of *lo mexicano* interpellated a popular national audience, while attending to the trans-national processes at play that impacted its configuration.

One of the seemingly simple, yet profound differences of the celebrations of 1921 was to attract primarily not foreign visitors and potential investors as in 1910, but rather people from all social classes. The efforts of the post-revolutionary government involved or rather relied also on civil organizations, newspapers, and the creation of a committee to reach out to the vast numbers of the population impacted by the Revolution of 1910. Unlike the Porfirian centennial celebrations, the post-revolutionary government did not have the resources or the infrastructure needed, as it was the first time the federal government celebrated Mexican Independence after the turmoil of the armed phase of the Revolution. Therefore, and as a series of newspaper articles published in *El Universal* demonstrate, the

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<sup>18</sup> I elaborate in the introduction why and how I approach these practices as “cultural performances.”

committee in charge of the festivities reached out to public and private organizations to carry out the activities of the centenary. In May 15, 1921, for instance, a short article confirmed the “popular character” of the centennial celebrations and extended an invitation to different associations to actively participate. “Serán populares las fiestas del Centenario” read the title of the piece. The article, among other things, announced the name of the committee and the individuals who were part of it—the “Comité Ejecutivo de la Comisión Organizadora de los festejos del Centenario”: Emiliano López Figueroa, president; Juan de Dios Bojorquez, vice-president; Carlos Argüelles, treasurer; Martín Luis Guzmán, secretary. The aim of the celebrations was specifically, according to the president interviewed for the article, to engage all “social classes” so that all inhabitants of Mexico could participate: “El señor López Figueroa nos manifestó a continuación que por indicación expresa del señor Presidente de la República, el programa que se está haciendo será de carácter esencialmente popular; a excepción de aquellas ceremonias y números indispensables que requerirán la celebración oficial del centenario de la consumación de nuestra independencia” (“Serán populares”). Although the president of the committee acknowledged the celebration of some events that were exclusive and not open to the general public, the program itself was essentially of a “popular character,” and designed to celebrate the “consummation” of the independence movement. The author of the piece went on to state that “los festejos que se preparan, especialmente aquellos en los que podrán asistir todas las clases sociales, serán inusitados, y dignos, por lo tanto, de la fecha inmortal que conmemorarán. El Gobierno no escatimará suma alguna para alcanzar un verdadero y su principal deseo es que a la mayoría de los festejos concurren, sin restricción alguna, los habitantes de México que deseen hacerlo” (“Serán populares”). The majority of the festivities would be unprecedented in that they were to be organized for all social classes and without any restrictions. Finally, according to the article, all private institutions and corporations were encouraged by the president of the committee, López Figueroa, to participate in the celebrations, sharing their programs, as the committee was willing to publicize the activities and events that were to take place from September 15th to the 27th. As the article stated, “el Comité desea formar un programa armónico, que abarque en absoluto todos los festejos con que haya de celebrarse dicha fecha, con objeto de evitar discordancias. Y que con este fin el Comité invita a todas las instituciones y corporaciones privadas que estén organizando fiestas para el Centenario, a que remitan su programa a dicho Comité” (“Serán populares”).

A second article featured in *El Universal* on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, “El pueblo tendrá acceso a todas las fiestas del Centenario,” reiterated the accessibility of the festivities while simultaneously showcasing on the front page a picture of the members of the committee of the centennial celebrations. The article broadly described the activities that were to take place during the centenary, some of which had already been publicized in the newspaper according to the article. This particular article draws attention to a couple of key elements. First of all, from the title of the note, it was clear once again that the people—*el pueblo*—were the main emphasis of the celebrations. Accessibility was therefore crucial and a variety of activities, commonly designed for the upper classes were organized to foster “un mexicanismo con el que se demuestre el cariño que tenemos por nuestro país” (“El pueblo tendrá acceso” 1). However, and although it was not its primary focus, the centenary was also a staging of *lo mexicano* and its products, cultural or otherwise, for foreign audiences, highlighting the international scope of some of the events. Hence the significance of multiple expositions to showcase Mexican products:

Con motivo de las fiestas del Centenario y para demostrar que México trabaja con todo empeño encarrillándose de una manera definitiva en el camino del bienestar y del progreso, habrá exposiciones industriales en las que entrarán en juego todos los elementos mexicanos que servirán de vehículo eficaz para darnos a conocer ampliamente en el extranjero, procurando por este medio un mercado seguro a nuestros productos. La exposición de arte popular, y en la que se exhibirán todos aquellos productos que fabrica nuestro pueblo, así como los objetos artísticos que tanto llaman la atención por su belleza y originalidad, será lo más completa posible y para ello cada uno de los Estados de la República enviará un poderoso contingente de objetos dignos de figurar en una exposición, por notable que ésta sea. (1, 12)

Even though the article did make a reference to the industrial expositions that were to take place, the emphasis was on local artistic and cultural products. Sharing the language of progress characteristic of the Porfirian regime oriented to create a market for Mexican goods, the article's focus then shifted to highlight the inclusion of products elaborated by *el pueblo*, whose contribution was to be recognized by showcasing them in an exhibition. The description of the "Exposición de Arte Popular," in effect, discursively elevated the goods and the "artistic objects" "fabricated" by *el pueblo* to cultural objects worthy to be displayed.<sup>19</sup> Functioning, one can say, as another public lesson in visual culture by the government, as Mraz read *El desfile histórico*, the "Exposición de Arte Popular" aimed to identify the diversity of Mexico's local artistic production and include it vis-à-vis the industrial goods produced in the country.

In his detailed analysis of the emergence of a nationalistic aesthetics and cultural politics in post-revolutionary Mexico, Rick López draws attention to the ways in which their consolidation responded to and was embedded in a complex web of trans-national intellectual, economic, and artistic discourses. According to López, the success of the national cultural endeavors "was born out of the manner in which diverse cultural projects intersected with economic and political developments, and most importantly, because of the ways the endeavor transformed the political, economic, and cultural terrain on the local level, within rural and urban communities across Mexico" (7). Despite the fact that the "Exposición de Arte Popular" is not the focus of this chapter, I want to emphasize López's understanding of how the various nationalistic post-revolutionary projects responded to local and transnational developments that simultaneously transformed and continued the emergence of a Mexican aesthetics. In fact, the emergence of a popular visual aesthetics was fundamental for the configuration of the nation. As López rightly argues, focusing on the creation of a

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<sup>19</sup> For a thorough analysis of the "Exhibición de Arte Popular" see chapter two, "Popular Art and the Staging of Indianness" in López's *Crafting Mexico*. In the chapter, López summarizes the objectives of the exhibition as conceived by the organizers Enciso and Montenegro as follows: "First, they wanted to bring together popular art from every part of the republic so as to discern a common aesthetic foundation that, once revealed, might offer a basis for national cohesion. Second, they wanted to display examples of high-quality popular art. The structure of the exhibition, the tours, the docents, and the catalogue taught the audience that these objects were not curiosities or markers of cultural fragmentation and indigenous backwardness but instead were national art. Their third objective was to encourage urban middle-and upper-class visitors to admire, and then seek to possess, these markers of *mexicanidad*...Demand for popular arts by a public willing to pay fair prices, they hoped, would bring economic uplift to the countryside and assure the survival of these arts, while at the same time fostering mutual understanding among the different sectors of society" (79).

national aesthetics “can help us understand how art has served not just as a medium of conquest, resistance, and *mestizaje* but also of nation formation, accommodation, and solidarity” (15).

Furthermore, and particularly in the case of the exhibition and I would add “La Noche Mexicana”, it was not simply that artisan products would soon be imbricated in an international market and mass cultural flows, but rather many of the key players, especially intellectuals, already belonged to transnational circuits, cultural, economic, and political (18). Consequently, as López reminds us, the consolidation of a popular nationalistic cultural movement was the result “of the dynamic relation that emerged between transnational flows, the elite nationalist project, and local experience” (20).

The centenary celebrations aimed at establishing a market for Mexican goods, cultural or otherwise; recognized, and hence created, a national aesthetics; but perhaps most importantly, promoted an audience for their consumption. In other words, the cultural, intellectual, and political elites promoted the creation of a national public—a public that was to consume a depiction of the people for the people. The article “El pueblo tendrá acceso” gestured towards the need and influence of the role of education in the formation of a nationalistic culture: “El ambiente artístico que existe entre nuestro pueblo y que por desgracia ningún Gobierno había estimulado, recibirá al [sic] partir de hoy la atención que merece por la Secretaría de Educación y a iniciativa del señor licenciado Vasconcelos va a funcionar en plazo muy breve” (12). The author of the article highlighted the impact of education in promoting the “ambiente artístico” that already existed within the nation and that had not been properly fostered before, mentioning the work of José Vasconcelos as paramount for this cultural task. However, it is important to recognize the intersection between the arts and education. In effect, the pedagogical dimension of the post-revolutionary project was crucial for the emergence and configuration of a national aesthetics. The centenary festivities were designed to celebrate Mexican independence, but at the same time the staging of *lo mexicano* required the education of *el pueblo*. I believe that it is here where lies the difference between the Porfirian and the post-revolutionary nationalistic projects: the shift from the discursive and visual construction of *lo mexicano* to the formation of a popular national audience through pedagogical praxis centered on embodied practices—on bodies.

The festive character of the celebrations was conflated with the notion of the popular, an aspect that Vasconcelos was eventually to foster and promote through public education and the development of cultural projects. The insistence on the accessibility of the centennial festivities, previously designed exclusively for the privileged classes, thus underlined the double nature of the celebrations—festive and educational:

Por primera vez en México, el pueblo tendrá acceso a espectáculos que siempre habían sido dedicados a las clases privilegiadas; esta disposición que es muy acertada, tendrá por objeto además de un carácter festivo, el de educación, ya que muchos de esos espectáculos consistirán en conciertos, funciones teatrales, representaciones de ópera, juegos florales, sin olvidar los torneos de viriles deportes que seguramente serán el ejemplo para que se instituyan en nuestro país agrupaciones que procuren el desarrollo de nuestro [sic] cultura física. (12)

The spectacles and events were to be considered examples of citizen formation. These public performances were to be festive, given the celebratory character of the events, yet they were also to educate the public, particularly those who had never had access to them. In this sense, these public performances were to shape national bodies into citizens and into a national audience, I would add, given the importance of cultural performances. If the “viriles deportes” literally attempted to promote and develop a “cultura física,” the cultural performances formed Mexican citizens through the embodied performance of a nationalistic cultural identity, a “cultura nacional.”

Finally, the role that various kinds of scientific, artistic, professional, and workers associations played is also central to understand the scope of the centennial celebrations. According to the article, “[e]l Comité organizador de las Fiestas ha convocado a agrupaciones científicas, literarias, artísticas, industriales y obreras para que cooperen dentro de su esfera de acción a dar mayor brillo a las fiestas y todas ellas en una forma tan desinteresada como digna de aplauso, han correspondido, celebrando conferencias con el Comité citado para el mejor desarrollo del programa” (12). Encouraged by the State-sponsored organizing committee of the centenary, private and civic institutions actively contributed to the formation of a nationalistic cultural identity, organizing their own events that, in cases such as *El Universal*'s “India Bonita” contest, literally shaped the embodiment of a gendered nationalistic aesthetics (Plate 2).<sup>20</sup> The parades, beauty contests, massive performances, exhibitions, and other such festivities aimed at reconfiguring the notion of the popular and the indigenous to be included by the idea of the national. The performance of these bodies in public places therefore revealed a much more complex picture, articulating female, indigenous, and at times queer embodiments of *lo mexicano*.

The staging of *lo mexicano* thus organizes a process whose meaning is always incomplete, transitory, polyphonic, and ambivalent. I argue that the moving bodies of festive productions, such as the centenary celebrations I mentioned, contrast with the more conventional image of *lo mexicano*, understood as static, hyper-masculine and mestizo. In this sense, I want to highlight the signifying function of scenario and its ability to make visible what already exists in a given spatio-temporal frame or stage. As Diana Taylor asserts, the scenario functions as a structuring mechanism that makes visible the many “relatos” that predate any particular staging. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor suggests that the physical space of representation as well as the actions represented or scenes complement each other metonymically: “the place allows us to think about the possibilities of the action. But action also defines space” (29). The scenarios therefore represent “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes... The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes...; [it] predates the script and allows for many possible ‘endings’” (28). Along with the physical and symbolic construction of any scenario, the spectators/actors also partake in the elaboration of narratives of what is represented. By focusing on bodies in public spaces, I want to highlight how the idea of the “popular” emerges not only discursively, but also visually gesturing towards the imaging and imagining

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed analysis of the contest and the racial and gender implications of this particular staging of a nationalistic embodied indigeneity see López's “Ethnicizing the Nation: The India Bonita Contest of 1921” in *Crafting Mexico*.

of a shared embodied cultural background.<sup>21</sup> Forming and informing a national public—the spectators & actors of Mexican nationalism—and operating as a mechanism and a metaphor, the scenario ultimately allows us to think about the material and discursive ways *lo mexicano* was presented and represented in 1921.

### **“La Noche Mexicana”— An Assemblage of Mexicos**

How did “La Noche Mexicana” come to embody the idea of the nation? “La Noche Mexicana” provides a unique scenario to look at the tensions that derived from the staging of a cosmopolitan, yet very locally diverse nation. The literal imaging vis-à-vis the embodiment of nationalistic imaginings draws attention to the continuities, discontinuities, and contradictions of the post-revolutionary cultural agenda. On the one hand, it allowed for the creation of an exportable image of the nation to be consumed by a national audience, while simultaneously enabling Mexicans to self-identify with the cosmopolitan trends of the epoch. The self-exoticization of Mexico enabled intellectual and cultural post-revolutionary elites to participate in the construction of an already cosmopolitan national identity. By resorting to an Orientalist grammar that was already cosmopolitan, as I will illustrate later with the work of Adolfo Best Maugard, post-revolutionary thinkers could jump-scale from the local and national to the cosmopolitan. This triangulation of rendering cosmopolitan the national via Orientalist and European and American tropes highlights the contradictions of staging an image of a nationalistic shared cultural background. These cosmopolitan discursive and visuals representations contrasted with the actual representations and presentations of bodies and objects from different parts of Mexico gathering in a public space. The “hermosas señoritas” dressed as *tehuanas* at the various booths selling Mexican goods, for instance, did not necessarily embody the *tehuanas* depicted and described in the official program with Oriental, Greek, and art-deco references. “La Noche Mexicana,” therefore, draws attention to the production of an embodied idea of the nation that drew from cultural practices of the international scene while simultaneously rendering its own resources as raw materials in a gesture of self-exoticization and self-aestheticization. At the same time, however, the staging of this particular Mexican scenario would be performatively complicated and at times undone by the embodied gestures of the bodies who cited an idea of the nation.

The staging of a national identity at “La Noche Mexicana” was the result of an “assemblage” of what eventually became a cosmopolitan sense of Mexicanness that at once reinforced and disavowed the fiction of a national unity. In this sense, I look at the staging and therefore the shifting and ambivalent scenarios of *lo mexicano* that “La Noche Mexicana” ultimately re-presented in order to compare and contrast the elitist representations of the nation vis-à-vis the concrete, yet ephemeral actions of various national bodies— of the “amalgama de clases,” to borrow the words of Palavicini. I follow Jasbir K. Puar’s theorization of assemblage as both a concept, but also as a hermeneutical device as theorized in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* in order to question the seemingly coherent and/or normative narratives readily attributed to *lo mexicano*. Thinking of *lo mexicano* as an assemblage draws attention to the ways in which it functions as a contingent spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergence (204). As such, it allows us to examine not just what is “visibly, audibly, legibly, or tangibly evident” but rather focus on the “movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit

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<sup>21</sup> Later in the chapter, I elaborate on the notion of “imaging” based on the work of Adolfo Best Maugard and his *Método de dibujo*.

events, spatiality, and corporealities” (215). Puar asks us directly to consider not just what corporeal expressions mean or signify but also what they actually do (204). Questioning coherent and/or normative discourses of *lo mexicano* brings to the fore the importance of bodies and what their actions conjure, not just what they represent. In doing so, I explore the emergence of a nationalistic corporeal culture that does not necessarily transcend the national aesthetic language, which has been carefully analyzed by Ricardo López and Ricardo Pérez Montfort, but that nonetheless may exceed.<sup>22</sup> Thus, I focus on the ways these nationalistic corporeal expressions attributed to *lo mexicano* speak of an embodied form of sociality that highlights how bodies signify on their own in addition to or despite being asked to represent something else.

Hence I read “La Noche Mexicana” as an assemblage of Mexicos. In what follows, I analyze the discursive and photographic rendition of the events prior and during the celebration of “La Noche Mexicana” and the implications of the multiple stagings of *lo mexicano* that took place. I first turn to the articles that appeared before and after the events in order to highlight how it was rendered discursively. In an article published by *El Universal* on September 6<sup>th</sup>, “La Noche Mexicana en el Bosque de Chapultepec,” the author mentioned that the event, which was supposed to attract at least thirty thousand people, would take place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month. The plan for the staging of “La Noche Mexicana” was described as follows, and I quote at length:

Diseminados por el Bosque de Chapultepec, van a construirse numerosos puestos decorados bajo la dirección del artista Adolfo Best, y donde damas de nuestra mejor sociedad y pertenecientes a las Cruces Rojas y Blanca y demás asociaciones benéficas, se encargarán de las vendimias de flores, confetti, etc... Existe el propósito, para que nada falte a lo típico de esta fiesta, de que las damas encargadas de los puestos vayan ataviadas no sólo del clásico traje de china poblana, sino también del de tehuana, ranchera, norteñas, mestizas, que tendrán como marco los puestos decorados con zarpas, tapetes de tule, rebozos, banderas y todos aquellos objetos de arte típicamente nacionales. En los puestos habrá vendimias, entre otras cosas, de agua fresca, la que estará depositada en las clásicas ollas tapatías y será servida en jícaras bellamente decoradas por los indios de Pátzcuaro. No faltarán los puestos de platillos mexicanos, como de asados de pollo, enchiladas, tamales, atole y buñuelos. (1,5)

This description draws attention to the fact that it was conceived as a massive event, though they were not prepared for the hundred thousands of attendees, where women and the civic associations they represented were to play an important role. The organizers of “La Noche Mexicana” relied on the “damas,” the Mexican bourgeois women, precisely to embody the great diversity of Mexico, which at this moment was not reduced entirely to the iconic figure of the *china* and the *charro*. According to Pérez Montfort, in the first years after the Revolution, particularly in the 1920s, “[s]i bien el centralismo empezó a plantear una especie de ‘sanción’ o reconocimiento sobre aquello que identificaba como lo ‘típico’ de tal o cual región, igual de ‘mexicanos’ resultaban los norteños que los yucatecos, los jarochos que los

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<sup>22</sup> I will address López’s and Pérez Montfort’s discussion on the consolidation of an aesthetic language in the following pages.

abajeros, los ‘inditos’ que ‘los charros’” (128).<sup>23</sup> “Las damas de nuestra mejor sociedad” were to dress up as norteñas, mestizas, rancheras and of course tehuanas. They had to embody the various Mexicos to contribute to the elaborated fiction of a national celebration—its imaging and its imagining. Even though this spectacle led to the eventual co-optation of the otherwise popular and regional symbols in terms of attire, food and artifacts, the same gesture inaugurated a narrative that also recognized these symbols as Mexican, “típicamente nacionales,” placing the contributions and skills of the “indios de Pátzcuaro” at the same discursive and visual level and necessary for the staging of *lo mexicano*.

The particular scenario that “La Noche Mexicana” staged conjured and even created different publics. The appearance of a national public depended upon the summoning of a sociality that enabled contingent adscriptions to an idea of Mexico. In his insightful study, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner reminds us of the contingencies and potentialities of the emergence of publics. He argues that “[w]riting to a public helps to make a world insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it” (91). A public is interpellated into being and in so doing conjures a “stranger sociality,” a mode of belonging that actualizes the discourse that produces it. In the case of the newspaper articles that encouraged people to participate in the centenary celebrations, the aim was to foster a sense of national belonging, thereby creating not equal citizens—there was a distinction between “damas” and “inditios”—but rather a national public. It is because of this sense of openness and impersonality characteristic by the notion of publicness, as Warner understands it, that I find the idea of a public closer to describing the interpellation of a national sociality in 1921 rather than that of citizenry. In his critique of Benedict Anderson’s theory of *Imagined Communities*, Claudio Lomnitz recognizes that the great novelty of Anderson’s approach was “to treat nationalism not as an ideology, but rather as a hegemonic, commonsensical, and tacitly shared cultural construct” (*Deep Mexico* 3). However, Lomnitz criticizes the presupposition that nationalism creates a single imagined community. The author argues that “nationalism does not ideologically form a single fraternal community, because it systematically distinguishes full citizens from part citizens or strong citizens from weak ones (e.g., children, women, Indian, the ignorant)” (12). He then proposes a redefinition of nation “as a community that is conceived of as deep comradeship among full citizens, each of whom is a potential broker between the national state and weak, embryonic, or part citizens whom he or she can construe as dependents” (13). I use Lomnitz’s understanding of a differentiated access to an imagined community to re-evaluate the symbolic impact that an investment in an idea of a “popular” nation re-presented in post-revolutionary Mexico. Lomnitz, as Warner, insists on the potentiality of being a participant, a “potential broker.” Yet I argue that the organizers of “La Noche Mexicana” conjured a “popular sociality” that could not be reduced to total or partial citizenship. Rather than a national audience who needed to be present at the time and place of the festivities, the fostering of a national public implied the potential participation contingently open to anyone,

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<sup>23</sup> Pérez Montfort observes that it would take several years, most of the 1920s, for the *china* and the *charro* to be consolidated as the indisputable symbols of *lo mexicano*, particularly due to the popularization of *el jarabe tapatío* as a musical genre and national dance. The iconic performance of *el jarabe tapatío* by Anna Pavlova in 1919, as the cultural critic claims, “no sólo incorporaba el todavía un tanto confuso atuendo de la china poblana, sino que hacía vestir a los caballeros con lo que ya entonces se llamaba ‘traje de charro’ y que no era otra cosa, al parecer, más que una estilización del uniforme del rural porfiriano” (132).

even if not equally. Crucial for the success of this national mode of belonging, however, was the emphasis on the “típicamente nacional,” on a discourse of a national aesthetics. As Warner goes on to say, “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and it must attempt to realize that world through address” (114). In order to conjure a national public, references to *lo mexicano* needed to be continuously emphasized. The aesthetic language that described a national public enabled the world it aimed to re-present.

Before discussing the events that took place at “La Noche Mexicana,” I want to further elaborate on the consolidation of a national aesthetic language to better understand what was at stake once it was staged and embodied. In their critical works, Rick López and Ricardo Pérez Montfort have each discussed the ways this particular staging of Mexican nationalism responded to the needs of creating a tradition that could appeal to the popular masses, and yet address the aesthetic demands of a cosmopolitan, modern post-revolutionary Mexico. This appeal to the popular masses, in effect, was crucial, for it would have significant symbolic and ideological repercussions for future enactments of *lo mexicano*. As Roger Bartra has argued, the creation of a people, *el pueblo*, was shaped by the emergence of a spectacle of a national culture that would allow *el pueblo* to see itself reproduced in its staging: “De diversas maneras, el pueblo reconoce, en el espectáculo de la cultura nacional, no un reflejo pero sí una extraña prolongación (o transposición) de su propia realidad cotidiana” (228). The staging of the popular needed to be able to offer a form of identification with the audience. At stake was therefore the configuration of a form of sociality that required the participation of different sectors of the Mexican population: from indigenous communities, peasants, and urban workers to the bourgeoisie and the political and economic elites.

In *Crafting Mexico*, Rick López indicates how “La Noche Mexicana” was originally intended to emulate a Porfirian garden party to showcase Mexico’s technological modernity such as electric lighting and paved roads. In 1910, the Porfirian Garden Party showcased a spectacle of fireworks and lighting with a battle of boats. According to María de las Nieves Rodríguez, “[a]l caer la tarde, invadieron al lago los fuegos artificiales y una batalla naval de luces comenzó: dos barcos tras sus murallas lanzaban por sus cañones grandes bocanadas de humo coloreado hasta que el fuerte de ‘Santa Bárbara’ fue destruido por su oponente, deleitando al público con una explosión de fuegos artificiales nuevamente” (65). The mythical theme of the allegorical floats combined the preference of the Díaz government for European tropes along with the staging of modernity through a show of lights. However, as López reminds us, Adolfo Best Maugard, who had been hired for the occasion by the centennial committee, decided to model the event after a “feria” instead, inspired by cosmopolitan modernism, romantic primitivism and post revolutionary nationalism— indeed, as López claims, “nothing less than a new aesthetic vocabulary of *mexicanidad*” (69).<sup>24</sup> According to López, the emergence of a national aesthetic discourse resulted from the State-sponsorship of a popular-oriented celebration to promote the cultural integration of the nation. Unlike the contest of “La India Bonita” organized by *El Universal*, “La Noche Mexicana” and the “Exhibición de Arte Popular” were completely sponsored by the post-revolutionary regime placing contemporary “indigenous culture” at the center of the nationalistic enterprise. As López states, both cultural projects “celebrated folkloric

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<sup>24</sup> I will briefly discuss Best Maugard’s trajectory and cultural influence in this phase of the cultural experimentation in Mexico later in the chapter.

expressions [that] conflated campesinos and Indians, and though some of the arts they drew upon had urban roots and grew out of mestizo or even Spanish practices, they generalized the forms they celebrated as coming from ‘rural Indians’” (68). However, the treatment of “folkloric expressions” required the selection, transformation and dissemination of the intellectual and cultural elite to process them and share them with a national and international audience. In effect, “[i]t was up to elite artists and the intelligentsia to recover this indigenous essence and package in such a way as to turn it into a form or art around which they could mold an ethnicized national identity” (74).<sup>25</sup> However, I contend that this process was much more complex, as it was the result from a tension between two strands. On the one hand, it recognized an “indigenous essence” as the raw material to elaborate a national aesthetic language; in so doing, it emphasized the need for an artistic and intellectual intervention in order to render it consumable and legible according to Europeanized aesthetic standards. On the other hand, in order for a national public to emerge, indeed to be conjured, the cultural and intellectual elites had to actually “indigenize” European cultural forms so that they would be legible to a popular public.

While I share López’s idea of the emergence of an aesthetic language, specifically a “visual aesthetics,” as one of the major implications of the State-sponsored intellectual and cultural interventions mediated by men such as Adolfo Best Maugard and José Vasconcelos, I want to draw attention to the impact that public cultural performances and particularly “La Noche Mexicana” had in the emergence of a corporeal national culture and how it complicated a unified rendering of the nation. However, before addressing how I position my work in regards to the emergence of this “ethnicized” aesthetic language López thoroughly analyzes, I would like to briefly return to the pedagogical and centralist component of the post-revolutionary cultural project. In his seminal work, *Estampas del nacionalismo popular mexicano*, Ricardo Pérez Montfort analyzes the emergence of State-sponsored nationalistic expressions as invented, mythified and imaginary creations of the urban artistic and intellectual elite to unify and legitimize the government. Pérez Montfort particularly draws attention to the relationship between the emergence of a nationalistic cultural aesthetics and the role of education. As he explains in essay “Una región inventada desde el centro: La consolidación del cuadro estereotípico nacional, 1921-1937,” despite the presence of an aestheticized and discursive nationalism present in the cultural and political activities of the Porfirian regime, a “popular” tone became “medular” for the political discourse of the post-revolutionary government, thereby “inventing” a series of stereotypical representations of a *mexicanidad* (121-22). *El pueblo*, which vaguely referred to the peasants and marginal groups that had fought during the Revolution, “reinició su tránsito hacia las referencias míticas y abstractas, de donde se había apartado para participar en la lucha armada” (123). This process of abstraction and mythification, however, also responded to the consolidation of the mass media and to the establishment of a public educational apparatus in Mexico thanks to the work of the so-called “cultural *caudillo*” José Vasconcelos.

Pérez Montfort precisely focuses his analysis on these two models of formal and informal education of *el pueblo*: the dissemination of mass media and the configuration of

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<sup>25</sup> By the process of “ethnicization,” López attempts to “capture the fluidity and contested nature of [an] embrace of indigenosity as part of the national identity, even as the Asian and black presence was erased and prejudice against indigenous people was continuously reconstituted. The term also highlights the extent to which intellectuals and artists seized on the revolution as a mandate to study contemporary indigenosity and make it part of the discussion on national identity” (9).

public instruction in Mexico. The mass media played a crucial role to circulate images of *lo mexicano*, giving them the status of a trend in the 1920s. As Pérez Montfort claims, “[e]n el teatro popular, en la prensa de diversión, en el cine y en la radio—medios que tuvieron un auge particular en la ciudad de México—lo ‘típicamente mexicano’ adquirió la dimensión de ‘moda’ junto con las ‘flappers’, el bataclán, ‘el guacamoleo’ y la ‘parafernalia sicalíptica” (124). The proliferation of embodied representations of *lo mexicano* already suggests the impact of appealing to the general public and the popularization of national icons. Nevertheless, the post-revolutionary thinkers wanted to elevate it to the realm of the aesthetic in order to advance a discourse that legitimated the regime and unified the nation, while rendering consumable and therefore teachable a Mexican cultural identity. Cultural and political debates were primarily centered on distinctions between three major tendencies of the epoch: “indigenismo,” “hispanismo,” and “latinoamericanismo.” Yet, the three of them shared the same ideal about the bond between aesthetics and education. According to Pérez Montfort, “[el indigenismo, el hispanismo, y el latinoamericanismo] veían a la educación, y con ella a la ‘estética’, como la forma ideal de superación material y cultural. En materia pedagógica, el patriotismo [estaba] íntimamente ligado al goce estético—en el que la representación de ‘la mexicanidad’ jugaba un papel importante ... Hispanistas, indigenistas y latinoamericanistas esgrimieron sus ideas invocando más a los sentimientos—y sobre todo al patriotismo—que a las razones” (125-26). Whether or not the “sentimientos” played a more important part than reason, a pedagogical impulse characterized the formation of a cultural identity. In this sense, the aesthetic dimension of *lo mexicano* was intimately linked with notions of patriotism and education. However, I want to draw attention to the importance of the “goce estético” that Pérez Montfort alludes to but does not elaborate much further, as it highlights the significance of the body in the configuration, circulation, and consumption of *lo mexicano*.

Indeed, the actual embodiment of *lo mexicano*, particularly as staged at “La Noche Mexicana,” merits further interrogation. The periodicals and photographic archives I have consulted reveal a much more complex picture of the significance of the physical and symbolic bringing together of bodies to present and represent the nation that at times exceeded the State-sponsored project. “La Noche Mexicana” converged a popular public within the same spatio-temporal coordinates: two consecutive nights in Chapultepec, Mexico in late September of 1921.<sup>26</sup> On Sunday, September 25, 1921, *El Universal* published in the section where it advertised the program of the numerous festivities that were taking place during the centennial celebrations a note stating that the entrance to “La Noche Mexicana” would be entirely free given the great interest in the celebration. The committee had originally intended to charge five pesos, but they had run out of tickets. In addition, and according to the note, “[c]iento sesenta mil personas han expresado de palabra o en acción su deseo de concurrir a la fiesta organizada con el nombre de ‘Noche Mexicana’ en el Bosque de Chapultepec, jamaica, cabalgata, bailes y cantos regionales, gran baile nacional, iluminación y fuegos artificiales, fiesta a la cual asistirá el C. Presidente de la República.” The article went on to state that “[q]uince mil boletos fueron impresos y distribuidos entre los primeros solicitantes. Ciento cuarenta y cinco mil personas se consideraron excluidas... Seguir distribuyendo boletos sería seguir distribuyendo descontento, por consiguiente,

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<sup>26</sup> López claims that there were “two complete repeat performances during September and October (one of which was reserved for an exclusive crowd)” (71). I have not been able to document the ones in October and I will thus limit my analysis to those of September.

quedan cancelados los boletos para esa función tan solicitada. La entrada será absolutamente libre y todos serán admitidos sin necesidad de exhibir invitación ni boleto” (3). This short note confirmed the activities programmed, such as the regional songs and dances, cavalcade, and carnival-like activities typical of a *feria* in addition to the fireworks and lighting show. Nevertheless, what is most important is precisely the amount of interest and the accessibility to all citizens with a free entrance. The significance of this event celebrating a sense of Mexican nationalism was further emphasized by the expected attendance of the President Álvaro Obregón.

Adolfo Best Maugard was in charge of orchestrating this major event. Best Maugard, a cosmopolitan artist in his own right, had been hired in August of 1921 for the occasion to stage a spectacle of a modern nationalism. As María de las Nieves Rodríguez reminds us, Best had long been part of the national scene. He had previously worked with Manuel Gamio and Franz Boas in 1911, who had hired Best Maugard to elaborate drawings of the pre-Hispanic objects who they found in Teotihuacán (Rodríguez 67). Later in the decade, after a stay in Europe during the armed phase of the Revolution, he had staged *Fantasia Mexicana*, designing the scenography for Anna Pavlova’s famous interpretation of *el jarabe tapatío*, first in Mexico in 1919 and later in New York 1920. According to Rick López, *Fantasia Mexicana* was an “avant-garde performance” based on a script by the US writer Katherine Anne Porter, whose story took place in Xochimilco. As López states, “until 1920 [it] had remained a regional dance and a vaudeville act” (70). Adolfo Best Maugard became therefore fundamental to understand the emergence and consolidation not only of an aesthetic discursive and visual language of *lo mexicano*, but also, and perhaps more importantly, its actual embodiment. Best Maugard championed an indigenous aesthetics as representative of the nation. In fact, this Mexican cosmopolitan artist aestheticized certain elements of indigenous artistic productions and literally put them on stage. In addition, and as Rodríguez rightly insists, the significance of his works derived not only from the different stages and pavilions whose sceneries he created, but also from the performance of two dances— those of the *chinas* and the *tehuanas*. (Plate 3) The impact of “La Noche Mexicana” thus resided precisely in the fact that it showcased the re-insertion of the popular and indigenous sensibilities into the discourse of the nation despite its Porfirian influence.

On Monday, September 26, 1921, *El Universal* published the program of “La Noche Mexicana,” mentioning all the activities that were to take place as illustrated in the official program designed by Best Maugard (Plate 4). I quote at length to give a complete sense of how this national fiesta was conceived.

A las 7.30 p.m., NOCHE MEXICANA EN EL BOSQUE DE CHAPULTEPEC.—Los carruajes llegarán por la Calzada de la Reforma, descendiendo el público de ellos en el Restaurant Chapultepec, donde bifurca la calzada de la Gran Avenida hasta la entrada de la NOCHE MEXICANA; los vehículos seguirán por la Calzada de circunvalación y la Avenida de la Exposición.—A la hora citada dará inicio la jamaica, combate floral y de confetti, bailes música y cantos regionales.—Los puestos donde se venderán flores, confetti y platillos mexicanos, estarán atendidos por hermosas señoritas.—Habrá tres escenarios donde continuamente habrá representaciones típicamente mexicanas.—A las 8.30 p.m., se anunciarán con siete cohetes detonantes los fuegos sobre el Lago Grande.—Concluido este

número seguirá la kermesse.—A las 9 p.m., bailable en el escenario grande del lago (grupo de tehuanas).—A las 9.30 p.m. fuegos artificiales, erupción del Popocatepetl, se simulará la erupción con cohetes de colores.—10 p.m., bailable final en el escenario grande del lago.—Himno Nacional cantado por todos los concurrentes y desfile de antorchas, tomando parte los charros y bandas de música.—Cada número en el escenario del lago será anunciado con cohetes detonantes, con el objeto de que el público que se halle en la kermesse acuda a la orilla del lago.—Las señoritas que atenderán los puestos, se hallarán vestidas de chinas poblanas y se invita a las damas a concurrir a esta fiesta, vistiendo trajes típicos nacionales; igual invitación se hace a los caballeros.—Una vez terminado el programa, seguirá la iluminación del Bosque.—Esta fiesta tendrá un carácter esencialmente mexicanista y estará hecha totalmente con elementos mexicanos de las distintas artes nacionales.—Una banda de música compuesta de 350 profesores pertenecientes a varias músicas del Ejército dirigida por el profesor Melquiades Campo, tocará composiciones del compositor mexicano Manuel Castro Padilla—bailable de las tehuanas y bailable de chinas y charros—y del profesor Manuel Ponce el bailable final.—Concurrirán también a esta fiesta la Orquesta Típica del Centenario dirigida por el maestro Miguel Lerdo de Tejada y la Orquesta de Trovadores Yucatecos y la Regional Yucateca, con su grupo de cantantes y bailarines.—El cuerpo de baile está formado por elementos exclusivamente mexicanos, siendo la PRIMERA BAILARINA MARIA CRITINA PEREDA. Los fuegos artificiales han sido hechos en México bajo la dirección del señor Pereyra.

PROYECTO LA FIESTA EL DIRECTOR GENERAL DE ELLA, SEÑOR ADOLFO BEST MAUGARD.

LA ENTRADA A LA “NOCHE MEXICANA”, ES ENTERAMENTE LIBRE. (3)<sup>27</sup>

I quoted at length in order to capture the detailed orchestration with which the events took place. As it could be broadly grasped in the design of the map where one can appreciate the different stages and the main stage in the middle of the lake, the program emphasized various moments throughout the night that captured different aspects of the cultural nationalism at play in this particular embodied iteration of *lo mexicano*. I want to draw attention to the different spatial and temporal coordinates referenced in the program. Above all, it begins with an allusion to Reforma, Mexico City’s principal avenue that was the gem of the Porfirian celebrations, as the epitome of a country in transition with “carruajes” and “vehículos,” symbols of a modern city. Yet as soon as the people arrived at the entrance and cross the spectacular arch, they entered a different world—a “fiesta” of a character “esencialmente mexicanista” (Plate 5). The multiplicity of actions therefore aimed to reinforce the idea of converging and assembling various Mexicos in one space and time. “La Noche Mexicana” conjured different and differing experiences of Mexico. The regional music, dances and the “jamaica” in general evoked the mythical and exotic Mexicos represented at three different stages. The staging, of course, was crucial because it contrasted

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<sup>27</sup> I followed the original spelling and use of capital letters.

the performers who were summoned to signify the nation with the “hermosas señoritas” invited to staff the booths showcasing Mexican goods and an array of Mexican traditional attires, as indicated by the news piece I mentioned before. The majority of the events, however, would take place from 8:30 pm to 10 pm when there would be a series of shows at the main stage around the lake—from dances and songs to the eruption of the replica of the volcano Popocatepetl followed by the intonation of the national anthem and the lighting of the forest. At play was the celebration of an assemblage of Mexico that captured its modernity through the lighting of the forest and world-class fireworks along with the nationalistic staging of Mexico as a vigorous territory, the Popocatepetl, and as an amalgam of traditions carefully selected, presented, and embodied by the artistic imagery produced by Best Maugard. Paying particular attention to the actual embodiment of the “elementos mexicanos” that constitute the “distintas artes nacionales,” the program underlines that the musicians and particularly the “cuerpo de baile “está formado por elementos exclusivamente mexicanos.”

The official hand program provides an excellent example of the intricate ways the aesthetics, pedagogy and embodiment of *lo mexicano*—in the shifting and ambivalent scenarios of its staging—create contested, incomplete and ambivalent fields of action and belonging. Best Maugard deployed a very cosmopolitan aesthetic language in its assemblage of Mexico, which brought to fore the ambivalence of how the “elementos exclusivamente mexicanos” were materialized and translated not only discursively and visually in the design of the program but also corporeally on stage. “La Noche Mexicana” is described as follows in the program:

La Noche Mexicana es una glorificación del arte nacional de México... Los artistas desconocidos, los que traman en silencio la urdimbre inicial del arte mexicano, cuyas manifestaciones más refinadas [sic] y más áltas [sic] aun están por venir, inspiraron los motivos fundamentales, en esta fiesta de multiple [sic] significación. Porque es un canto al arte nacional autóctono; porque es un resumen de toda suerte de manifestaciones artísticas populares; y porque en ella el pueblo de México se mirará a sí mismo, como en un espejo prodigioso, con una fisonomía que hasta ahora él mismo casi desconoce. (“Noche Mexicana”)

The emergence of a national ideal of *lo mexicano* responded to cosmopolitan exchanges and currents of the time period as I have mentioned. Yet it also responded to the very performance of its imaging and imagining within the nation. The program simultaneously recognized and denied the artistic qualities of the “arte nacional.” It glorified and elevated it to the realm of the aesthetic while acknowledging that its most refined manifestations have “yet to come,” instilling a sense of potential futurity or, rather, considering them precisely “motivos fundamentales” to be processed but not art in its own right. At the same time, it pointed toward the exemplary character of the artistic manifestations of multiple significations staged in “La Noche Mexicana” that were to serve as an “espejo prodigioso” to in-form a *pueblo*, indeed to conjure it, as it was unknown to itself. In this sense, the program addressed the pedagogical component of the festivities—the emphasis shifting from focusing exclusively on what was represented to what was also done. However, which Mexicos were visually represented in the program and with what purpose?

I want to focus on the representation of the *tehuana*, not only because it was illustrated in the program, but because its presence was also staged with a dance accompanied by an orchestra with 350 musicians (Plate 6). The women from Tehuantepec would later become immortalized in the film by the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein, *¡Que viva Mexico!*, and by Frida Kahlo, because of her attires. According to the description of the program,

El prodigio de nuestra tierra caliente se ha concretado en una flor prodigiosa: la tehuana. Toda la suntuosidad de las selvas, imponentes y solemnes como catedrales de follaje; toda la clara reverberación del sol, que pule y abriga el cielo y llena de espejos rabiosos la tierra; todas las gradaciones de lo verde, que decoran los flancos de las montañas y los convierten en paletas gigantescas; toda esa cálida y apasionada fecundidad de la tierra caliente fueron precisas para crear a la mujer de Tehuantepec. Mujeres de una soñadora sensualidad, de aspecto hierático, serenas y bellas, las tehuanas hacen surgir, sobre el fondo cristalino de las cosas bañadas de sol, perfiles de Grecia. Sus vestiduras, que las envuelven hasta los pies, tienen armoniosas sumisiones de peplo. Y sus brazos, despegados del cuerpo siempre, durante la marcha, dibujan sobrias y elegantes actitudes de canéforas. Si hay en alguna parte de México resurrecciones instintivas de la equilibrada gracia helénica, es en Tehuantepec. Cuando miramos, amodorrados por la furia solar, el paso de una tehuana con el busto firme y recto, los brazos ondulantes y un largo y lánguido vaivén de las anchas faldas agitadas por el viento, se nos figura asistir, como en sueño, a una evocación de la Grecia artística y heroica. Hay, pues, en redor de esta mujer una amplia y humana palpación de clasicismo. Y por ella y para ella, la vida se llena en aquella región de una fuerte, de una clara, de una melódica serenidad, que se refleja en la música, apasionada, graciosa y lánguida; en la proporcionada lentitud de los movimientos; y hasta en el majestuoso balanceo de los árboles, cargados de siglos. (“Noche Mexicana”).

“La tehuana” certainly conjured a plethora of imagings and imaginings of the nation (Plate 7). The discursive description of the *tehuana* vis-à-vis its visual rendition draws attention to the ways the figure emerges as an assemblage of spatial, temporal, and corporeal contingencies, as Puar argues. Visually speaking, as it can also be appreciated in the entrance to the park and in the pictures of the scenography designed by Best Maugard, there is a mixture of artistic trends at play. On the one hand, as María de las Nieves Rodríguez points out, “[e]l decorado presentaba la versión mestiza de la naturaleza mexicana con base en diseños de roles y estilizaciones gráficas de arte popular” (65). In the image, it is clear, however, that Best Maugard borrows from other aesthetic currents of the time such as art nouveau, primitivism, and Orientalist tropes.<sup>28</sup> Mexican art historian, Karen Cordero explains

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<sup>28</sup> The influences of Best Maugard require further analysis that is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, for an introduction of Best Maugard’s *Método* and contextualization of his work, see Karen Cordero’s “Para devolver su inocencia a la nación: origen y desarrollo del Método Best Maugard” in *Abraham Angel y su tiempo*. For a discussion of the influence and presence of Mexican artists in New York, see Marco Antonio Martínez’s “Estéticas del desplazamiento: artistas mexicanos en Nueva York (1920-1940)”.

how this particular painting of “la tehuana” responded to Best Maugard’s attempt to “refine” *lo popular* for the upper classes. As matter of fact, it belonged to a series of paintings that Best Maugard did while living in the United States. According to Cordero, “[e]stas ‘pinturas de carácter mexicano’ entremezclan los elementos que conforman, según Best, el arte nacional mexicano: lo propiamente mexicano, lo europeo, y lo oriental, pero esta combinación está muy deliberada y definitivamente modificada por el refinamiento *art nouveau*. Remite más bien al eclecticismo de fin de siglo que a un estilo nacional integrado.” And she goes on to say regarding a painting that resembles the *tehuana*, “el medio punto, la composición sencilla y planimétrica, y el vestido de tehuana de la bailarina se derivan del arte popular mexicano, pero la caligrafía del cuerpo y el dibujo de un fuego pirotécnico en el cielo negro evocan el *art nouveau* y el japonismo. (Este último refleja sin duda la influencia de José Juan Tablada, residente en Nueva York y gran amigo de Best Maugard)”(17).

The discursive description of the *tehuana*, however, emphasizes a different set of corporeal, spatial, and temporal registers. On the one hand, she wanders “con el busto firme y recto, los brazos ondulantes y un largo y lánguido vaivén de las anchas faldas” evoking ancient Greece. The serenity of the music of the regional music, the languishment invoked by the movements themselves and those of the centenary trees conjure an image of a land displaced in time. On the other hand, there is a conflation of her body with nature as if one were an extension of the other. The text is quite clear: the *tehuana* is the product of mother nature: “toda esa cálida y apasionada fecundidad de la tierra caliente fueron precisas para crear a la mujer de Tehuantepec.” It is interesting to note, however, that she is described and actually portrayed in motion—“durante la marcha, dibujan sobrias y elegantes actitudes de canéforas.” Evoking a primitive paradise of sensuality, her actual facial characteristics, indeed her imaging, Best Maugard’s depiction of a *tehuana* does not look like a Mexican indigenous woman but rather an Indian woman from the Far East. Even though his actual staging of *tehuanas* attempted to capture the same displacement in time and space, as illustrated by the picture, each Mexican woman that embodied a *tehuana* on and off stage during “La Noche Mexicana” conjured a much more complex iteration of Mexican femininity through the particularities of their own bodies. One can only wonder how tall, skinny or brown each dancer, “señorita” or “dama” was (Plate 8). Yet, each of their corporeal alignments cited differentially a sense of *lo mexicano*.

The gender dynamics suggested by these images and the imaginings they inspired sharply contrasted with the modernizing efforts of the epoch. Unlike the regional female embodiments the “hermosas señoritas” re-presented by the *tehuanas*, *chinas*, among others at “La Noche Mexicana,” the “chicas modernas” exemplified by the flappers from New York who performed at the Teatro Iris— “En pleno centenario,” as the title of an article reads— could not embody a greater contrast. With short hair, strapless short dresses, high heels, and nylons, the New York dancers clearly offered a changing sense of modern femininity. Compared to the *tehuanas* portrayed in a mystical land, the “chicas modernas” were meant to capture the experience of the city. In her insightful study, *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle & Modernity in Mexico City, 1900-1930*, Ageeth Sluis draws attention to how the modernization of Mexico City marked by its urbanization after the Revolution can be related to changing ideas about gender and the place of women in society. The modernization of the city resulted in the increasing visibility of women’s. The cityscape was to contain, rule and mold the female bodies and the bodies where to re-present the city. Marked by transnational influences, such as flapperism and other international iterations of “la chica moderna,” the

emergence of a female deco-bodies that were to resemble the New Woman (productive and normative mother and wife) fostered the gendered view of the urban city. Put simply, according to Sluis, women were rendered “spectacles” and the actual “spectacle driving [the] new culture industries taught women to perform modern identities through makeup, clothes, posture, mannerisms, and attitude” (15-16). Therefore, the contrast with the regional, Mexican embodiments of “La Noche Mexicana” could not be greater.

Indeed, the consolidation of a corporeal expressive culture would come later, but its rehearsal started to take place in late September of 1921 during a “Noche Mexicana.” Paradoxically, the long awaited event had to be postponed due to “[e]l aguacero que cayó ayer en la ciudad,” and it was postponed until the following day “si las condiciones del tiempo lo permiten” (“La Noche Mexicana fue aplazada para hoy”). The event would continue to be free, according to the official program printed in *El Universal*, “sin más limitación que la capacidad del lugar del Bosque donde deberá efectuarse este festival” (3). “La Noche Mexicana” was celebrated two consecutive days given its enormous success. I want to conclude the chapter by comparing the descriptions prior to the event with two of the accounts of what took place. *El Universal* published two consecutive articles following each of the celebrations. The first one, which I already cited, by Palavicini highlights the combination of activities I have mentioned— the electrical illumination, the masses and also the physical presence of people from different parts of the country.

Palavicini started and ended his article the same way: “mucha luz y mucha gente.” He describes the stands decorated with Mexican motifs: “Los puestos de refrescos y ‘confetti’ están adornados con pinturas de colores brillantes, que son estilizaciones de los dibujos típicos, tan populares en todas nuestras tiendas baratas, y que hasta ahora no se habían sabido aprovechar como motivos decorativos.” In a way, Palavicini discursively gestured towards the incorporation of the otherwise popular designs and decorations to a national aesthetics. But most interesting, however, is his description of two of the small stages with performers from other parts of the nation. I quote at length to appreciate how he attempted to capture this staging of an assemblage of Mexicos.

En las cruces de las calzadas se habían instalado pequeños escenarios, en los que se hizo un derroche de color y de buen gusto, para simbolizar en cada uno, con motivos gráficos, los bailes nacionales, que se ejecutaban por nativos de diversas partes del país. Los yucatecos, con la música lenta y lasciva de las costas, que lleva quejas mezcladas con notas distintas que interrumpen el sentido general de la música. En cambio, los indios “yaquis” sin más acompañamiento que el de sus pasos y los curiosos instrumentos que esgrimen incansables, se retorcián inverosímilmente, mientras brillaban con destellos de bronce, sus rostros cincelados y sudorosos. Muchos minutos repitiendo el mismo movimiento, para cambiar después a uno muy similar y que da impresión de una estabilidad muy grande de carácter. Se comprende fácilmente que deben tener algo de faquires de la India, que permanecen tanto tiempo en una misma posición sin moverse; éstos bailan con su monotonía que cansa y que lastima. Debe ser un pueblo de leyendas tristes como su música y cansadas como sus bailes, que con un sonsonete unísono y un movimiento igual, de cadencia no variada, impresionan profundamente.

What kind of national imaginaries did witnessing and experiencing such different dances evoke? What does it mean to relate to others through the movement of bodies literally and metaphorically? Though smaller in scale, this assemblage of national stages draws attention to the different and differing scenarios of the nation. Palavicini discursively distanced himself from the Yaqui Indians associating them to the faqirs of India and then to a distant, sad and tired people. Yet, he acknowledged the way the experiencing of their dances and music “profoundly” impacted him. Although he ended up denying them co-evalness as many indigenista narratives of the time, he captures the different kinds of affects and attachments fostered by an embodied interaction with these other Mexicos.<sup>29</sup>

The previous description offers a very vivid glimpse of what it may have been like to have walked across this assemblage of *lo mexicano*, experiencing different and differing spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences. *El Universal Ilustrado* published on Thursday, September 29, 1921, a short article titled, “La ‘Noche Mexicana’ en el Bosque de Chapultepec,” which featured six pictures illustrating the descriptions offered by Palavicini (Plate 9). Framed and decorated with drawings that alluded to indigenous designs, these pictures captured the staging and converging of an assemblage of Mexicos. Interestingly enough, the two largest pictures are not those of the *chinas*, *tehuanas*, or the *jaraneros*, as in the other articles, but rather of the Yaqui Indians dancing surrounded by hundreds of people in addition to the main stage in the middle of the lake. The photograph visually portrayed the contrast between the moving Yaqui male dancers and the standing spectators, mainly represented by members of the bourgeoisie. The article featured in *El Universal Ilustrado* focused on the massiveness of the event—from the thousands of light bulbs illuminating Chapultepec to the thousands of people witnessing the events. The author of the article lamented about the agglomeration of people and the misbehavior of some of the attendees—a testament that it was open and free for everyone: “¡Lástima que la aglomeración de personas, el desorden inherente a toda fiesta donde la entrada es libre y donde se cuelan elementos imbéciles, haya deslucido esta ‘Noche Mexicana’, digna de recordación!” (26). Not surprisingly then, the two largest pictures showcased the multitudes present during the event.

Palavicini’s descriptions, however, illustrated the ways an emerging indigenista narrative at once celebrated and denied the contributions of indigenous cultures. In fact, the passage offers a glimpse of the slippery vocabulary that was yet to be crystalized in order to name the indigenous. Rather than simply resorting to what we now consider clichés of the indigenous Other—the monotony, the endurance, and the suffering—, Palavicini, I argue, discursively attempted to grasp what he was corporeally experiencing through the moving bodies of the Yaqui pascola dancers. Estelle Tarica insists on the ambivalence of the indigenista discourse, which has many times subordinated indigenous populations to the State in the name of civilization (1). At the same time, “indigenismo is also responsible for creating a discourse of coevalness, for promoting an understanding of Indianness as lodged in

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<sup>29</sup> Although a discussion on “indigenismo” is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to point out the ways indigenismo as a cultural and political discourse has allowed for the simultaneous denial and recognition of indigenous communities throughout Latin America. Indigenismo has promoted the subordination of indigenous communities to the State in an effort to “civilize” them. But as Estelle Tarica reminds us, “[w]orking primarily through discourses of Christian evangelization and, later, national identity, and almost always tied to the institutions of the state, indigenismo has set itself the task of humanizing Indians and rendering them familiars, and therefore of transforming the cultural and racial self-conception of Latin American subjects” (xiii). See Tarica’s *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* for a thorough discussion of the impact of indigenismo in the formation of Latin American mestizo nations.

the metaphorical gut, heart, tongue, soul, and blood of the nation and national selves; that is, it also promotes an awareness of ‘shared’ time and space between Indians and non-Indians, the core of the mestizo nation” (2). The Yaqui dancers described by Palavicini and captured in the picture revealed a literal awareness of a shared time and space: a contingent spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergence of an assemblage of Mexicos.<sup>30</sup> In a way, a sense of indigeneity could not yet be taken for granted. As the case of the *jaraneros* illustrate, they were described either as “yucatecos” or “indígenas mayas bailando danzas regionales.” The act of naming indigeneity, of rendering it discursively legible, was performatively undone or exceeded by the actual embodiment of the “indigenous” bodies it claimed to re-present, thereby destabilizing the plane of language.

A second article appeared the following day after the second day of “La Noche Mexicana.” Although it appeared on the second section, it featured photographs of the event, including that of the main stage and the picture of the yucatecos and the typical *china* and *charro*. This article, like the previous ones, highlighted the illumination of the park and commented on the fireworks at the end of the program. In describing the events, particularly the fireworks, the author compared the ambience to the stories of the *Arabian Nights*: “Fue ésta verdaderamente maravillosa, y antojábase una serie de escenas de las Mil y Una Noche aquellos juegos de pirotecnia que dieron fama a los carnavales nocturnos en Venecia.” Mexico too could offer a spectacle compared to that of European cities, self-exoticizing itself, treating its own resources as raw materials and utilizing the grammar of the international scene—including an Orientalist trope. However, the author praised the level of artisanship necessary for such a display of lights and colors: “Fue un espectáculo en verdad sorprendente, fantástico, único... Fue una serie de juegos que puso también muy en alto el prestigio de nuestros ignorados pirotécnicos como artistas notables.” This local yet cosmopolitan re-creation of *lo mexicano* draws attention to the multiple ways its staging was made to signify. (Plate 10)

### **Embodying the Nation**

I would like to conclude by revisiting the notion of “goce estético” used by Pérez Montfort. He referred to the “sensibilities” and “concepts” of a patriotic nationalism promoted through education. However, I want to propose to think of the “goce estético” that is derived from visual and corporeal renditions of *lo mexicano* as a site where acts of transfer and translation of a contingent nationalistic sense of belonging take place. Juana María Rodríguez reminds us of the attachments we assign to corporeal acts that may not be readily legible or accessible through language but rather through “felt knowledges.” By focusing on dance and sex as “embodied social practices,” Rodríguez draws attention to how these bodily acts help us imagine and foster a shared corporeal background, citing material and ephemeral alignments, which ultimately in-form our “embodied sociality.” According to Rodríguez, sex and dance are “understood within defined frames of legibility and recognition that emerge from accumulated lived experience, but also from the worlds of media, storytelling, and the fantasies these vicarious forms inspire” (100). Therefore, I think of “La Noche Mexicana” as an instance that allows us to analyze the “defined frames of legibility and recognition” of *lo mexicano* while simultaneously exploring that which exceeded them. To cite Rodríguez once

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<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of the representation of Yaqui Indians in Mexican cultural production, see Ariel Zatarain Tumbaga’s “The Yaqui Warrior Myth: Representations of Yaquis in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Mexican and Chicana/o Literature and Theater.”

more, “dance in all its forms... enacts an embodied sociality that exceeds the time and place of its articulation” (110).

Best Maugard certainly offered an aestheticized vision of Mexico. According to art historian, María de las Nieves Rodríguez, Best Maugard’s “diseños, basados en la naturaleza mexicana, recuperaba el ‘sabor de la tierra’ y ofrecían de modo estilizado una nueva concepción visual de México, que venía de la mano con la nueva concepción musical y dancística que se estaba ofreciendo en la ‘Noche Mexicana’... marcadamente nacionalista que se estaba proyectando desde el gobierno obregonista, anfitrión y creador del evento” (68). Yet, the coming together of bodies bring to the fore the ways their particularities cannot be entirely dissolved, thereby complicating a seemingly coherent transmission of an embodied national culture (Plate 11). The barefooted girl captured in this last plate drastically contrasts with the dressed up members of the bourgeoisie that surrounded her and the stagings of the nation in the other plates. Standing right next to a policeman and to a bourgeois male, she is a reminder of the ways “La Noche Mexicana” aimed at conjuring a popular public that was nevertheless policed and differentiated in multiple ways, symbolically and materially. Her small body dressed in simple clothing significantly differs from those of the “hermosas señoritas” donning *tehuana* costumes or the “chicas modernas” I discussed before. Her presence and bodily actions—we see her extending an arm probably selling confetti—performatively undid and exceeded what “La Noche Mexicana,” conceived as “popular” in nature, attempted to re-present, to contain.

The staging of “La Noche Mexicana” enabled the consolidation of what would later be imposed as a national tradition of *lo mexicano*, yet the bodies that aimed to represent an idea of the nation performatively conjured other Mexicos. While the vision and aesthetic language might have been the product of an intellectual and cultural elite, the bodily acts and encounter of thousands of people congregated at “La Noche Mexicana,” particularly of those not from Mexico City, continuously reminded both the elites and *el pueblo* of how the “particularities of our embodied selves, our age, contours, color, and corporeal histories, have the ability to transform the meaning of words and gestures” (Rodríguez 126). In effect, the bodies congregated in “La Noche Mexicana” ultimately suggest a more complex, at times redeeming and at times oppressive, history of *lo mexicano*.

# EL DEMOCRATA

DIARIO INDEPENDIENTE DE LA MAÑANA

MEXICO, MIERCOLES 28 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1921

Registrado como artículo de segunda clase, el 15 de septiembre de 1915.

Director

## DESFILE MILITAR DE

DE NUEVO SE CONVIERTE EN IGNEA AMENAZA LA SECULAR MONTAÑA

LA "NOCHE MEXICANA" CONGREGO EN CHAPULTEPEC AYER, A MUY CERCA DE QUINIENTAS MIL PERSONAS



NOCHE MEXICANA.—UNA ESCENA EN EL LAGO (Del mural por maestro dibujante Nove).

Plate 1. "La 'Noche Mexicana' congregó en Chapultepec ayer, a muy cerca de quinientas mil personas." *El Demócrata: Diario independiente de la mañana*. Wednesday, September 28, 1921. Photo courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación*.



Plate 2. María Bibiana Uribe. “La India Bonita.” *El Universal*. September 1921. Photo Courtesy of *Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada*



Plate 3. Scenery designed by Adolfo Best Maugard. "La Noche Mexicana." *Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Fondo Martín Luis Guzmán.

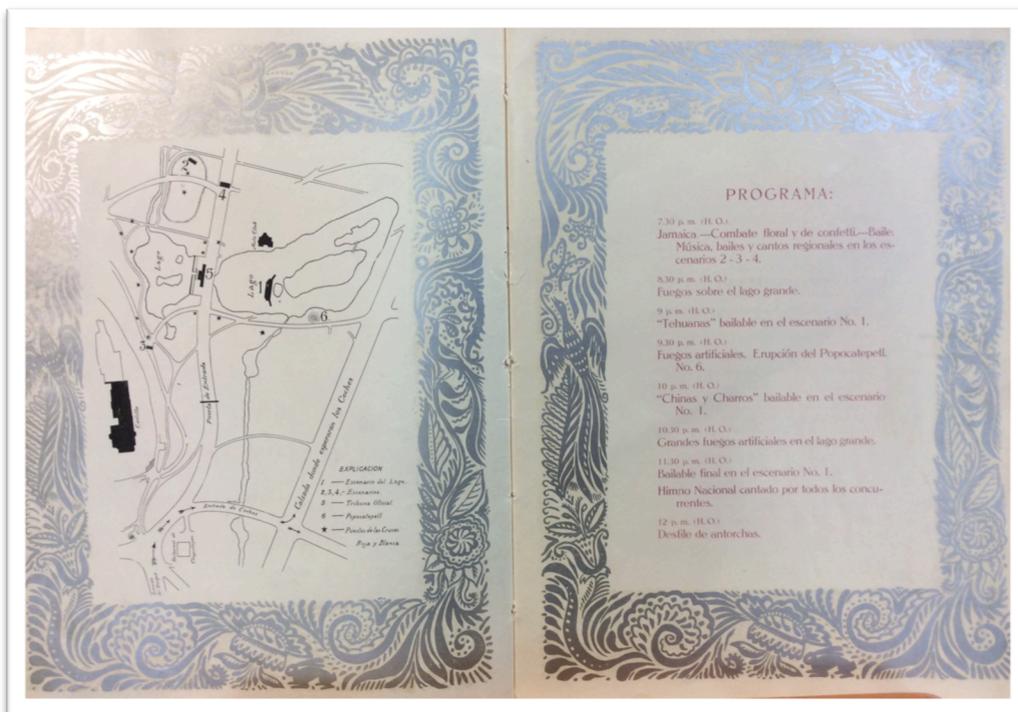


Plate 4. "La Noche Mexicana en los Lagos del Bosque de Chapultepec México." Program designed by Adolfo Best Maugard. September 26, 1921. *Biblioteca Nacional*



Plate 4. Entrance to the Chapultepec Park, designed by Adolfo Best Maugard. *Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Fondo Martín Luis Guzmán.



Plate 5. Stage with Dances from Yucatán. *Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Fondo Martín Luis Guzmán.



Plate 6. Scenery designed by Adolfo Best Maugard. "La Noche Mexicana." *Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Fondo Martín Luis Guzmán.

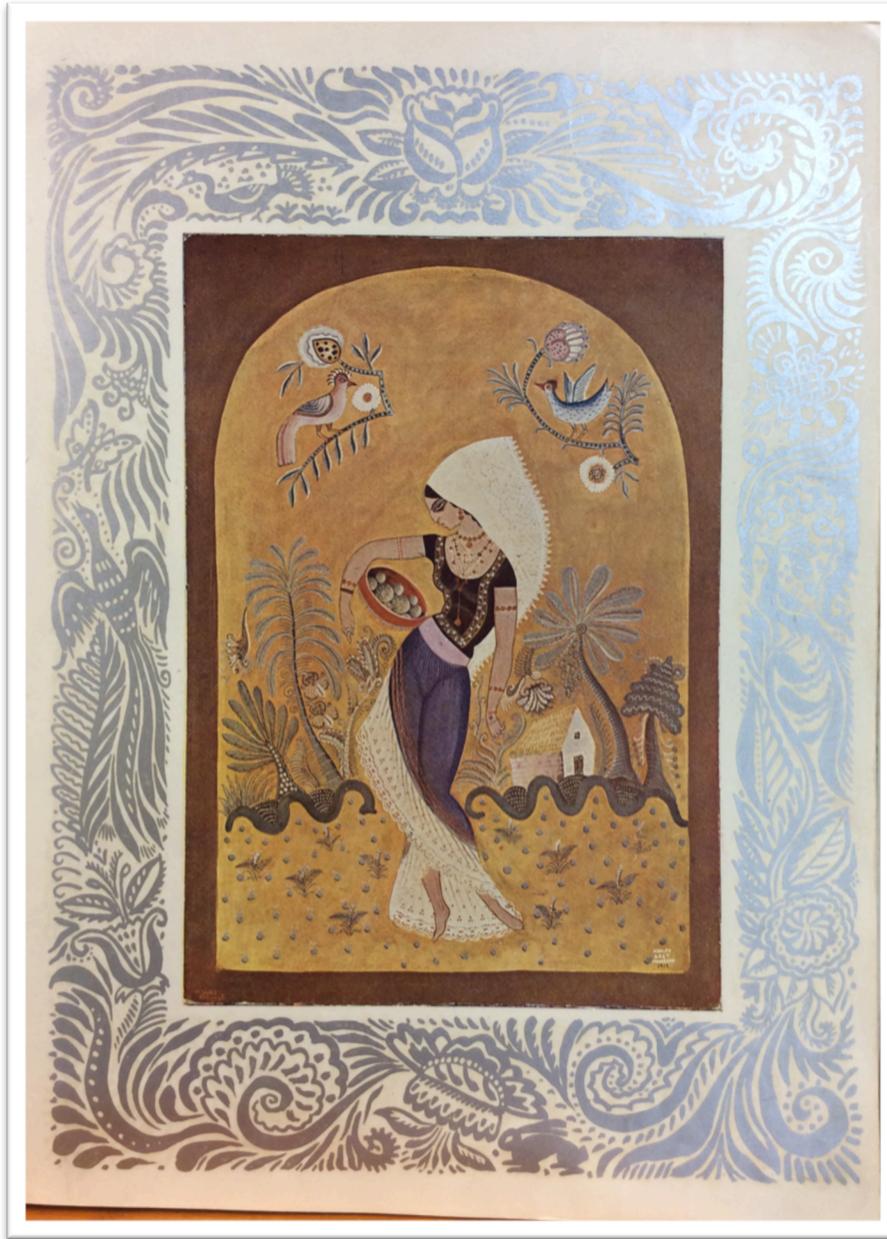


Plate 7. "La tehuana" designed by Adolfo Best Maugard. *Biblioteca Nacional*.



Plate 8. Ofelia Nieto. "Tehuana." *El Universal Ilustrado*. October 27, 1921. Photo Courtesy of Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada

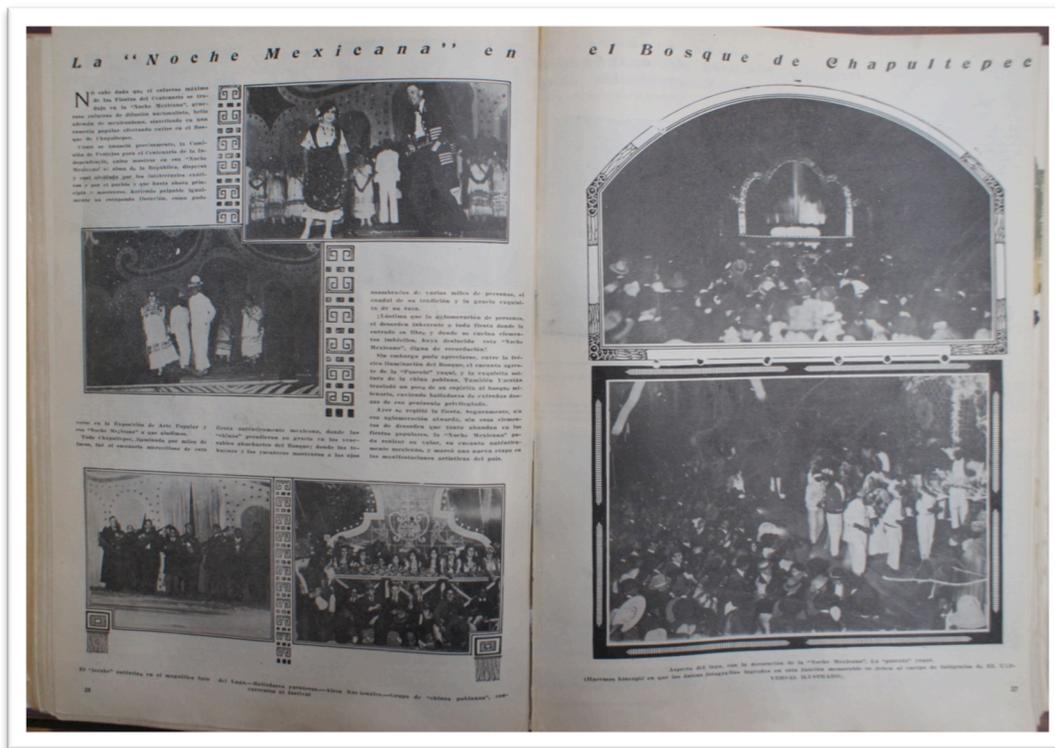


Plate 9. "La Noche Mexicana en el Bosque de Chapultepec." *El Universal Ilustrado*. September 29, 1921. Photo Courtesy of *Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada*

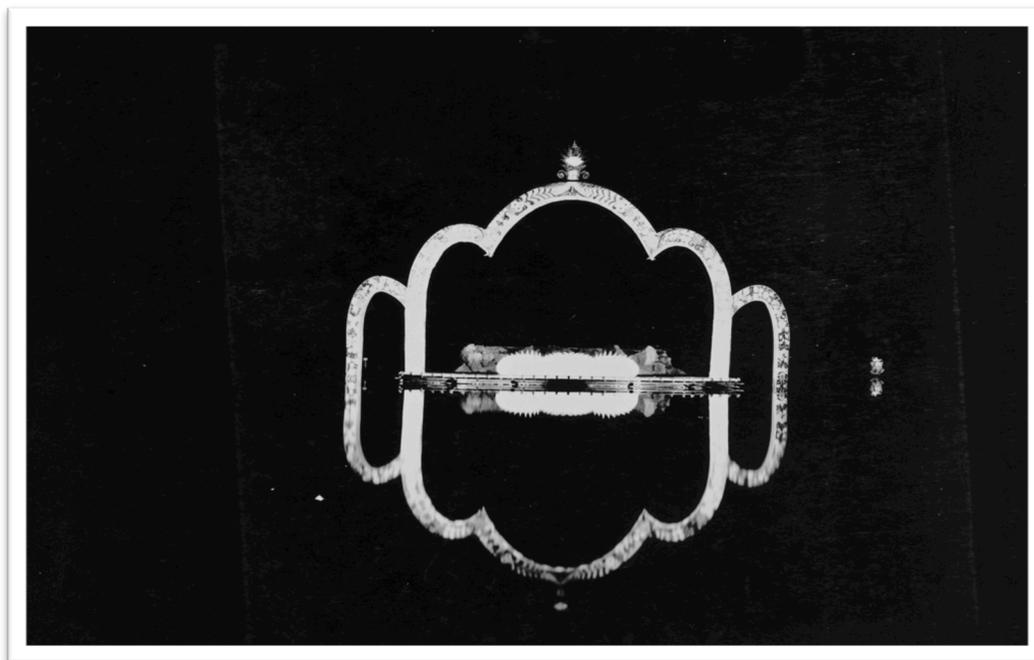


Plate 10. The Main Stage of "La Noche Mexicana." *Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Fondo Martín Luis Guzmán.



Plate 11. "La Noche Mexicana." Fondo Fotográfico del *Archivo General de la Nación*.

## Chapter 2

### Writing the Nation Through the Body: Nellie Campobello and the Performance of *lo mexicano*

In January of 1919, Anna Pavlova arrived at the port of Veracruz after a long tour through South America and a complicated stay in Havana, where some of the members of her dance company had to sleep on the deck of a boat. However, the arrival of her renowned company to Mexico was an important event for the government of Venustiano Carranza. Two hundred soldiers were assigned to ride on top of the train that transported Pavlova and her company to ensure their security (Dallal 40). In effect, her visit came to validate the importance of Mexico City as part of the international dance circuit. At the time, Pavlova was one of the primary exponents of the dynamic world dance scene of the epoch: the epitome of knowledge, beauty, and technique.<sup>31</sup> Her stay in Mexico would be marked not only by acclaimed interpretations of classical dance pieces but also by the appeal to a mass audience. Mexican dance historian Alberto Dallal notes that her success had a great impact, “al grado de que se pensara en ofrecer *matinéés* en la plaza de toros –con un cupo para 30 000 almas–, lugar donde bailó por primera vez ciertas ‘danzas mexicanas’ ante la aclamación unánime de la concurrencia” (41). The performance of “ciertas danzas mexicanas” gestured to both the incorporation of regional Mexican dances to an international repertoire and the elevation of such dances to the place of ballet—the predominant international dance form at the turn of the century. Anna Pavlova, in fact, incorporated in her repertoire the traditional dance *El jarabe tapatío* and offered it back to Mexicans with a twist —“bailado de puntas”—as part of her piece *Fantasia mexicana* (42). Though performed in “puntas,” *El jarabe tapatío* functioned as a marker of Mexico, highlighting the appeal of traditional dances to a wider audience (Plate 1).

Eleven years later, in 1930, Nellie and Gloria Campobello would perform *El jarabe tapatío* again. The Campobello sisters, or Campbell, as they were known then, had just returned from abroad. The sisters had successfully debuted in 1927 in Mexico City with the ballet of the Texan Miss Carroll—who “montaba ballets clásicos, danzas folklóricas mexicanas e internacionales, números de revistas musicales y danzas para las fiestas patrias, clubes de beneficencia, obras de caridad y modelaje” (Vargas and García 163). Their success abroad and recent return to Mexico not only confirmed their dance attributes and expertise but also highlighted the dance repertoire that dominated the current dance scene—at home and abroad. An article published in early May in 1930 in one of most circulated cultural weekly journals of the era, *Revista de Revistas*, praised their accomplishments overseas as well as their dance repertoire:

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<sup>31</sup> Anna Pavlova was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia in 1882, attended the Imperial School of Ballet, and eventually became the prima ballerina of the Marynski Theater. In 1907, Pavlova left Russia to tour the world and never returned. She died in Holland in 1931. For a description of the impact of Pavlova’s visit to Mexico, see “Las visitas de Anna Pávlova” in Alberto Dallal’s *La danza en México en el siglo XX*. For an excellent analysis of Pavlova’s impact in the consolidation of an embodied Mexican modernity, see Jose Luis Reynoso’s “Choreographing Politics, Dancing Modernity: Ballet and Modern Dance in the Construction of Modern Mexico (1919-1940).”

Acaban de llegar a México, después de una afortunada gira por Europa y Estados Unidos, Nelly y Gloria Campbell, gentil pareja de bailarinas artistas... cuya gracia, un poco griega y otro poco azteca, llena por completo un escenario cuando estas nerviosas y extrañas muchachas se proponen desarrollar un programa matizado con cadencias y ritmos evocadores de las danzas antiguas y con danzas nuestras, llenas de color y de vida. (“Artistas nuestros que triunfan” 14)

From the title of the piece, “Artistas nuestros que triunfan en el extranjero,” one can already notice the celebratory tone as well as the insistence on referring to the dancers as “artistas”—indeed, “bailarinas artistas” and “nuestros.” Mexico did have artists whose triumph combined not only the classic beauty and aesthetics of the Greek, but also that of the Aztecs. In terms of their dancing, the author recognized the talent of two Mexican women, praising their dance repertoire. The Campbell sisters’ program showcased ancient rhythms *and* also “danzas nuestras, llenas de color y de vida.” At stake, however, was also the fact that the “artistas nuestros” were not men, but women—“nerviosas y extrañas muchachas.”

The performance of *El jarabe* by the Campbell sisters or Campobello, as they would be known, had a different purpose and impact than Pavlova’s. It did not elevate Mexican dance to a world-class manifestation of Pavlova’s ballet, but rather reiterated what Pavlova had already accomplished. The Campobellos’ program had probably already included it in their repertoire abroad or at least some of the Mexican dances, “llenas de color y de vida.” In addition, *El jarabe tapatío* had previously acquired the status of a national dance during the inauguration of the national stadium in 1924, when 500 couples performed it (Tortajada 44). The Campobellos’ performance had, therefore, a different meaning from Pavlova’s, as it now illustrated the place of dance in the rendering of Mexico or, as I would argue in this chapter, the place of *folklórico* dance as a means to interpret Mexico. In October 1930, Dance critic Carlos del Río succinctly stated, “El primer espectáculo de danza mexicana de alta calidad estética que en México me han ofrecido lo debo a Nellie y a Gloria Campobello” (29). Their performance not only confirmed the aesthetic value of Mexican dance, but also reclaimed *El jarabe* for the national imaginary—directly contrasting it with Pavlova’s interpretation in 1919. After praising the Campobellos’ aptitudes, del Río went on to say that

[u]na poderosa, inteligente intuición... hizo que Nellie y Gloria Campobello descubrieran lo que en verdad es el jarabe, y lo bailaron sin miedo, apasionadamente. No las detuvo la falta de bailarín. Nellie, a la que ayudan su antecedente de existencia montaraz, su gusto por la aventura, su silueta, es el hombre admirable que cerca, persigue, vence a la mujer, la domina en una final alegría. (No lo bailan en zapatillas sino en huaraches). (29)

The Campobellos’ performance, understood within a national framework described by del Río, allows for a different reading of heteronormative discourses of *lo mexicano*.<sup>32</sup> Their performance at once reinforced and challenged heteronormative constructions of gender

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<sup>32</sup> The Mexican Revolution marked the institutionalization of a masculinized understanding of *lo mexicano*, whose construction, as Robert McKee Irwin argues, was “protagonized by young men, and national unity... allegorized by male homosocial bonding” (xiii). See Irwin’s *Mexican Masculinities* for a discussion of the homosexual subject vis-à-vis *lo mexicano* and Franco’s *Plotting Women* for a discussion of the role of women.

roles. Nellie, described by del Río as an “hombre admirable,” “cerca, persigue, vence a la mujer.” The imperative to keep a heteronormative gender binary led del Río to read Nellie as the “man” who “dominates” the woman at the end of the dance (Plate 2). The “final alegría” marks the festive tone that may continue as long as such a performance is read within a nationalistic framework that positions the Campobellos’ national dance vis-à-vis Pavlova’s or any other foreign-born female dancer performing national symbols and practices. There is a tension between describing almost as a queer(ing) gesture the Campobello sisters’ performing the iconic Mexican couple, *el charro* and *la china poblana*, and yet celebrating them as the symbols of the national—of *lo mexicano*. In fact, del Río highlighted that the Campobello sisters did not dance in *zapatillas* but rather in Mexican *huaraches*. In this sense, the Campobellos’ performance offered a “spectacle” of Mexican dance not because of the lack of a male dancer, which Nellie seemed to easily occupy, but rather because of its re-claiming of national symbols—a dance performed in *huaraches*.

These two related events—Pavlova’s *jarabe* and the Campobellos’—highlight the importance of Mexican dance for the construction of the idea of *lo mexicano* as well as the role of women in its configuration. In this chapter, I am interested in the importance of *folklórico* dance as a cultural field that reveals the fissures and tensions that were present from the very beginning in the heteronormative and mestizo post-revolutionary cultural nationalism. My argument is that *folklórico* dance became a significant embodied means both to tell Mexico’s past and to incorporate “living” indigenous cultures of the present. I use the term *folklórico* in Spanish to allude to its specificity as an established dance practice in Mexico and Greater Mexico.<sup>33</sup> I contend that *folklórico* dance is not just another modality of representation. Rather, it systematizes the kinetic and eventual kinesthetic formation of Mexican national subjects, that is, the formation of national subjects through movement and through their awareness of movement. As such, *folklórico* becomes a contested site for controlling and normalizing national bodies.

In this chapter, therefore, I highlight particularly the role of dance, and specifically the role of Nellie Campobello. Campobello is primarily known today as a novelist of the revolution. But as I have mentioned, she was also a dancer and an influential choreographer. In what follows, I want to draw attention to how Campobello’s dance career contributed, simultaneously and paradoxically, to the institutionalization of *lo mexicano* as hyper-masculinized and mestizo and to the creation of spaces for female and queer embodiments of national subjects. I first provide a brief description of the significance of *folklórico* dance for the performance of *lo mexicano*, starting with the Porfirian regime. I also provide a brief contextualization of the role of women in the public sphere after the Revolution, particularly alongside the work of José Vasconcelos. Then I discuss the work of Nellie Campobello and her impact on the emergence of *folklórico* dance as a pedagogical practice through which the State formed its citizens and provided them with a means to read, and consume imaginaries of the nation. I focus on her collaboration with the Ministry of Education or *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)*, her work at the National School of Dance or *Escuela Nacional de Danza (END)* as a founding member and director from 1937 to 1983, and the publication of the book *Ritmos indígenas de México, Indigenous Rhythms of Mexico*, in 1940. In these instances, I examine how Nellie Campobello contributed to shaping *folklórico* dance as a lens

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<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on *folklórico* as an important cultural practice across the Mexico-US border, see *Dancing across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantú, and Brenda M. Romero.

to understand the ethnic, sexual, and racial diversity of Mexico, and in so doing, the role of women in its eventual institutionalization.

### ***Folklórico Dance and the Performance of lo mexicano***

The Porfirian regime consolidated the active promotion and celebration of a nationalistic ritualized behavior. Dance historian Roxana Guadalupe Ramos Villalobos stresses the importance since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century placed on education to consolidate a sense of national culture. In this sense, a “symbolic territory of the nation was created,” whereby “los edificios, las esculturas, los festejos, la música, la danza, el teatro se tornaron formas de convocar, persuadir, apelar al sentimiento y a la conciencia de los mexicanos” (51). Perhaps the best example to illustrate the systematic dissemination of such public behavior is the work of Justo Sierra. As the Minister of Education, Sierra actively promoted a “performative” education, so to speak, of children in schools. In 1902, he officially established the *fiestas escolares* to celebrate the end of an academic year. As Dallal explains, “Sierra instaura la organización de un trabajo conjunto, profesional (en sentido didáctico), en el que trabajarían en conjunto profesores y alumnos, y el cual comenzaría a planificarse por lo menos uno o dos meses con anterioridad a la ‘presentación’ –que incluía declamación, canto, baile y teatro– para aguzar el ingenio escénico de los profesores y el talento en ciernes de los infantes” (27). He goes on to say that “[l]os niños no sólo eran los diligentes ciudadanos menudos del momento; también eran los artistas del mañana,” as the *fiestas escolares* attempted to educate and form citizens as spectators of the performance of spectacles (28), which would eventually include, as I will argue, the performance of the nation, particularly through dance.

During this period, popular dance, music, and festivals as well as the performance of high culture, such as ballet and opera, acquired a particular relevance and prominence. Traveling artists visited Mexico City and offered their shows to a consolidating upper and middle class. As a result, so-called popular manifestations soon began a process of transformation. Dallal claims that “[l]o mexicano debía transfigurarse gracias a los elementos venidos de fuera; el país importaba, sin ambages, óperas y operetas y las matrimoniaba con las tonadillas, las canciones locales y regionales, el lenguaje popular, el chiste espontáneo y la música y las danzas nacionales... La ‘alta cultura’ porfirista es un cúmulo de imágenes idealizadas que incluyen al concepto idílico del indio, del habitante prehispánico, de los elementos de la historia mexicana.” Moreover, the performance of power became the trademark of the Porfirian regime itself: “Díaz hizo que su propia imagen resultara elemento fundamental en el proceso ‘civilizador’ de su gobierno; él mismo se volvió un espectáculo junto con desfiles, fiestas cívicas, celebraciones y festividades escolares, faranduleras y dancísticas” (18-19). However, it is important to note that Dallal’s emphasis on the performativity of power and his reference to Sierra’s instruction and incorporation of children to the national enterprise reveal the significance of schools in the configuration of a national public for such events.<sup>34</sup>

Post-revolutionary Mexico further intensified the expansion of the realm of the “national” and the inclusion of the popular sectors.<sup>35</sup> In effect, the emergence of Mexico as a

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<sup>34</sup> I expand this section on the Porfirian regime in my introduction. However, suffice it to say that the emphasis on performance that characterized the post-revolutionary period had its origins during the Díaz’s regime.

<sup>35</sup> Although I will center my discussion on the post-revolutionary period, it is important to remember the impact of the actual armed struggle on artistic expressions, particularly dance. In this regard, Dallal states that “la

modern nation mobilized a series of discursive tactics that emphasized the “performance” of the nation as a whole. In this sense, the performance of the past became a means to connect the realm of the local with the national and to establish a (imaginary and material) connection among different and differing national actors (Gillingham 6-7). However, post-revolutionary Mexico sought to incorporate its contemporary citizens into an idealized version, not of the past, but rather of the present. It had to create its own national public. In *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution*, Rick A. López examines the importance of the cultural products and aesthetics in the configuration of Mexican nationalism. According to López, “[w]hat set postrevolutionaries apart from their predecessors was that they celebrated the living indigenous heritage as a vital component, even the foundation, of Mexico’s authentic national identity” (7). The network that allowed for the production and circulation of cultural projects and products changed with the transformation of the national cultural politics. López observes that “the success was born out of the manner in which diverse cultural projects intersected with economic and political developments, and most importantly, because of the ways the endeavor transformed the political, economic, and cultural terrain on the local level, within rural and urban communities across Mexico” (7). This had a tremendous impact at the local level. These new cultural, economic and political developments required the assimilation, integration, and transformation of indigenous people and their culture.

I argue that the performance of *folklórico* dance allows us to further expand our understanding of not only the aesthetic and material practices of *lo mexicano*—its conception and representation—, but also its very embodiment. In effect, *folklórico* dance operated as an important quasi-ritualistic mode of “presentation and representation” of *lo mexicano* during this period. As addressed in the introduction, I follow Claudio Lomnitz’ analysis of the importance of rituals in relation to the construction of Mexico. In his essay, “Ritual, Rumor, and Corruption in the Formation of Mexican Polities,” Lomnitz explores the interconnection between public rituals and the configuration of political communities within a national space. He rightly points out that rituals served as “a fundamental arena for constructing political boundaries and relations of domination and subordination within the polity” (153). Rituals, in fact, provided the means for the appropriation of the state while simultaneously creating a hegemonic order (155). Through a creation of a discursive space, rituals have contributed to the configuration of a polity since, “on the one hand, rituals can be expressions of collective vitality and interests within the sanctioned political order; on the other hand, public political manifestations are understood as expressions of a public sentiment that is constructed in the backstage, and that has therefore not (yet) been harnessed by the state” (160-61). Their importance derives precisely from the construction of an arena that positions “a collectivity vis-à-vis the state” and the creation of a discursive space in which “subjectivities [are formed] by the state” and “state institutions are locally appropriated” (162-63). In this sense, *folklórico* dance functioned as a site to rehearse often-contradictory renderings of the nation, highlighting the significance of the hegemonic representational framework of *lo mexicano* with respect to its local and eventually national iterations.

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Revolución enardecía los ánimos y hacía que lo más granado del mundo artístico farandulesco se pusiera trajes regionales y llamativos atuendos de tehuanas, de china poblana, de charro negro...y obligaba a la sociedad mexicana de las ciudades grandes a autosentirse y autoanalizarse de una manera nueva, distinta en la medida en que se percibían ya las intensidades y violencias de un cambio social que iba a trastornarlo y a transformarlo todo, incluso las formas del espectáculo y la danza” (35).

*Folklórico* dance underscored the contradictions of establishing a national imaginary based on the insistence of a (homogenized and “ethnicized”) notion of cultural difference. In *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony*, Carlos J. Alonso analyzes the extent to which Latin American cultural discourse has emphasized the existence of an irreducible difference to mark the experience of Latin American modernity, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He proposes to understand Latin American modernity as a “cultural activity possessing meaning unto itself; that is, as an ongoing process of cultural production that engages in a symbolic appropriation of historical and cultural experience. . . . To summarize then, Latin America’s preoccupation with the affirmation of its cultural specificity has constituted the essence of its experience of modernity” (32). In the same way Alonso focuses on the rhetorical deployments of “autochthony” as a necessary marker of Latin American modernity, I show how *folklórico* dance points towards “a cultural activity” that insists on difference as a marker of a national unity. In what follows, I return to the dance career of Nellie Campobello to discuss how she contributed to the formation of *folklórico* dance as a cultural realm to negotiate the tensions between the production of cultural difference and its local and national iterations and appropriations.

### **Las misiones culturales: “Shaping Society Through Dance”**

The dancing career of Nellie Campobello began in the 1920s in the middle of a cultural revolution led by José Vasconcelos when the role of women at times challenged and at times reinforced a unified, masculinized construction of the nation. The consolidation of *folklórico* dance in the national and international scene, in fact, can be traced back to the cultural and political agenda of Vasconcelos. As in the case of popular arts and crafts, I would argue that *folklórico* was produced for both a local and international audience, and it was the result of a series of negotiations between popular and elite sectors. Dance played a crucial role in the consolidation of *lo mexicano* and the parallel configuration of a national public. As an artistic expression, however, it needed to be regulated in order to make sure it conformed to the aesthetics of post-revolutionary Mexico.<sup>36</sup> In order to underscore its national foundations, the local took a new precedence vis-à-vis bourgeois, cosmopolitan dance practices that characterized the first two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her insightful analysis of the significance of dance in the early 1900s, “Touring History: Tórtola Valencia Between Europe and the Americas,” Michelle Clayton explores the ways in which dance operated as a mechanism to negotiate cultural, political, and historical differences between the Western, modern world and its “others,” ethnic, historical, sexual or otherwise. Clayton argues that in the early 1900s, dance’s “central role was to provide a bodily image—and simultaneously, a somatic experience—of other cultures, often as part of variety shows that had much in common with world’s fairs or amusement parks” (30). Mexican *folklórico* dance also functioned as a mode of representation of the diversity not of Western “Others” but rather Mexico’s own culture, history, and racialized sexual and gender roles during the establishment of *misiones culturales* in the era of José Vasconcelos.

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<sup>36</sup> Although further elaborated in the introduction, by post-revolutionary aesthetics I allude to the “mestizo aesthetics” and its concomitant policies as proposed by Ana Alonso. Based on her analysis of the work of Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, she claims that they believed that “el humanismo, la estética mestiza y la ciencia antropológica podrían redimir una sociedad injusta. . . . [Ambos] impulsaron la ‘mezcla racial y cultural’ como la única vía para crear la homogeneidad a partir de la heterogeneidad” (176). The consolidation of an “estatismo estético” inaugurated a “mestizo aesthetics” characterized by a visually indigenous culture.

José Vasconcelos pioneered the reform of the educational system. He was named the president of the National University of Mexico in 1920 by Victoriano Huerta and in 1921 the director of *SEP* by Álvaro Obregón. Carlos Monsiváis argues that in this period teaching acquired a messianic character and education itself gained a different status (“De sollozos”). Students and young women encouraged by Vasconcelos reached out to remote places and launched *misiones*, built schools, and actively promoted the arts. In her classic study on Mexican dance, *Danza y poder*, dance critic Margarita Tortajada Quiroz discusses the importance of the creation of *misiones culturales* in 1923 throughout the country and their correlation in the promotion of dance. She claims that the *misiones* “estaban inspiradas en los misioneros de la Colonia que habían logrado la hazaña de llegar a todo el país, aprendiendo las lenguas indígenas y enseñando la cultura y religión occidentales. Los nuevos misioneros eran laicos y debían aprender las artes, artesanías y creencias indígenas para después llevarlas a las ciudades” (40). The *misioneros* approached “local knowledges” as raw materials that were to be processed and transported from the rural communities to a national realm—indeed, they were processed to be re-presented for the Western, modern arena of the nation.<sup>37</sup> Dance allowed women the creation of physical and political spaces of their own. It is precisely at the center of such gendered entanglements that Nellie and Gloria Campobello emerged. In her article “Mi cigarro, mi singer, y la Revolución Mexicana: la danza ciudadana de Nellie Campobello,” Mary Louise Pratt briefly recounts the dance trajectory of Campobello and highlights the importance of dance in the social and political sphere. Pratt affirms that the sisters were strategic about launching their professional dance careers in Cuba in 1929 to return in 1930 to Mexico to join the *SEP*’s division of music and dance. As Pratt recounts,

En aquel momento la danza ocupaba un lugar sólido en los programas educativos del [sic] SEP, aunque no existía una escuela nacional de danza ni una sola compañía profesional.... La danza se consideraba un medio para la formación de identidades y conciencia nacional. Era un elemento constituyente de las actividades de las misiones culturales encargadas de diseminar la ideología revolucionaria e integrar las comunidades indígenas y campesinas en el proyecto nacional. La nueva educación rural incluía la danza regional en su currículo. A las misiones también se les encargaba aprender las danzas regionales y llevarlas a la capital.... Las misiones culturales... se encargaban de crear un público urbano por las formas artísticas rurales y por otro lado reorientar las artes locales hacia un marco nacional. (268)

Pratt emphasizes the processes of subject formation and the impact of dance both in urban and rural areas. Following Néstor García Canclini’s theorization of cultural products and modes of production, she reminds us of the importance of such *misiones* for the production, transmission, and circulation of a national cultural capital. For García Canclini, the manipulation of the representation of the cultural heritage established the hegemony of the

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<sup>37</sup> As addressed in the introduction, I follow Eric Van Young’s definition of “local knowledges” as “the contingent, historical, and even personalized understandings that groups of people and communities bring to ideas and cultural complexes shared in a general way with other groups” (344). Such forms of knowledge shape local understandings about socio-cultural, political, and economic processes at play in the configuration of a given community and a nation.

state. As he argues, “[p]ara que las tradiciones sirvan hoy de legitimación a quienes las construyeron o las apropiaron, es necesario ponerlas en escena. El patrimonio existe como fuerza política en la medida en la que es teatralizado: en conmemoraciones, monumentos y museos” (151). Dance played a key role in the *escenificación* or display of *lo mexicano* to interpellate a national audience. And as Pratt goes on to state, “[m]ucho del trabajo dancístico de Campobello fue dedicado a esta función” (268).

I would like to underscore, however, the importance of embodied practices. In fact, performance in general played an important role in the *misiones culturales*. As Sarah J. Townsend reminds us, the performative arts, such as dance and theater, constituted an essential part of Vasconcelos’s program. Unlike the limited number of people who actually travelled to Mexico City to see the murals, performative arts “could involve many people as both participants and spectators, including those who had no formal schooling or spoke little Spanish” (65). Inspired by the policies of Russia’s Anatoly Lunacharsky, the dissemination of performative arts through the *misiones culturales* and the subsequent programs developed in Mexico City highlight the role of schools in this endeavor and the State’s attitude towards the ethno-racial diversity of Mexico. As López demonstrates, the State’s attitude towards the incorporation of indigenous people did revolve around embodied practices:

As public schools in the 1930s tried to improve Indians by teaching them indigenous dances from the far corners of Mexico, for instance, they pressured those same students to abandon their local traditions, including not only such imposed “traditions” as poor hygiene but also their native language and folk religious practices. In short, they insisted that students abandon many locally rooted practices (which teachers and reformers looked down on as rife with degeneracy and superstition) in exchange for ethnicized practices that had been sanitized through a process of nationalization. (9-10)

Indigenous embodied practices had to be selected, “sanitized,” and reorganized to fit an “ethnicized” idea of the nation. Unlike the Porfirian politics, the indigenous in post-revolutionary Mexico did not belong to an ancient past; therefore, the State created mechanisms to engage with the contemporaneity and the presence of the indigenous bodies and their concomitant practices.

Tortajada also affirms that dance served as a means to record, and therefore I would add to interpret, such practices and to disseminate them throughout the nation for over a decade. In fact, she states that between 1926 and 1938, “se distribuyeron materiales de la Dirección de Misiones Culturales donde se hallaban registradas danzas, indumentarias, partituras musicales, dibujos y descripciones y anotaciones coreográficas. Además, [los] misioneros realizaron numerosos festivales artísticos en todo el país; en ellos las propias comunidades presentaban sus manifestaciones dancísticas” (54). The work of the *misiones* exemplifies the importance of dance in schools and its relationship to the formation of Mexican citizens. Mary Louis Pratt, however, reminds us of the lack of a systematic interrogation of dance despite “la estrecha integración de la danza en los programas culturales posrevolucionarios” (268). She mentions that this is in part the result of the “carácter efímero de la danza, sobre todo en la época pre-video y al hecho de que es el único medio artístico dominado por mujeres” (268). As Ilene O’Malley points out, in spite of the contribution of women during the Revolution, especially in their role as *soldaderas*, the

“glorification of revolutionaries’ manliness” dominated the public scene in post-revolutionary Mexico (136). However, the presence of women in public spaces did not diminish after the end of the Revolution. Temma Kaplan rightly observes that during and after the Revolution, women experienced significant changes in their sanctioned roles: “Occupying contradictory positions, simultaneously cast as dependents and nurtures, women of all classes join[ed] brigades, enter[ed] schools, and [took] their places in the public sphere” (271). Even though the Revolution did not drastically change the role of women, it fostered their mobilization, renegotiation, and reworking of their role within the emergent modern Mexican nation-state. (Plate 3)

Modernizing currents and transnational processes further complicated the role of women in the post-revolutionary period. Through often-contradictory dynamics of urbanization and industrialization, “women moved noticeably into public space as performers, spectators, and consumers, complementing their growing presence as workers, students, and political actors” (Vaughan 23). Thus, public presence and active participation of women led to the interrogation of the ways in which citizenship is “inhabited.” As Jocelyn Olcott states, “[q]uestions about whether one accrued citizenship rights through status (e.g., sex, property, or literacy), activities (e.g., labor, military service, or community activism), or affiliation (with a party, union, or official organization) remained in play throughout the postrevolutionary decades” (199). Women remained at times ambiguous in that they simultaneously challenged masculinized structures and reinforced them. On the one hand, the active political participation of women destabilized the patriarchal configuration of exclusively male, civil engagement, and dance allowed women the creation of physical and political spaces of their own.<sup>38</sup> Yet on the other, female cultural producers also reinforced masculinized national ideas. It is precisely at the center of such gendered entanglements that Nellie and her sister Gloria Campobello emerged.

### **The Dancing History of Campobello**

Nellie and Gloria Campobello began their dancing career precisely in the 1920s after seeing Anna Pavlova’s performance in 1925, an icon of international dance who had previously visited Mexico in 1919 as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. According to Irene Matthews, Gloria and Nellie Campobello first started taking classes with the Costa sisters, Amelia and Linda who had arrived to Mexico in 1904 as part of Aldo Barilli’s *Compañía de Baile de Pantomima* (48). Then they continued with Carmen Galé and after that with Stanislava Patapovich and Carlo Adamchevsky, two Polish dancers who had been trained in Warsaw and Petersburg, respectively (49). At the time, Mexico did not have a proper dance school. However, the Campobellos finally started dancing with Miss Lettie H. Carroll. Matthews recounts that “[l]a escuela de miss Carroll—otra ‘tejana’—, establecida a

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<sup>38</sup> Mino Moallem offers a very insightful analysis of the gendered, sexual, classed, and political engagement within the nation-state through the notion of the “civic body.” For Moallem, the “civic body” functions as a site of the intersection between “sexed corporeality, cultural nationalism and gendered citizenship” (319). According to Moallem, the “civic body produces, distributes and regulates racialized and gendered citizenship... The civic body, as a politicized body, encompasses the power to forge a connection between individual and collective identities, thereby generating inclusion and exclusion. By such corporeal inscription a system of signs is put in place to delegitimize and criminalize certain bodies and functions as a spatial marker of the transgressive, the dangerous and the endangered” (320). It is important to keep in mind the ways female bodies were meant to signify and “inhabit” citizenship based on the notion of the “civic body” as a site of inclusion and exclusion, of subordination and/or resistance.

principios de los años veinte, y por muchos años la única escuela de danza ‘seria’ en la ciudad, ofrecía un recital anual para completar los cursos y mostrar a los papás los frutos de su inversión”. In regards to the performance of Nellie Campobello, she mentions that “[t]al vez no era el exceso sino la falta de atributos lo que permitía que miss Carroll le diera a Nellie siempre ‘papeles de muchacho porque no tenía nada aquí...’ (es decir, lo mismo que comentó de su mamá: no tenía ‘chichis’)” (50). The Campobellos successfully joined the company and “aparecen por primera vez en el programa del recital de marzo de 1927, en cuatro bailes; Nellie interpreta tres papeles masculinos, incluyendo el joven favorito en *Una fantasía oriental*, un marinero, y el dios Pan en un dúo con Gloria en *Una fantasía bucólica*” (51).

Despite their success in 1927 with “the Carroll’s Girls,” who became a sensation in the next years, the Campobello sisters left the world of dance only to reappear again in 1930. In 1929, the Campobellos travelled to Havana, Cuba. They decided to pursue a professional dance career in Cuba, as Nellie Campobello stated, “sobre todo porque el embajador de México en ese país (Carlos Trejo y Lerdo de Tejada) gustaba mucho de nuestro impulso, nuestros trajes” (63). It was not until January, 1930 when they first started dancing at the Teatro Campoamor. In addition to performing at the theater, they performed at the *Château Madrid*, where “Gloria y Nellie ‘además de los bailes típicos de su bello país... interpretan las danzas clásicas y los <ballets> modernos, con sorprendente habilidad” (65). Upon their return from Cuba, the Campobello sisters joined the SEP invited by Carlos Trejo y Lerdo de Tejada and became pioneers of the consolidation of a school of Mexican dance. As Nellie Campobello stated, “Carlos Trejo de Tejada, dirigía las actividades artísticas de tipo popular [...] todo ello dentro de un marco puramente escolar y sin la menor pretensión de ir a un profesionalismo. Nos ofreció bailar en las escuelas y en las colonias pobres, así como contribuir en actos oficiales o políticos y crear espectáculos escolares en los estadios” (*Mis libros* 29). As part of their contribution to the consolidation of dance as a national endeavor, in 1931 the Campobellos, along with other dance teachers from the SEP, created the *Escuela de Plástica Dinámica*, directed by Carlos González (71). The Campobellos were the instructors of *bailes mexicanos*, and Matthews states that during the year, the Campobellos “interpretaron las danzas que habían estudiado durante sus recorridos ‘culturales’ para formular nuevos pasos y nuevos argumentos” (72).

The Campobello sisters contributed to the configuration of *lo mexicano* and their dance practices embodied its performance.<sup>39</sup> By actively continuing the cultural work that the *misioneros* had started, they underscored the role of dance in schools and its relationship to the formation of Mexican citizens. However, it is important to note that the consolidation of dance as a field through which notions of gender, race, and sexuality associated with the idea of *lo mexicano* were negotiated was also the result of international processes that interestingly enough can be related to the dance career of the Campobellos, especially Nellie’s.<sup>40</sup> In her study of the work of Nellie Campobello, Sophie Bidault de la Calle

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<sup>39</sup> Sarah J. Townsend discusses the example of a program of the SEP’s “Series Culturales” from 1933. She claims that the “draft of the program for an open-air festival in the working-class district of Colonia Morelos held sometime in the early thirties kicked off with a mariachi band, followed by a performance of three Comino plays, and then the Campobello sisters led a performance of the *jarabe michoacano* before the event concluded with another puppet play” (182). This example illustrates the scope of such open-air programs, which according to Townsend, were “often broadcast on the radio” with the help of microphones and amplifiers (183).

<sup>40</sup> For a biographical study of the life and work of Nellie Campobello, see Irene Matthews’ *Nellie Campobello: La centaura del Norte*. Published in the midst of her sudden disappearance from the public sphere in the late

examines the cultural, historical, and political milieus that shaped Campobello's artistic work. Bidault reminds us that transnational phenomena, such as "flapperism" impacted the image of women, particularly in urban areas, as its presence caused some anxiety that triggered the control and policing of female bodies, against *lo yanqui*. In this context, Nellie Campobello literally came to embody a national(istic) alternative against the impact of foreign influence. As Bidault states, "Nellie parecía expresar, y con fuerza, la voz de la nueva nación; su cuerpo y su danza 'telúrica' eran una declaración cultural y política" (116). At stake is the centrality of the female body in the cultural and political project of *lo mexicano*.

Mexican dance therefore summoned particularly women to perform the nation and the Campobellos joined the call to dance. The emerging national body had to be educated. According to Bidault, the body of the female dancer actualized this experience of the performance of the nation: "[a]demás de injertar autenticidad y espiritualidad en la danza mexicana, la bailarina de los años treinta debía dar cuerpo a una experiencia comunitaria, propiciar la integración de todos los estratos sociales y cumplir con los objetivos populistas de los gobiernos nacionales" (141). However, performing the nation required a different kind of gender performance. As mentioned earlier, flapperism dominated the urban scene, functioning as a marker of modernity to some extent. But this image was in direct contrast with revolutionary values. Nellie Campobello entered the public scenario performing the gendered ideal of a nation. As Bidault observes, "[d]esde el momento en que subió a un escenario, Nellie Campobello exhibió una personalidad acorde con los preceptos socialistas izados como valores absolutos por los revolucionarios. La imagen propiciada y divulgada por la prensa era la de una mujer combativa, 'viril', comprometida con su sociedad.... Una nueva revolución social fomentaba una estética femenina distinta del intrascendente 'flapperismo' de los veinte, poco apreciado por los artistas de entonces" (141). Campobello's attitude and behavior continued to promote the notion of a combative cultural revolutionary. In 1930, she claimed "que sus piernas eran fuertes, tenía el cuerpo 'endurecido' y el espíritu 'templado' de una mujer dispuesta a ayudar a su patria y que se había olvidado definitivamente de trapos, vidrios y colgajos, de los mil adornos, en fin porquerías, que echan sobre su cuerpo" (142). To what extent was her masculinization necessary for her legibility within the national project? Bidault puts it succinctly: "Nellie Campobello ostentaba todos los rasgos del 'ser revolucionario'. Su carácter franco y 'brusco' de 'Eva moderna' gustó en los círculos oficiales, donde se buscaban artistas identificados con el espíritu revolucionario" (142). Nellie, however, seemed to have considered herself more than an "Eva moderna." In the interview with Emmanuel Carballo—the only one ever published—, Nellie attributes to her clothing aspects of her character. Her description operates as an allegory of her personality:

Soy muy exigente con mi ropa. Si alguien la toca, si se cae al suelo, no me la pongo. Antes de usarla, debe estar intacta. En casa, uso cierta ropa de tipo un tanto varonil: camisa de leñador y pantalón que recordaría a un soldado de Gengis Kan. En vez de zapatos, llevo sandalias un poco más grandes que el

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90s, Matthew's study denounces the lack of recognition of Campobello's work as well as the lack of accountability for her disappearance. The study traces Campobello's participation in the institutionalization of dance in Mexico as well as the publication of her fictional and nonfictional work. See also Jesús Vargas Valdés and Flor García Rufino's *Nellie Campobello: Mujer de manos rojas*, the most recent and thorough biographical account of Campobello's life.

pie, para que me quepan las medias de lana. Me gusta escribir con esa ropa. Los vestidos holgados sólo me incitan a caminar. (En ocho días acabo un par de zapatos. Piso como bestia.) Mi bata blanca me sirve, únicamente para pensar, para divagar. (381)

In this fragment, Campobello masculinizes her attire and her personality, even comparing herself to Genghis Khan, with whom she claims to have conversed from time to time and whom she admired—as she claimed in the interview. There is even a tendency to attribute certain animalistic-like characteristics of her personality. But how did Nellie Campobello come to embody the ideal of a nation? (Plate 4).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the public appearances of the Campobello sisters performing traditional dances allows for a different reading of a heteronormative construction of *lo mexicano*. Attributing a queer subversive quality to the figure of Nellie Campobello of course merits further interrogation. One needs to be careful not to celebrate or take for granted such subversion. To what extent did the Campobello sisters, particularly Nellie, actively disavow a heteronormative role of women within the state, and to what extent did they foster heteronormativity? In *A Queer Mother for the Nation*, Licia Fiol-Matta examines the figure of Gabriela Mistral claiming that she “created a public discourse that supported a conservative role for women within the state, but her private life deviated significantly from the state prescription” (xv). I read Nellie in a similar way. Though I will not necessarily argue that Nellie Campobello’s private life challenged conservative notions about the role of women (though at times it did), the performance of her dancing body, her embodiment of *lo mexicano*, was often read by male commentators not as a woman, but rather as a man. This tension is precisely why Nellie, and more generally the women in consolidating a dance field, becomes crucial to understand the importance of Mexican dance for the construction of the idea of *lo mexicano*. Simply stated, the fact that women played a central role in the emergence of dance as a cultural field produced a particular queering of the otherwise heteronormative Mexican nationalism and deepened the fractures and tensions that were already present from the very beginning in post revolutionary cultural national projects.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Mexican State regarded dance as paramount. Dance became “una de las más altas expresiones del ‘alma nacional’ y una de las más consecuentes de un designio nacional: ‘otorgarle forma significativa al movimiento armado y/o constitucional’” (Bidault 145). One of the main effects of this almost “imperative” to perform the nation was the occupation of public spaces by the participation of a great number of citizens. Bidault describes this collective enterprise as a “social *gestus*.” “Los espectáculos masivos nacieron de la necesidad de crear ritos, gestos y formas; en términos brechtianos, un *gestus* social y teatral que fuera la manifestación visible de un orden cósmico superior alcanzado por la nación” (147). Once again, Vasconcelos had been the visionary of such an extraordinary endeavor: “A la ‘regeneración’ de la raza debía contribuir una nueva escenografía, masiva y grandilocuente, para la cual Vasconcelos imaginó ‘un gran ballet, orquesta y coros de millares de voces’” (147).<sup>41</sup> In addition to the celebrations programed for

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<sup>41</sup> Vasconcelos, Matthews reminds us, divided the SEP in three departments: schools, libraries and archives, and fine arts: “El gran proyecto educativo-cultural de la época postrevolucionaria incluía el desarrollo de la educación general en las regiones rurales, sobre todo entre la población indígena y campesina, y la popularización de la cultura.” According to Matthews, in 1929, “el programa de Vasconcelos intentaba

the inauguration of the *Estadio Nacional*, what best exemplifies the intersection between the State and dance are the massive ballets that dominated the dance scene during the 1930s. The Campobellos choreographed a good number of them; the *30-30*—a ballet “de masas” was perhaps the most famous and popular.<sup>42</sup> Bidault rightly asserts that the mass ballet “fue utilizado por el Estado y las diferentes asociaciones obreras como instrumento eficaz de difusión, apoyo y movilización. El Estado tenía en él la oportunidad única de reflejar un cuerpo social cohesivo y disciplinado, de agrupar a todos en una vasta movilización para dramatizar de esta forma la visión de una fusión entre el pueblo, la nación y el Estado” (150). Even though the choreographies varied, Bidault mentions that they were influenced by the Russian theater “que mezclaba con la danza folclórica elementos de teatro, de cine, musicales, acrobáticos y mímicos” (150). The Campobellos choreographed several *ballets masivos*; however, they also created “numerosos bailes regionales y populares inspirados en sus apuntes sobre danzas mexicanas, tomados durante sus viajes por el país” (151). This aspect of their work merits further analysis. The emergence of Mexican *folklórico* dance was practically simultaneous with its institutionalization, as it relied on the state for funding. Moreover, this was also a period characterized by the increasing “identificación de la nación con el Estado” (Bidault 152). The institutionalization of dance as a national project came about with the creation of *Escuela Nacional de Danza (EDN)* in 1932, as part of the *Departamento de Bellas Artes de la Secretaría de Educación Pública*. In what follows, I offer an analysis of the establishment and development of the *EDN* of which Nellie was a founding member and director from 1937 to 1984.

### ***La Escuela Nacional de Danza: The Formation of National Subjects through Movement***

In the introduction to *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, et al argue that dance practice and the narratives it generated in the Americas “often served as important media for documenting and transmitting history, and they subsequently became a significant means for expressing the complicated tensions of the colonial and postcolonial periods. As a result, the changing dance traditions testify to the political and historical trajectories of the people” (xiv). In the case of Mexico, dance traditions particularly testify to the political trajectory of the state ideology. As a pioneer of Mexican dance, Nellie Campobello came to be known for her massive choreographies in stadiums and other public venues in the 1930s during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, and for the role she played in the institutionalization of a dance practice along with her sister Gloria. Nellie Campobello was appointed the director of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza* in 1937, only five years after its founding in 1932 by the *Consejo de Bellas Artes*. Despite a number of difficulties and tensions with other choreographers, Nellie continued to be its director until 1983.

The *Escuela Nacional de Danza* represented the consolidation of “danza academica” in Mexico. From its start, Mexican “danza académica” attempted to systematize a pedagogy of movement as a political project. The establishment of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza*

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‘incorporar el libro al espacio vital del pueblo, hacer voz del pueblo a los artistas y capacitar al pueblo para la democracia...’; es decir, tenía una meta triple: literaria, artística y pedagógica” (70).

<sup>42</sup> For a thorough analysis of the *30-30*, see Jose Luis Reynoso’s “Choreographing Politics, Dancing Modernity: Ballet and Modern Dance in the Construction of Modern Mexico (1919-1940).”

elevated the status of dance to a fundamental part of the post-revolutionary project. The first attempts were made by the *Escuela de Plástica Dinámica* created by the Russian Hipólito Zybin (Tortajada 107). His work proved essential to develop a systematic curriculum that could elevate dance to the standard of painting and music nationally and ballet and modern dance internationally. In her illuminating study, *Una mirada a la formación dancística mexicana (ca. 1919-1945)*, dance historian Roxana Guadalupe Ramos Villalobos traces the emergence and curriculum development of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza*. According to Ramos, “[la] educación fue un rubro fundamental del proyecto político; como parte de los programas y acciones se impulsó la educación artística y, por ende, la creación de una escuela de danza bajo dirección y auspicio del gobierno” (66). Having been trained in the Russian school of ballet, Zybin’s short lived project aimed at establishing a comprehensive dance education in order to “formar actores completos, con una preparación integral, hombres y mujeres capaces de expresar por medio de su cuerpo todas las manifestaciones del mundo” (74). In fact, Zybin goes on to define “plástica dinámica” as the intersection between various cultural activities. He claimed that “la plástica dinámica surgida de la danza teatral, hermana de las artes plásticas, de la poesía y en estrecha unión con ello, alcanzará un día fuerzas insospechables de penetración que producirán nuevos fenómenos psíquicos-físicos en los individuos y en las masas” (qtd. in Ramos 74-75). Nevertheless, in addition to “actores completos” that would create the national ballet based on the folkloric study of Mexican dances, the Mexican government needed teachers.

Despite the fact that it only operated for 10 months, the *Escuela de Plástica Dinámica* set the way for the creation of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza*. By the 1930s, the Mexican government had realized the significance of dance compared to other spheres of national culture, such as muralism. The work of Zybin proved essential to develop a systematic creation of a curriculum that could elevate dance to the standard of painting and music nationally and ballet and modern dance internationally. Therefore, as Tortajada succinctly states, the establishment of “la Escuela Nacional de Danza significaba recuperar las danzas autóctonas del país a la manera del trabajo realizado por los muralistas y la experiencia de las Misiones Culturales que habían demostrado su capacidad artística, teórica y organizativa” (67). In addition, she mentions that the main objectives of the dance academy were to “impartir una enseñanza profesional, difundir la danza como medio de expresión y contribuir a la creación del baile mexicano.... Se buscaba generar la danza mexicana, y para esto el programa daría los elementos técnicos y conceptuales que requerían los alumnos para alcanzar el dominio de su cuerpo y experimentar en la creación basándose en la danza popular tradicional” (69).

In a text that first appeared in 1932, Carlos Mérida, *END*’s first director, highlights the importance of systematizing the production and transmission of dance knowledge. Mérida claims that

El desarrollo de los aspectos estrictamente gentílicos de la danza, los caracteres propios de nuestra danza, de nuestra música y el desarrollo de sus posibilidades, no es posible irlos aprovechando y desarrollando sin una base científica, lógica, sin un organismo especializado para ello. Todos los aspectos técnicos del problema de la danza, necesarios para que puedan servir y expresar con claridad la tesis que se desea ilustrar, la ideología que sea indispensable darle, se harían irrealizables sin el establecimiento de una seria

educación sistemática, moderna y efectiva. El contenido ideológico tiene que estar servido por la perfección técnica, del mismo modo que toda la perfección técnica adquirida deberá emplearse a servir la ideología, el contenido general o particular de la danza. Sin esa base continuaríamos de forma empírica y somera siempre, continuaríamos considerando a la danza como un arte que nada significa en la cultura y la tradición artística de México, continuaríamos desconociendo una de nuestras propias realidades. (130)

Mérida clearly established the intricate connection between dance form and content, or better said, ideology. In his text, he suggests the lack of development of a “educación sistemática, moderna y efectiva” necessary for the transmission of culture and the artistic tradition of Mexico. Moreover, he clearly identified that approaching dance “de forma empírica y somera” would not serve the real needs of the country. Instead, he advanced that form and technique must reflect the ideological expression demanded of this art form. Mérida ultimately fought for the recognition of dance as one of the most important modalities of artistic expression. And despite the fact that he acknowledged the significance of studying Mexico’s indigenous and popular dances, as Townsend reminds us, “he warns against the dangers of ‘empiricism’ and argues that the key is arriving at the proper articulation between ‘ideological content’ and formal ‘technique’” (179). In this respect, Mérida would insist more on the creation of a dance tradition parallel to that of Russia, which he regarded as the most sophisticated expression of this popular art. As he stated, “Otra de las innovaciones rusas consiste en la utilización de los elementos folklóricos rusos, pero no con sentido de nacionalismo, sino como elemento plástico; bajo ese carácter difiere por completo del aprovechamiento que todavía hacemos nosotros de nuestros ritmos folklóricos” (140). This is where he clearly departed from the Campobellos’ vision. Nellie in particular was a strong advocate of nationalism as will be discussed later in the chapter. Mérida, on the other hand, clearly opposed a “empiricist” version thereof:

Si nosotros llevamos nuestra idea de investigación por los campos del folklore y de las danzas aborígenes, deberemos cuidar de que éstas sean elementos para realizaciones de carácter ideológico en forma de ritmos plásticos, pero nunca con tendencias a afianzar un espíritu de nacionalismo o con el propósito de ofrecer regalo al turista: bastante tiene éste con odas las chinas poblanas que desfilan por los escenarios de nuestros teatros. (142)

Not surprisingly, his inclination for the form and the aesthetics of the dances over the national(istic) trends of the government, particularly during the Cárdenas presidency, led to the eventual substitution of Mérida as the director of the academy.

Guided by a nationalist idea, The *Escuela Nacional de Danza* conceived dance not just as praxis, but also as a site for production and transmission of knowledge, in effect, as a pedagogical and epistemological realm. Here it is important to think of dance not just as a product—the performance seen by an audience—but also a process. Dance scholar Jane C. Desmond recognizes this potential of dance and proposes to approach it as a product and a process. She argues that dance “is both a product (particular dances as realized in production) and a process (dancing, and the historical conditions of possibility for the production and

reception of such texts and processes, as well as their articulation in systems of value)” (2). This particular approach draws attention to the various aspects that configure dance praxis as an “economy of representation” with a specific history, one that is inserted in a larger matrix of values and power where meanings are negotiated. Desmond suggests thinking of “kinesthesia” as a “historically particular register of meaning” (2). That is to say, Desmond reminds us of the multiple ways our bodies are made to signify and to archive, I would add. As such, kinesthetic renderings of power relations (e.g. class, race, gender and sexuality) highlight important processes of signification. In fact, Desmond goes on to state that the “complexity of writing selves with and through the body is always framed by the social formations within which the work and its reception takes place” (12). The importance of the study of dance lies precisely at the core of this network of power: “Whether as practice or product, dance is an act of presentation and representation that literally embodies the political, the historical, and the epistemological conditions of its possibility”(19). Such a perspective brings to the forefront the tensions between a hegemonic representational framework—such as Mexican state-sponsored nationalism—and individual and collective kinesthetic engagements with it, such as the Campobellos’s.

As a “presentation and representation” of *lo mexicano*, the *Escuela Nacional de Danza* became a contested terrain for its configuration. The Campobello sisters would embark on the consolidation of a *danza mexicana* that would be in constant tension with modernizing currents, particularly as represented by the work of Anna Sokolow and Waldeen—two American dancers that moved to Mexico in 1939 and were pioneers for the establishment of modern dance.<sup>43</sup> Pratt describes the Campobellos’ dance practice and ethos succinctly: “Fanáticas opositoras a la danza moderna, las hermanas Campobello (Gloria muy dominada por Nelly [sic]) buscaron fusionar ballet clásico, baile indígena, temática nacionalista, y espectáculos de participación masiva. Su dogmático rechazo de las corrientes ‘modernas’ causó finalmente la total marginación de Campobello del escenario dancístico mexicano” (271). Perhaps their rejection of foreign and modern, i.e. non Mexican, dance practices is best exemplified by the publication in 1940 of their book *Ritmos indígenas de México*.

### **Ritmos indígenas de México and the Kinesis of *lo mexicano***

*Ritmos indígenas*, I argue, offers a catalog of the kinesis of *lo mexicano*. It was signed by both sisters, although evidence exists that it was Nellie who wrote it, with drawings by their brother Mauro Moya (Tortajada 339). In *Ritmos indígenas de México* (1940), Nellie and Gloria Campobello propose what could be thought of as a kinesthetic ontology of *lo mexicano*. Through this undertaking, the Campobellos established indigenous rhythms and dances as the primary materials informing their dance practice. As they state, “[e]l principal objeto de este libro es señalar los ritmos indígenas mexicanos como el material básico de las danzas que nos son propias: ofrecemos aquí las líneas elementales, el principio y raíz de nuestras futuras disciplinas coreográficas” (7). The research project aimed to recognize such practices as a form of knowledge and to systematize its transmission: “Unidos de este modo en un conjunto coherente, los valores de la danza mexicana quedan al servicio de quienes, como nosotras, quieran elevarlos a la categoría que les corresponde” (7).

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<sup>43</sup> The impact of Sokolow and Waldeen are beyond the scope of this chapter. For a detailed discussion of their dance projects in Mexico, see Jose Luis Reynoso’s “Choreographing Politics, Dancing Modernity: Ballet and Modern Dance in the Construction of Modern Mexico (1919-1940).”

In an effort to define Mexican dance, they systematically observed and examined indigenous embodied practices in order to “reconocer en ésta[s] la parte que sea auténticamente original, y por lo tanto, verdaderamente indígena” (7). One of the aspects that is most striking is the initial emphasis not on the elaborated movements that might characterize their ritualistic dances, but rather on the everyday forms of bodily expression: “Hemos tomado en cuenta como primer material para este trabajo la expresión propia de los indios, el ritmo que imprime a su cuerpo el andar, su porte, sus ademanes, y, en general, todos sus movimientos, incluso los que pueden deducirse o componerse partiendo de muchas danzas antiguas y ya casi perdidas” (8). It is in the every day life movements where they claim to find a trace of what constituted “corporeal rhythms” that define an “authentic” expressive embodied culture in Mexico. What are the implications of recognizing the value of embodied expressions, yet framing them as authentic, original and with a different temporality?

Sophie de la Calle, in her research on Nellie, affirms that more than actually preserving and recuperating the traditions of the past, the Campobellos resorted to indigenous embodied practices to counteract the advances of modern forms of dance expressions (126). In fact, de la Calle affirms that more than actually preserving and recuperating the “traditions” of the past, the Campobellos resorted to indigenous embodied practices to counteract the advances of modern forms of dance expressions. She rightly claims that “‘lo indio’ aparece como modelo ‘construido’ en oposición a lo ‘moderno’ y a una figura mestiza, fundamentalmente híbrida y por lo tanto impura, asimilada a la nación y a la cultura” (126). In effect, the Campobello sisters discursively constructed a category to aimed to defend “authentic” Mexican cultural and embodied practices against a wave of “de-Mexicanization” of traditional values. The Campobellos claimed: “En el orden de la danza, como en todos los otros, México tiene una labor que desarrollar, sobre todo en este tiempo en que se propaga una onda de desmexicanización de todos los valores tradicionales” (10). They denounced the incorporation of foreign styles and false representations made by those who, according to them, do not know the “authentic” Mexican rhythmic expressions. The Campobellos stated:

Vueltos los ojos *al Tutuguri, al Venado, o a los Malinches*, muy difícilmente ocurrirá lo que ahora suele verse: pasos de *tap* en jarabes tapatíos, y mixtificaciones como ciertos bailes chiapanecos creados por bailarinas irlandesas o húngaras transplantadas a Norteamérica.... Otro tanto en cuanto a nuestros bailes: vestidas de tehuanas o mestizas, o simplemente de indias, andan por ahí muchas bailarinas norteamericanas o rusas que al interpretar lo exterior de los bailes nuestros no consiguen apartarse un instante de lo que es esencial en los bailes suyos. (10-12)

Interestingly enough, the Campobello defended the preservation of authentic indigenous rhythms, yet their criticism always involved references to regional or mestizo dances. In their work, they proposed a hierarchy of dance practices in Mexico, where mestizo dances do not constitute so-called “authentic” expressions: “Ni los jarabes, ni las jaranas, ni los huapangos, o ningún otro baile de este género tienen nada de autóctono. Son mexicanos, absolutamente mexicanos, en el sentido de nuestra nacionalidad actual, pues México es, en cierto modo, la expresión americana de España, pero no nada hay en ellos que les haga hincar la raíz en nuestro suelo” (9). The policing of authentic dance expressions encompassed not

only dance practices, but also practitioners. In regards to the inauthentic interpretation of Mexican dance practices, they claimed that even Mexican born dancers failed to properly perform them: “Creyendo algunas de ellas interpretar un son abajeño o un zapateado de Jalisco, o la danza indígena de *los Malinches* o de *los Concheros*, se mantienen dentro de un ritmo personal enteramente ajeno a estos bailes. ¿Por qué? Porque sus movimientos siguen siendo los propios de su cuerpo, no los de los bailes que hacen, que no han asimilado” (12).

As a pioneer of Mexican dance, Nellie Campobello, together with her sister Gloria played an important role in the systematization of knowledge of Mexican dance. As pioneers of Mexican *folklórico*, they elevated to an intellectual realm that which was considered mainly “popular” and “subaltern” (de la Calle 129). Moreover, they gave national topics and themes an “aesthetic status” (324, qtd. in Irene Matthews). Nellie and Gloria envisioned these practices as the “pillars” of Mexico’s “choreographic expression:” por su pureza y originalidad, estos ritmos ocuparán un lugar especial en nuestra manifestaciones de la danza, y tan pronto como se conozcan y se apliquen, su riqueza y desenvolvimiento quedarán asegurados mediante el entusiasmo y la vigilancia de las danzarinas técnicas, que indudablemente utilizarán este material” (8). In a form of a manifesto, they not only proposed such manifestations as “pure and original” and hence foundational for Mexican dance practice, but they also established the *danzarinas técnicas* as the ones responsible for their dissemination, development, and even use. Indeed, the legacy of Nellie Campobello demonstrates the pedagogical and even epistemological impact of dance, particularly *folklórico* dance, in contemporary Mexico. The women, the *danzarinas técnicas*, had the responsibility to carry out a practice that would bring to the front what the Campobello described as “lo auténticamente mexicano según la plasticidad esencial del indio y los ritmos de su cuerpo” (15). In a way, Nellie’s choreographic rendering of Mexico opened up a space for the circulation of female bodies and voices within the nation. Despite its nationalistic and heteronormative understandings of women’s bodies and voices, her work continually undid that which it claimed to represent. In this sense, I think it is imperative that we consider the performance of *lo mexicano* as always incomplete and ambivalent, with cultural boundaries continuously shifting.

### ***Writing the Nation Through Indigenous Bodies***

In the introduction to the anthology *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha proposes the idea of a nation as a “cultural *elaboration*,” “an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for ‘subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding’” (3-4, emphasis in the original). Thinking the nation as narration allows Bhabha to highlight the contingency of the discourse that authorizes and constructs it, noting the process of the different practices that produce and re-produce its iteration as well as the “ambivalence” of such a process. Bhabha’s insistence on the ambivalence that narrating the nation entails directly challenges the “authority,” “continuity,” and “transparency” of historical discourses that aim to articulate a coherent “transitional social reality.” In doing so, he challenges us to think of the nation through the process of the articulation of the elements “where meanings are partial because they are *in media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of ‘composing’ its powerful image” (3). The ambivalence that results from the uncertainty of the process of signification proves particularly relevant for the case of

Mexico during the post-revolutionary period in the 1920s and 1930s. Not only was the discourse or narrative about the nation still *in media res*, but also the players were shifting, which open up spaces particularly for women. In effect, Bhabha's theorization of nation as narration draws attention to the political power and cultural authority of two attendant processes: the configuration of "cultural boundaries," "'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production" and the importance of "incomplete signification," "[the] turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (4, emphasis in the original). It is in the tension and "ambivalence" that result from the process of "incomplete signification" of "cultural boundaries" that I would like to re-write the emergence of *folklórico* dance and the role of women, especially through the figure of Nellie Campobello, in its attendant institutionalization. Bhabha himself stressed the significance of the ambivalence that resulted from "the language of those who write of [the nation] and the lives of those who live it" (1).

In this sense, the case of Nellie Campobello proves to be paramount. Not only was she a pioneer of Mexican letters, being the first self-taught woman to write about the Mexican Revolution, but she was also a pioneer of the creation of dance as a national(istic) discipline in post-revolutionary Mexico. In fact, it should not be a surprise that her incursion and the height of her career coincided in both fields, particularly during the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> Although a thorough discussion of her literary legacy is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to point out some of the ways in which Nellie Campobello resorted to literature and indigenismo in her quest for independence, not unlike Rosario Castellanos as discussed by Estelle Tarica. In *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*, Tarica traces Castellanos's return to "indigenismo and her regional origin" in her novel *Balún Canán* as "integral to her bid for a new kind of independence—intellectual, aesthetic, female—" (139) and as a way to write herself into a national narrative. These particular spheres of independence—intellectual, aesthetic, female—also characterized the search for autonomy of Campobello. As Tarica discusses,

Castellanos turns the novel into an instrument of a larger purpose—national progress—rather than an end in itself. This move allowed her to join together her literary vocation and her indigenista vocation into a single narrative of female enlightenment and moral self-improvement. The writing of *Balún Canán* thus contributed to forging Castellanos's attitude to writing as both a deeply personal and a deeply political act, one that has much to do with the process of female—and feminist—self-invention and discovery. (181)

Writing, just as much as dancing for Campobello, enabled Castellanos to carve out a space of her own into the national cultural boundaries that conditioned her autonomy. Nevertheless, this quest for autonomy came with a price. Tarica details how developing an aesthetic, intellectual, and female writerly practice manifested through a "profound attachment to the idea of marginality... crucial to developing her autonomy and her literary

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<sup>44</sup> For an excellent contextualization of Nellie Campobello's literary work, see the prologue of Jorge Aguilar Mora, "El silencio de Nellie Campobello." For a discussion of her written and dance works, see Irene Matthews' *Nellie Campobello: La centaura del norte* and Sophie Bidault de la Calle's *Nellie Campobello: Una escritura salida del cuerpo*.

art, came at the price of denying coevalness to Indians yet without endowing them with its accompanying autonomy” (180-81). This bind that resulted in the denial of coevalness of Indians points towards the interconnection between individual transformation and the writing of the nation. Indeed, this shared notion of “indigeneity,” which Tarica defines as “the whole symbolic complex erected by modernizing intellectuals who established that nationality is a form of nativism, of being native to the land, yet constructed that land as a site of barbarity that exerts a negative force on its habitants [which] must be tamed and civilized if they are to become properly national” (148), became the dominant mode of narrating the nation.

Like many *indigenista* thinkers of her time, Campobello too engaged in the simultaneous recognition and denial of the contributions of indigenous people as the primary markers of nationalism. In an effort to craft a voice of their own, their work combined the language of dance with the literary tropes of indigenismo, but perhaps more importantly and more radical was their re-inscription of the body into the writing of the nation. The Campobello were clear: “Refiriéndonos concretamente a México, podría decirse que los indios hablan más claramente con el cuerpo que con la lengua. La costumbre de ser en todo silenciosos y parcos contribuye en ellos a que hallen en el movimiento el verdadero vehículo de su expresión, y esto aun en el caso de aquellas tribus que por un hondo sentimiento de orgullo hablan poco” (12). The body speaks the language of movement. It is thus important to emphasize that they advanced the emergence of an *indigenista* discipline through the re-positioning of the body—the body operates as a language; the body signifies.

As Margarita Tortajada has also noted, *Ritmos indígenas de México* “es un estudio antropológico que vence el reto de utilizar la palabra para explicar el movimiento y sus dimensiones espacio-temporales. A veces a Nellie sólo le queda la poesía y sus metáforas para explicarlo” (340). Furthermore, she goes on to say that both Nellie and Gloria “recuperan la dimensión histórica y social del cuerpo a partir del estudio de las formas concretas de moverse que van acompañadas de toda una concepción espacio-temporal que constituye al sujeto. Reconocen... el enorme poder que tiene la cultura corporal que inscribe en el cuerpo vivido de manera natural e inconsciente las grandes estructuras sociales” (340). Through the careful examination and detailed account of indigenous bodies and their movements—indeed through the analysis of a “corporeal culture”—, the Campobellos addressed the historical and social dimension of the body and its writing through movements, which are always already part of a structure or system of signification. For the Campobellos,

[s]i alguien quiere conocerlos, entrever lo que hay en ellos de profundamente humano —lo que son en la intimidad, lo que hacen en su vida común y en su soledad, lo que valen, lo que su existencia tiene de aspiración o de impulso— debe acercarse a verlos caminar, a ver cómo mueven su cuerpo en el reposo o en el trabajo, y, sobre todo, a verlos bailar, o mejor dicho, a verlos en sus bailes. Desde el punto de vista de la danza todo esto tiene la misma trascendencia que, en otros órdenes, tendría oírlos hablar y verlos vivir. De este modo consigue penetrar el origen de su plástica, se comprueba el tipo y calidad de sus movimientos actuales y posibles o, en una palabra, de su ritmo, en reposo y en actividad” (12-13).

The Campobellos make a case for the importance of focusing on kinesis—on movement—as a system of signification. In fact, they make a claim that as a system of knowledge, as an

“order” of signification, dance and therefore movement are as significant as the verbal or visual regimes—as “oírlos hablar y verlos vivir.” Their understanding of kinesis is such that they even address movement in stillness—“en el reposo”—; one gets information from observing someone resting as much as from someone walking. Nevertheless, the Campobellos emphasize the importance of dancing or better yet, seeing them in their “dances.” “Verlos en sus bailes,” as a festive manifestation, implies paying attention not only to movement, but also to the context in which the movement is reproduced, as any specific context would impact “el tipo y calidad de sus movimientos actuales y posibles.” The Campobellos had a very profound sensibility for the production and re-production of movement. In what can be defined as a form of “performance ethnography,” they gesture towards the unbreakable bond between knowledge and knower, one of the principal characteristics with which Diana Taylor names the repertoire—embodied expressions of knowledge. Dance brings to the fore the fact that there are certain kinds of knowledges that can only be transmitted through bodies. This is one of the greatest contributions of Campobellos’ work: although complicit with indigenista cultural politics, they understood the significance of embodied cultural expression.

I argue that with *Ritmos indígenas de México*, the Campobellos elaborated the first systematic attempt to trace a genealogy of movement in Mexico—in effect, to propose a genealogy of what Carrie Noland calls “gestural performatives.” In her seminal study on gestures, *Agency and Embodiment*, Noland proposes the idea of “gestural performative” to address the “coded and carefully policed movements that constitute an embodiment, a kinetic, corporeal support, for cultural (discursive) meanings” (190). To illustrate, I quote at length one of the descriptions about the movements of the Yaqui Indians:

Camina el yaqui con los pies un poco abiertos y apoyándose casi completamente sobre la parte exterior de ellos y el talón. Quiere esto decir que, aunque análogo en la apariencia al modo de andar de los japoneses, el de los yaquis se diferencia de este último en que el japonés carga todo el peso del cuerpo en el talón, mientras que el yaqui lo reparte entre el talón y el borde exterior del pie. Al andar, el yaqui dobla un poco más que la otra la rodilla de la pierna que no avanza, y de ese modo su cintura adquiere un movimiento tan especial, que en el acto surge de allí un ritmo vivo y enérgico que comunica a toda la figura movimientos quebrados enteramente propios. Sucede también que hay un marcadísimo balanceo que el yaqui imprime elementalmente a su andar, y que eso, a ojos del espectador poco acostumbrado a verlo, cobra el valor de un baile original y extraño, y tan peculiar de la figura que lo hace, que viene a ser en el yaqui una de sus expresiones plásticas más características.

En la vida diaria, igual que en la guerra, los movimientos del cuerpo del yaqui son siempre rápidos y enérgicos. La actitud de sus brazos es en todo momento expresiva. Movimientos precisos, tensión nerviosa, ademanes bruscos como de animal siempre alerta, parecen ser la actitud y el dinamismo a que al yaqui da vida constantemente, hasta cuando se hunde en la mayor quietud. Plásticamente, el yaqui es dinámico y expresivo; es inquieto o anuncia inquietud; hace fiestas, danza como el que más y es esencialmente guerrero...

Se comprende por todo lo anterior que en las danzas que el yaqui ejecuta, los quiebros del cuerpo, bruscos y rápidos, semejan relámpagos o líneas en zig-zag, y que estos giros profundos alternen con grandes pausas en que toda la tensión y el alma del danzarín parecen quedarse estáticas y en acecho. El contraste, que no estriba en diferencias de vitalidad, pues tanta vida expresa aquí la quietud como el movimiento, hace de estos giros de danza algo increíble. Y ello se debe también a que no necesita el yaqui ejecutar saltos ni adoptar figuras teatrales aparatosas para dar la sensación de que está bailando grandiosamente. (157; 159).

The detailed description the Campobellos provide highlights different and competing discourses at play in the performance of indigenous movement. Right at the beginning, they resort to a comparison between the walk of the Yaqui Indians and the Japanese by stressing the distribution of their body weight either at the heels or the heel and the external part of the feet. In this sense, kinetic or rather “gestural performatives” allow the Campobellos to establish a comparison between two completely unrelated cultures—one of them greatly admired in Mexico, one of them still struggling for recognition. However, such comparison begs the question of the need to resort to imaginaries of the Oriental other versus perhaps a comparison between the various indigenous groups whose movements they catalogue.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the Campobellos use this as a strategy to establish their expertise in dance. The description of the walk, however, does not stop there. The Campobellos detail how the fact that one of the knees is not as bent as the other one causes the hip to move with a “ritmo vivo y energético.” The balancing of these movements must be read by a spectator. The Campobellos are aware that these gestures have a valance that constitutes one of the Yaqui Indians’ “expresiones plásticas más características.”

The movements of the Yaqui Indians are compared, in addition to those of the Japanese, to the those of an animal “siempre alerta”... “hasta cuando se hunde en la mayor quietud.” What is interesting about this comparison is the emphasis of the kinesis of stillness. To appreciate motion in the seeming absence of movement reveals an understanding of the way the body is in continuous motion as a living entity. Moreover, the importance of describing not just festive instances of movement, but rather prioritizing the description of the everyday motions, or rather gestural performatives, stresses the significance of a continuum of movements that mean according to the occasion—a shared “kinesthetic background” to borrow the words from Noland. In fact, it is only when they describe the everyday movements of the Yaqui Indians that the Campobellos move on to discuss their “danzas.” First the Campobellos describe the walk and the movement of the arms in order to then state that during their dances, “los quiebros del cuerpo, bruscos y rápidos, semejan relámpagos o líneas en zig-zag, y que estos giros profundos alternen con grandes pausas en que toda la tensión y el alma del danzarín parecen quedarse estáticas y en acecho.” The Campobello point towards that continuum between movement and stillness, between “los quiebros del cuerpo” and the “grandes pausas,” “pues tanta vida expresa aquí la quietud como el movimiento.” The valance of these two instances of movement resides in the fact that “no necesita el yaqui ejecutar saltos ni adoptar figuras teatrales aparatosas para dar la sensación de que está bailando grandiosamente.” Certainly, the Campobellos state succinctly

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<sup>45</sup> This rhetorical gestures reminds us of the way Palavicini described the dances of the Yaqui Indians at “La Noche Mexicana.”

how the movements of the Yaqui Indians constitute an embodiment charged with cultural meanings. *Ritmos indígenas*, therefore represents one of the first systematic efforts to propose a genealogy of cultural meanings through the movements of the body, underscoring how the body is both a signifier and a signified. Clearly their work contained biased and exoticizing depictions of indigenous people. Yet even so I want to emphasize the importance of their work for the use of a language of movement and the establishment of a discipline.

### Nellie's "danza mexicana"

I would like to conclude this chapter turning to Nellie's own reflection about her dance career. In 1960, Nellie Campobello published *Mis libros*, a compilation of her written works. In a poem titled "Estadios" and dedicated to the motherland, "la patria," Nellie wrote: "En todos los estadios / donde para ti he danzado, / he ido sumisa a prosternarme ante tu imagen, / y entre luceros y nardos, tú patria, / forjada con devoción, / me hiciste estatua en silencio, / estatua en paso de danza, / que humilde toca tu suelo, / suelo en que estoy engarzada" (261). Nellie, referring to the nation, acknowledged the way she was part of the post-revolutionary cultural enterprise. Yet, she felt betrayed and silenced. In the "Prologue" to *Mis libros*, she also revealed the ambivalence she felt when performing the nation and for the nation: "Aunque yo me preguntaba: ¿Por qué andamos aquí? ¿Por qué tengo que danzar en estos estadios enormes, en este suelo ardoroso que remueve la tierra, que sofoca mi alineto?... Era la patria; ella lo quería así. Los hombres que tenían la ley ordenaban que fuéramos por todos los estadios, que respiráramos la tierra y la cal"(39). Nellie clearly was aware of the gender and power dynamics that took place. Men were the law. Although she may question the purpose of her performances, ultimately she was a nationalist. (Plate 5)

In many ways, like her writings for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, her dance career has been ignored due to her strong character and her overt and unquestioning nationalism. Yet, her own body allowed for a kind of writing that would continuously undo what she claimed to represent—that common national narrative of a heteronormative and mestizo nation. *Folklórico* dance was crucial to make tangible the past and ethnic diversity, manipulate it and foster a sense of nationalism. The staging of performances of *lo mexicano* aimed at creating citizens; they operated as embodied pedagogical practices. As Néstor García Canclini has shown, through its manipulation of cultural heritage the State established its hegemony. As he argues, for traditions to serve today as legitimizing for those who created them or appropriated them, it is necessary to put them on stage. The patrimony exists as a political force so long as it is staged: in commemorations, monuments and museums (151). Dance played a key role in the *escenificación* or staging of *lo mexicano* to interpellate a national audience. Through her dance and her body, Nellie drew from two distinct, yet intersecting modes of participation: her "danza mexicana" interpellated Mexicans via corporeal tropes of *lo mexicano* while she embodied ritualized movements that gestured towards ideological and material ways nation building and cultural nationalism took place. Dance allowed Nellie to write the nation through her body, and in so doing, she pointed towards the intricate ways movement operates as a mode of signification, but most importantly towards the ways in which nation-making involves a historical and social dimension that cannot be separated from the body.



Plate 1. Anna Pavlova. *El Universal*. Thursday, March 27, 1919. Courtesy of Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada

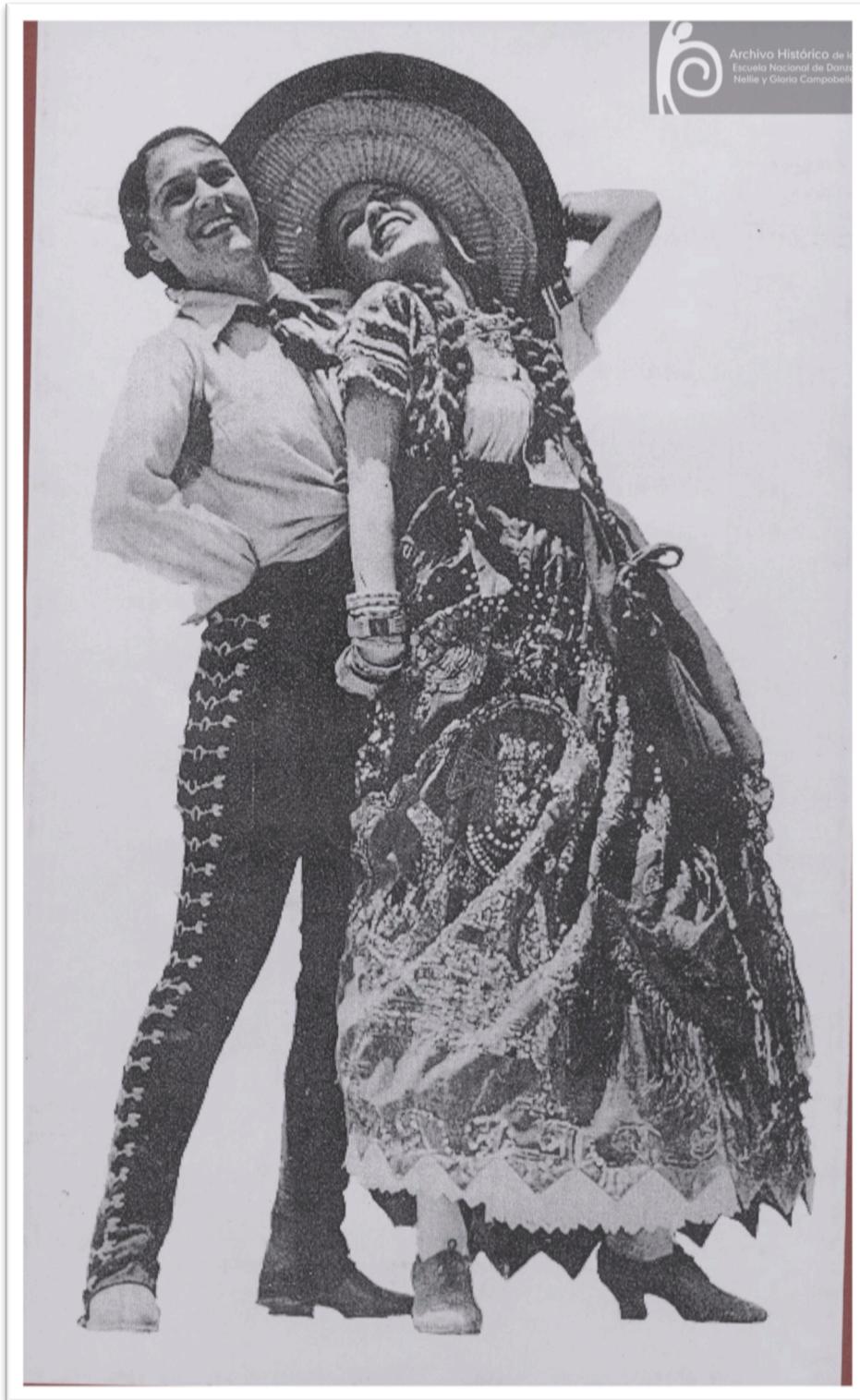


Plate 2. Nellie and Gloria Campobello dressed as a Charro and a China Poblana, respectively. Photo Courtesy of the *Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Nacional de Danza Nellie y Gloria Campobello*



Plate 3. Nellie Campobello and her students. Photo courtesy of the *Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Nacional de Danza de Nellie y Gloria Campobello*.



Plate 4. Nellie and Gloria Campobello along with Martín Luis Guzmán and others. Photo courtesy of the *Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Nacional de Nellie y Gloria Campobello*.



Plate 5. Nellie and Gloria Campobello dressed in Tehuana costumes. Photo courtesy of the *Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Nacional de Danza Nellie y Gloria Campobello*.

## Chapter 3

### *Los mecos de Veracruz: Queer Gestures & the Performance of Nahua Indigeneity*

Early in the morning the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, a group of about twenty young Nahua males meet on the outskirts of the town of Tecomate, Chicontepec, Veracruz to walk to the next town, Tepecxitla, located approximately twenty five minutes away by foot, each carrying a bag with a costume or a mask and some food for the day.<sup>46</sup> This group of Nahua males will parade and wander through their neighboring towns all day long, performing their choreographed and improvised dances—half dressed as women, at least two as devils (one red and one black), and the rest simply wearing a mask to cover their face. For the “mecos,” as they are called, this event marks the beginning of “El carnaval de la Huasteca,” the annual celebration of Tlahuilliloc or Tlacatecolotl—the “owl human” deity who embodies good and evil, commonly known as “el Diablo.” For four consecutive days, the mecos go from house to house in each neighboring town dancing in honor of Tlahuilliloc, or el Diablo, while raising money to pay for the two musicians who accompany them and hopefully for a small celebration at the end of the carnaval.<sup>47</sup>

“El carnaval de la Huasteca” is a “costumbre” or custom of the indigenous groups of the Northeast region of Mexico known as the Huasteca that inaugurates Lent in the Catholic tradition, but also marks the beginning of the upcoming agricultural cycle. The Nahuas in the Huasteca in the state of Veracruz, along with the Otomíes, celebrate this annual celebration three days preceding Ash Wednesday in honor of Tlahuilliloc or el Diablo. It is common that each town has a group of young indigenous males that parade, dance, and travel between neighboring towns. In the spring of 2014 and 2015, I was able to travel and actively participate with the group of mecos of Tecomate, Chicontepec, Veracruz together with Eduardo de la Cruz, my Nahua instructor and one of the “diablos” for that year, and Octavio Barajas, a colleague from the University of Tulane and fellow Nahua student who went with us in 2014. In this chapter, I propose the queering of the archive of conventional studies on indigeneity in the humanities by approaching the topic as a lived experience—not just as an ideological manifestation, but also as an embodied problematic.<sup>48</sup> By insisting on queering the archive, I recognize that the repertoire—as Taylor names embodied expressions of

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<sup>46</sup> Throughout this work, I refer to “males” as opposed to “men” in order to recognize the existence of other, albeit at times suppressed, forms of masculinities that may not necessarily be constrained to an ideal of manhood. In doing so, I emphasize the notion that males are biologically so, however, men and hence manhood are social constructs. Males who perform a form of transvestism during carnival question and interrogate notions of gender and sexuality for both men and women, females and males.

<sup>47</sup> I chose to use the word “carnaval” in order to account for the connotations of the term in Mexican Spanish and to acknowledge and honor the use of this term by the Nahuatl speakers to refer to their celebration—a celebration that cannot be reduced nor solely framed as “carnival.” The connotation in English calls forth images of indulgence and revelry. Though these are of course elements of the carnivals throughout Latin America and Europe, especially in Catholic countries, current usage of the term implies a secularization of it. I, however, would like to emphasize the fact that *el carnaval de la Huasteca*, is a celebration in honor of the devil, whose existence is still very much present in the *cosmovisión* of the Nahuas of the region of Chicontepec.

<sup>48</sup> Although I will further elaborate this in my introduction, I think of my dissertation as a “queer assemblage” as suggested by Jasbir Puar in order to contend a linear progression of the different festive instances my work addresses and instead focus on the “intensities” and “textures” that putting such instances in dialogue generate—an assemblage.

knowledge—has been already mediated through my own positioning and interpretation. Once I “document” the repertoire, once I archive it, I too produce it—to paraphrase Derrida. However, as mediated as my analysis may suggest, it is important to examine and discuss how to engage questions of knowledge production that cannot be reduced to written documents and that foreground the blurring between the production and producers of knowledge: “el representante y lo representado.”

Throughout the chapter, I offer a brief description of the events that take place and my experience as both an observer and participant of the group of mecos of Tecamate—as an instance of performance ethnography. Methodologically, I engage Dwight Conquergood’s understanding of “performance ethnography” in order to “focus on issues of embodiment and the body itself as sources and sites of meaning in ethnographic field research and as a way to privilege performance as a legitimate and *ethical* method” (Johnson 8, emphasis in the original). In effect, I argue that as modalities of knowledge production, transmission of social memory, and mechanisms of normalization that shape processes of identity formation and identification, the carnival and the mecos enable the Nahuatl community to interrogate the inscription and incorporation of contesting discourses about indigeneity. Given the importance of the construction of indigenous subjects in the configuration of a modern Mexico, I analyze the extent to which the fiesta-carnaval and the danza actualize and re-signify various modes or mechanisms of normalization and discipline of gender and sexuality, while simultaneously allowing for the performance of indigenous knowledges through racially and sexually marked indigenous festive bodies in contemporary Mexico.

### ***El carnaval de la Huasteca: Dancing for the Devil***

In order to comprehend the significance of the multiple layers of meaning of el carnaval, one needs to ask a simple, yet complex question: What does it mean to perform for el Diablo in an indigenous community in contemporary Mexico? Despite the fact that el carnaval can be understood through and within a Christian framework, it cannot be reduced to such an interpretation. *El carnaval de la Huasteca*, as other so-called syncretic forms of indigenous festivities, resorts to Christian imaginaries in order to expand and engage with different worldviews that exceed Christian, or modern ways of knowing and being in the world. Lacking a seemingly clear dichotomy of good and evil, Nahuas have often negotiated how to understand the figure of Tlahuilliloc, Tlacatecolotl or el Diablo—the central figure of el carnaval and a cornerstone of Christian theology. In her seminal work, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth Century Mexico*, Louise M. Burkhart proposes to think of the ideological exchange between European and Nahuas as a dialogue—often fragmented, misunderstood, and not always two-directional. She contends that there was a well-defined distinction between the two: while for the Christians the world was understood through the moral absolutes of good and evil, for the Nahuas it was rather understood through the notion of a cosmic balance between order and chaos. This distinction emphasized the fact that there were not always equivalents and parallels between the two cultures.<sup>49</sup> It also underscores that the Nahuas’s understanding of the world was “monist” and “amoral,”

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<sup>49</sup> This particular scenario, of course, often led to what James Lockhart calls “double mistaken identity:”[a process] whereby each side takes it that a given form or concept is essentially one already known to it, operating in much the same manner as in its own tradition, and hardly takes cognizance of the other side’s interpretation” (445).

while the missionaries had a “dualist” and moralistic view (44). This ultimately allowed for a differentiated conception of the world that led to a pluralistic practice of Christianity. Therefore, in order to analyze the importance of the Diablo for the Nahuas, one needs to go beyond its Christian connotations and examine the mental and ideological category it refers to. The missionaries in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico had to resort to Nahuatl rhetoric to persuade and explain Christian concepts, such as sin as “damage,” or *tlatlacolli*, and especially its direct embodiment: Tlacatecolotl, Tlahuilliloc or simply el Diablo. According to Burkhart, “a Nahuatl term was needed..., one which would indicate the nondivine [sic] status, malicious character, and dangerous power. *Tlacatecolotl* was selected for this function in the 1530s if not earlier. *Tlacatecolotl*, a compound of *tlacatl* and *tecolotl*, means ‘human owl’... The term *tlacatecolotl* was not coined by the friars but referred to a particularly malevolent type of *nahualli*, or shape-changing shaman who took the form of an animal alter-ego during his or her trances” (40). As she goes on to say, “the *tlacatecolotl* was associated with the night, the underworld, sorcery, ghostly apparitions, human afflictions, even horns—all features of Christianity's Devil. And it was not a *teotl*. Of all indigenous concepts, this one was undoubtedly the best choice. It solved the major problem of de-deifying the native gods by identifying them with something, which though having superman powers, was essentially human” (41).

El Diablo continues to be a central figure in the “cosmovisión” of the Nahuas of the Huasteca, and its role during the carnival is paramount.<sup>50</sup> In effect, the carnival structures both the social and spiritual lives of the Nahuas living in the municipality of Chicontepec, Veracruz. Beyond the common understanding of carnival as a ritual practice as proposed by anthropologist Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process*, I argue that the carnival functions more than a liminal spatio-temporal window as its impact extends beyond the time-space of the ritual. Turner’s emphasis on the liminal state highlights the importance of the suspension of structural norms: “if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs” (167). I’d like to explore liminality not as an exception to the structure, but rather as an instance to understand how the structure works and is simultaneously co-constituted by it, as Turner in fact suggests in the second part of the sentence. Moreover, I’m interested in examining the extent to which liminality operates as a site of ambivalence and complex gender, sexual, and racial power relations. Therefore, I analyze the theoretical and political consequences of looking at the carnival not just as a “liminal” state but also as a structuring mechanism of a Nahua community and the dynamics that result from this event that situate it within a larger trans-national scenario in terms of indigeneity, gender, and sexuality.

Moreover, as the carnival actualizes the cosmovisión of the Nahuas of Chicontepec, it is essential for the preservation of the equilibrium of life forces. According to anthropologists Arturo Gómez and Félix Báez, the Nahuas from Chicontepec conceive themselves not just as members of an ethnic community, but also as an articulation of nature, hence as belonging to a greater cosmos. The terrestrial plane (earth), or *Tlaltepactli*, is considered to be the point of equilibrium between the celestial plane and the underworld and between humans and deities. Humans, however, have the capacity to disrupt such equilibrium, and, therefore, they are responsible for helping to preserve it through their

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<sup>50</sup> I chose the term “cosmovisión” as opposed to worldview to emphasize the Nahuas’s sense of belonging to a cosmos that transcends this world.

offerings, prayers, and behavior. Within this understanding of the world, Tlahuilliloc plays a key role in these communities.<sup>51</sup> In effect, Tlahuilliloc maintains a good relationship with other deities, monitors the behavior of humans, punishing them when needed, and teaching them to behave. Báez and Gómez further assert that in everyday life, the Nahuas from Chicontepec reveal the dual character of Tlahuilliloc, as it is associated with the devil and imagined both as man or woman, good and evil, child or elder; one who gives life and takes it away; one who is gullible and thus, “‘se le alegra’ con danzas, música, comidas y cohetes” (89). The carnival allows the Nahuas to embody their cosmovisión while simultaneously operating as the principal marker of their indigeneity.<sup>52</sup> The analysis of the performance of their cosmovisión is, therefore, what is at stake in this chapter through an examination of spatial ethnic markings and the queering of subjectivities.

### ***Los días del Diablo*—A Description of the Events**

The days of the carnival are “the days of el Diablo.” Though young Nahuas do not necessarily share all the same spiritual and cultural beliefs, they are very much aware of the origins of the carnival: “se le baila al Diablo.” As any day of the carnival, on Tuesday morning, the central day of the celebration, the mecos gather in the outskirts of Tecomate to begin the activities. The group is comprised of males of different ages: the dancers, the musicians (usually two), and the “mochileros” (the young group members that carry their bags). There is also a large group of males with them—most of whom have performed as mecos in the previous years or decades.<sup>53</sup> This particular scenario highlights the male-centered process of socialization young Nahuas undergo: most males participate directly or indirectly during the carnival either as mecos, bag carriers or spectators/actors. As audience members, the other males witnessing the mecos performing and wandering through the town are simultaneously spectators and actors, as they respond to their performance often interacting with them commenting on their costumes, making jokes, and at times even dancing along. Furthermore, they also operate as a policing mechanism of what is executed both in terms of their dance and gender practices. These other males either approve or disapprove their peers’ execution of their indigenous “costumbre” that constantly shape and condition, as I will argue, gender practices.

In a matter of minutes, there goes a parade of “tecomateros,” as they often refer to themselves, ready for the actual day of carnival—“el mero día.” The tecomateros usually go

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<sup>51</sup> Both Gómez and Báez favor the term Tlacatecolotl (Human-Owl) to refer to Tlahuilliloc, or el Diablo. I prefer to use the latter terms, since those are the ones I commonly heard Nahuas used while I was in Tecomate, Chicontepec, Veracruz.

<sup>52</sup> Later in the chapter I address how indigeneity is marked and inscribed. However, it is important to keep in mind how language, traditional attire, phenotype, and space have longed served as markers of indigeneity in Mexico. Nevertheless, processes of modernization have accelerated the rapid transformation of indigenous attire, language and even mobility and migration. Nowadays, a great number of indigenous people no longer live in remote rural areas, often moving to urban centers, and even those who remain in their communities have slowly adopted a non indigenous attire, learned Spanish and travel back and forth to urban areas to work or study or a combination of both. Furthermore, all these phenomena have significantly altered how to conceive of an indigenous person just on phenotypical characteristics in such an ethnically diverse and mixed country like Mexico.

<sup>53</sup> This other group of local males, which varies from town to town, follows the mecos in each town to witness and compare the skills and wittiness of the each group of mecos and, at times, to dance with or harass the cihuamecos (those dressed as women), especially if they have been drinking the local liquor for the carnival, “la caña.”

to Tordillo and Tiocuayo, the farthest towns they will venture to, approximately an hour away by foot, in order to begin the day's celebrations. Upon arrival to their destination, they change into costumes.

Among the males present, their performance dexterity will derive not only from their costumes, but also from their wittiness, dance skills and impersonation as either a "cihuameco" —those dressed as women— or an "enmascarado" —the ones wearing masks of monsters, lucha libre fighters, old men or at times even political figures such as former Mexican president Vicente Fox. In addition, there are at least two devils: one red and one black, who along with the leader of the group, direct the dancers and determine when and where they will perform.<sup>54</sup>

At first sight, there is not a clear division as to who dresses as a cihuameco and who does as an enmascarado. The tecomateros hurry themselves to get dressed before any other group arrives and starts performing before they do.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless and despite the fact that the main focus is on the even distribution of mecos and enmascarados, older Nahuas tend to dress as cihuamecos more frequently than younger ones, wearing wigs and mini-skirts, while the rest of them just put on their masks. As soon as they start dancing, one immediately realizes that Nahuas regard the role of cihuamecos as one that is more difficult to perform than just wearing a mask. More than the enmascarados, it is the cihuamecos who must be convincing in their performance, since they, along with the "diablos" are responsible for the "chistes," or pranks, that will ultimately garner respect and money for the group, as people ask them to perform more dances. The success of any group of mecos depends on their ability to dance and to improvise verbally and corporally. While the enmascarados utter guttural sounds stomping very hard on the floor, the cihuamecos and the diablos must showcase their skills through the performance of chistes among the group members and with the audience (Plate 1).

Here is where the performance of gender becomes crucial to understand the carnival.<sup>56</sup> According to the "abuelos," the elders, it was Tlahuilliloc who ordered the Nahuas to have men dressed as women for his own amusement. Therefore, the "travestismo ritual," or ritual transvestism, of the cihuamecos, as Arturo Gómez terms it, plays an important role during the celebration [Gómez "Interview"]. For older males, it is important that the cihuamecos perform the chistes well—the flirting with other men, enacting their

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<sup>54</sup> There are generally two diablos in the group. The responsibility of each diablo is to go in front of the mecos to secure places where they can dance their sones and charge for their performance (in 2014 the tecomateros charged ten pesos for four sones; other groups charge up to twenty pesos per four sones or ten pesos per three sones—this of course depends on the reputation of the group and the community where they come from and where they perform; in 2015, they charged ten pesos for three sones.) This is a very important aspect of the carnival. The diablo must know the community or take into account various elements: first, he should have a general idea of the families that are no longer "Catholic" (families that have been converted to other Christian denominations, particularly Evangelicals, and that no longer partake in the celebration of carnival); second, he should know how to perform *chistes* with whoever is at each house (since it is carnival, most adult Nahua males do not work, as it is the time to pay respect to Tlahuilliloc and follow the *costumbre*); third, he should address the people in the town in Nahuatl; fourth, he has to ensure that he is not recognized by changing the pitch and tone of his voice—a good diablo always deceives others and plays pranks.

<sup>55</sup> Each town has its own group of mecos that wander and dance first in neighboring towns during the mornings and return to their hometowns in the afternoons. Therefore, various groups may be performing in the same town simultaneously competing for the attention (and money) of their residents.

<sup>56</sup> Later in the chapter, I will further elaborate the significance of regimes of gender and sexuality for the performance of carnival.

gender role as *cihuameh*, or women. Unlike the diablos whose chistes consist of deceiving others and playing pranks, the cihuamecos deceive others through seduction and flirtation. Older males complain that the younger generations do not understand the carnival and that they have lost their ability to make people laugh and perform good chistes. The first day, I saw how one of the older cihuamecos sat in the lap of a man who was sitting down in front of his house watching the mecos perform. The moment the dancer flirted with him, asking him to give them more money, the rest of the male and female spectators, including the man's wife, could not contain their laughter—one of the musicians later told me that those were the kinds of chistes people wanted to see and that unfortunately, these younger mecos did not really do them anymore. He believes that younger Nahuas do not know the carnival well enough to understand it and therefore respect it. Many young mecos claim that they accept to participate in carnival because it is a “costumbre”—their tradition. But many of them also claim that they do it for fun. Nevertheless, I witnessed how despite the fact that many of them do it for fun, they are very aware that this costumbre is passed down to them from their ancestors, their abuelos. And many of their abuelas actually patiently wait for the arrival of mecos in order to get their hens and eggs “blessed” and pay their respects to Tlahuilliloc. On such occasions, the young mecos behave accordingly, honoring the belief in Tlahuilliloc.

The mecos, thus, wander through the town led by their diablos. The diablo always runs in front of the group of mecos. As he approaches each house or group of people, he greets them in Nahuatl and asks them whether they want the mecos to perform their sones for them.<sup>57</sup> If they agree, the mecos perform four sones and if they like them, they pay for another set of four and so on. Therefore, the mecos could end up dancing at one place for half an hour or more, depending on the generosity and willingness to pay of the people at a particular house. The musicians along with the leader determine both the sones and their duration. If the people pay more, the mecos then dance what are known as “cumbias”—these are either more contemporary popular songs (e.g. duranguense) or are more traditional songs that allow the mecos to dance with the cihuamecos such as “La raspa” or a traditional huapango. The point of the cumbias is to make the spectators laugh. And so the mecos try to perform chistes, by grabbing the buttocks of the cihuamecos, acting more “feminine” or simply by fighting to dance with the “prettiest” cihuameco. Improvisation is as important during the cumbias as the synchronicity during the sones.

In many regards, the carnival allows young Nahuas to develop a sense of identification and belonging to their indigenous community. Participating in the carnival marks a rite of passage, as they become active members of the community through the performance of this costumbre. Just as all males are expected to work in the *milpa*, or plot of land, they are expected, if indirectly, to participate during carnival as mecos or spectators. This process of socialization instills a sense of indigenous belonging and male identification, as only men are allowed to participate. Women participate as spectators and indirectly by letting their brothers, cousins, and friends use old pieces of clothing. In this sense, this is continue to be a very male-dominated space/time that reproduces a hetero-patriarchal world, albeit with difference that at times is radical, as I will explore in the next section. There are instances, however, when women flirt with the cihuamecos and vice-versa. Women may comment on their nice legs, their attire and skinny complexity, or simply enjoy how the cihuamecos flirt with their husbands if they are married. The cihuamecos, however, in an

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<sup>57</sup> Although an exploration of the use of Nahuatl is beyond the scope of this chapter, this is another way in which their cosmovisión, and hence indigeneity, is embodied.

effort to assert their masculinity usually whistle to them or gesture towards their genitalia if they are dealing with young females or use their verbal skills to maneuver the situation in the case of older females.

Through their wanderings and performances, the mecos draw a new cartography as private and public spaces are re-signified, marking them ethnically as indigenous. Even though this event does not imply a radical transformation of the space itself, it cannot be contained by its common uses. Instead, it points towards an indigenous understanding or cosmovisión of how their abuelos relate to their place and space.<sup>58</sup> The contact with their place and space is the result of or rather enabled through bodily movement. How does bodily movement operate as a meaning making paradigm to signify cultural practices—taking into account its function as a historical marker and its mechanisms, especially that of the fiesta?

First, I would like to explain my understanding of kinesthesia. Amelia Jones succinctly defines movement or kinesthesia as the “expressive action of bodies in space over time” (12). As the movement is based on the “historical materiality of the body,” kinesthesia also operates as a “historically particular register of meaning,” to borrow the words of Jane C. Desmond. In fact, Desmond argues that “[t]he complexity of writing selves with and through the body is always framed by the social formations within which the work and its reception takes place” (*Meaning* 12). Therefore, it is important to understand the “contextual and embodied specificity” of intersubjective and spatial contact. As Jones proposes, each body, including our own, is “positioned, presented, experienced, understood geographically, technologically, spatially, temporally” (14) and I must add sexually, ethnically, and racially. I, however, would like to complicate Desmond’s definition of kinesthesia as a “register of meaning” to emphasize how it “*constitutive of... the process of individuation.*” As Carrie Noland rightly contends, kinesthetic experience, “the sensory awareness of one’s own movement,” operates as a site of “affect belonging” whose sensations are “preserved as memories” (3-4). By focusing on the awareness of the sensations of movement, Noland sheds light on the tensions and discrepancies of the actual embodiment of meaning. According to Noland, “it is the doing-body... that senses most urgently the dissonance, the lack of adequation, between a cultural meaning and the embodiment of that meaning, between the what the subject is supposed to be signifying and how she feels” (195). Through an examination of carnival, I follow Noland’s emphasis on kinesthetic experience to examine how the carnival enables the bodies of young Nahua males to be in contact not just with each other within a specific time and place, but also to instantiate a sense of indigeneity—as I would later argue. The carnival, in this sense, allows for the possibility of imagining themselves otherwise and embodying that experience through movement—especially for non-normative forms of subjectivity.

Therefore, it is at the center of the tension between playfulness and ritualized behavior where the performance of Nahua indigeneity and the queering of subjectivities takes place. Richard Schechner, a key figure of ritual and performance studies, invites us to think

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<sup>58</sup> I follow de Certeau’s theorization of place and space as detailed in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In examining notions of place and space, it is important to consider some of these questions: If the Nahuas’ subjectivity is tied to the indigenous notion of place, based on their cosmovisión, how does a racialized understanding of land condition and impact their sense of knowing and being in the world? What does the performance of the mecos allow us to understand in regards to a racialized practice of place and space (i.e. engaging local and national problematics)? And ultimately, how does the racialization of place impact the processes of gender and sexual subjectivation and subjection of the Nahuas of Chicontepec?

of rituals as “dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways” (228). Following Victor Turner’s legacy, he reminds us that the ritual process allows for the creation of spatio-temporal antistructural playfulness, “betwixt and between” the cognitive and the affective (233). On the hand, the ritual process can actually introduce “new behaviors or undermining established systems;” on the other hand, it constitutes “a means of conserving and transmitting traditional cultural knowledge and individual patterns of behavior” (258). Schechner, however, stresses the importance of temporality and historicity embedded in ritualized performative behavior and even challenges us to think of history as a performance: “the present moment is a negotiation between a wished-for-future and a rehearsable, therefore, changeable, past. History is always in flux; that is what makes it so like a performance. The mortgaged future is always death; the past is always life-as-remembered, or restaged” (259). Ultimately, Schechner repositions the body as a site for signification and, therefore, re-signification: “[t]he future of ritual is the continued encounter between imagination and memory translated into doable acts of the body” (263). It is precisely at the intersection of imagination and memory through bodily acts that the possibility of queer imaginaries emerges. The playful performance of mecos allows for queerness to emerge in the horizon of life forms possible while not necessarily amounting to a viable social option, as it is a transgression of gender and sexual norms. In the next couple of sections, I further expand on the importance of the festive for the performance of Nahua indigeneity and queer imaginaries.

### **Performative Stories: On the Festive and the Markings of Indigeneity**

In the performance of fiesta-carnaval, there emerges a tension between the established (normative) ritualized behavior of the mecos and the imaginative expressive creations they enact. This tension between ritualized behavior and playfulness of the carnaval defines and conditions what I have called the spatial ethnic marking and the queering of subjectivities of Nahuas in Tecomate. This tension, however, is itself defined and conditioned through the indigenous festive bodies that perform the fiesta-carnaval. As Turner, García Canclini, Taylor, and Mendoza, among others, have argued, the fiesta-carnaval operates as a conduit for the transmission of meaning/knowledge, social memory, and norms. However, it also functions as a social structuring mechanism. As a cultural practice, the fiesta can be normalizing and normative to the extent that it establishes means of regularization of various modalities of knowing and being in the world. Nevertheless, the fiesta is ultimately a meaning-making process and consequently open to re-signification. It is at this juncture that I believe lies the significance of the festive. I understand the festive as a spatio-temporal window that enables a modality of knowing and being in the world otherwise through the workings of the body. In effect, the festive allows a repositioning of the body and hence reading of it. To mark is to position but also to inscribe, if only ephemerally, the body otherwise.

As a paradigmatic point of contact of “bodies in space over time” (Jones 12), the carnaval actualizes the body as the spatio-temporal window of the festive. This particular juncture enables the bodies of Nahua males to position, mark, and re-write indigeneity through the performance of mecos. What is at stake during carnaval is therefore the strategic performance of their indigeneity—of their cosmovisión. However, it is also through the repositioning of bodies during carnaval that queerness is tactically gestured. In his classic study, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau proposes the notions of strategy and

tactic to discuss how individuals articulate and re-signify power structures and meaning-making processes. In what follows, I complicate de Certeau's theorization of strategies and tactics to explore how the repositioning of indigenous bodies during carnival allows for the performance of indigeneity and the queering of subjectivities of Nahuas in Tecomate. However, before engaging spatial strategies and queer tactics, I would like to address one simple, yet complex question: how to define indigeneity.

In the introduction to *Indigenous Experience Today*, Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn question the ascription of indigeneity to a "natural" state or pre-existing configuration of "purity." Instead, they argue for the re-conceptualization of indigeneity as a relational process that articulates a "field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledges" that implicates both indigenous and nonindigenous (3). Therefore, de la Cadena and Starn point towards a series of "practices, institutions, and politics" that "*become*" indigenous operating within a very situated historical context (4, emphasis in the original). The idea of becoming questions dichotomic understandings of the term itself. The authors suggest that to associate indigeneity to that which is outside civilization and progress is as reductive and problematic as associating it to the always radical and subversive. Indigenous practices and formations at times are complicit with the coloniality of power structures (11). To put it succinctly, as an instance of the indigenous and nonindigenous, "indigenism today is a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, in short, and not a fixed state of being" (11).

Mary Louise Pratt also gestures towards an understanding of indigeneity as a process rather than a state of being. She argues that current conceptions of the term such as "indigenous, native, aboriginal, first nations" imply the existence of a "priority in time and place" (399). Indigeneity is thus constructed relationally with the arrival of the European settlers: the indigenous people refer to those who were "'already' there." This construction emphasizes the co-constitution of the temporality of the "already" and the spatiality of the "there" of the indigenous. The "perdurance" of that "priority" suggests a continued tension between the "relational status as 'indigenous'" and "the nonrelational self-identity"—that which already existed prior to the encounter in time and place (399). Nevertheless, Pratt proposes to rethink that continuity and tension in generative terms. She conceives of indigeneity as a generative force—a "force" that "enables" or "makes things happen" rather than a "state" or "configuration" (404). Pratt insists on "imagining" indigeneity as a "bundle of generative possibilities, some of which will be activated or apparent at a given time and place while others will not" (403). This approximation to indigeneity requires us to critically consider what is engendered as well as the possibility of that which has not yet been realized in a time and place. In effect, Pratt goes on to say that:

This generativity, I would suggest, lies not only in what indigeneity actually makes happen in a given instance, but also in the unrealized possibilities that it creates in every situation, and that remain as potentialities that can be activated in the future. One imagines indigeneity, then, as an unfolding in space-time that generates realized and unrealized possibilities. Unrealized possibilities of the past remain available to the present, and unrealized possibilities in the present remain available to the future; they are part of the fertility or potency of thinking and knowing (i.e., by means of) the indigenous. (404)

Pratt's insistence on the process of becoming highlights the production of indigeneity as a contingency. To think of indigeneity as the "unfolding" of "possibilities" that are (un)realized in a time and place underlines the provisional and relational modalities of the process of becoming.<sup>59</sup> However, I would also like to note how Pratt's emphasis on imagining—otherwise, I claim—points towards the agency or at least the potential for the indigenous people to generate their own possibilities. "Imagining otherwise" is how, in my reading of Pratt's theorization of indigeneity, indigenous people can counteract the "priority" of the "already-there-ness" that has characterized formations of indigenoussness. Indeed, this process allows indigenous, and not just nonindigenous people, to strategically potentiate their own possibilities.

I take de la Cadena's and Starn's notion of indigeneity as "becoming" and Pratt's as "generative possibilities" to think of indigeneity as a position or rather a positioning—a location that refers both to a place but also a position in relation to the nonindigenous.<sup>60</sup> The continuous process of becoming highlights how indigenous people occupy different positions, always contingent, provisional, at times conflicting and even complicit with larger structures of power—particularly of coloniality. Juana María Rodríguez defines identity as "situatedness in motion: embodiment and spatiality" (*Queer Latinidad* 5). I follow her theorization to explore the ways in which indigeneity is "situated" and imbricated within a larger structure of power where alliances and hierarchies are continuously shifting or rather "in motion" in a constant flux. In this sense, notions of marginality and even alterity or otherness historically associated with indigenous groups cannot be taken for granted. Yet, and in spite of the precariousness and provisionality of the positioning of indigeneity, one is always able to point out how power is ultimately asserted or not within a sense of "embodiment and spatiality."

For the Nahuas, the performance of carnival brings to the fore how indigeneity operates as a positioning. As indicated above, it is through the festive that the body is repositioned. By framing indigeneity as a positioning, I analyze how the repositioning of indigenous bodies during carnival highlights the contingency and interrelatedness of Nahua embodiment and spatiality. How do Nahuas negotiate occupying a position of indigeneity? The carnival, to borrow Rodríguez's description of dance, "enacts an embodied sociality that exceeds the time and place of its articulation" (*Sexual Futures* 110). The performance of carnival then ultimately "positions" indigeneity as an embodied sociality that can be located in, yet exceed, the time and place of its articulation.

### **The Performance of Mecos: Gestures of Indigeneity**

The carnival allows the Nahuas from Chicontepe to kinesthetically position indigeneity in order to re-claim, re-appropriate, and mark their ethnicity, in this case through gestural practices. In her insightful study, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, Carrie Noland defines gestures as "organized forms of kinesis

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<sup>59</sup> I would like to stress the importance of the unrealized in terms not only of the political possibilities of change through the once-again-ness of the iteration of the festive, but also of the world-making possibilities of imagining otherwise.

<sup>60</sup> De la Cadena and Starn refer to the notion of "positioning" in relation to Tania Li's theorization of the concept to describe how "new mixed forms of indigenous identity and politics" are "enabled by 'sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning' and brought about through 'particular patterns of engagement and struggle'" (12). However, I follow Rodríguez's understanding of identity as "situatedness in motion" as well as de Certeau's discussion of strategies and practices as discussed later in this chapter.

through which subjects navigate and alter their worlds” (4). Gestures as “techniques of the body” enable individuals to become legible and thus “navigate” within a system of signification. However, and perhaps more importantly, gestures always allow for the possibility of performing otherwise and therefore “altering” the world. As Noland succinctly states,

If performing gestures affords an opportunity to sense the discrepancy between what gestures *mean* (the meaning bestowed by cultural convention on them and therefore on the subjects performing them) and what gestures make us *feel* (the sensations we experience while performing them)—if, in other words, gesturing widens the gap between meaning and sensate being—*then gesturing can have the valance of critique.* (212, emphasis on the original)

I follow Noland’s theorization of the gesture in order to argue that the performance of mecos functions as a gestural articulation of indigeneity. The dancing of mecos, indeed, aims at making indigeneity legible within an oppressive colonized and colonizing structure, making its realization always temporal, fragmented, and contingent. Nevertheless, through the performance of mecos, the Nahuas embody an indigenous cosmovisión, thereby “gesturing” a radical engagement with other non-human beings, including the earth.

Félix Báez and Arturo Gómez argue that the cosmovisión of the Nahuas in Chicontepec structures the collective imaginaries, material life, and social relations within the various communities of the municipality. According to the authors, the Nahuas from Chicontepec conceive themselves not just as members of an ethnic community, but also as an articulation of nature, hence as belonging to a greater cosmos. Their cosmogony, in fact, privileges the sacred configuration of the place they inhabit, as the earth occupies the center of the universe—though this does not necessarily imply the earth itself is the most important component of the universe, but just one more part thereof. They explain that the terrestrial plane (earth), or *Tlaltepactli*, is considered to be the point of equilibrium between the celestial plane and the underworld and between humans and deities. Humans, however, have the capacity to disrupt such equilibrium, and, therefore, they are responsible for helping to preserve it through their offerings, prayers, and behavior:

Los principios mitológicos que sustentan la cosmovisión de los nahuas de Chicontepec están presentes en diversos rituales públicos y privados. Las prácticas ceremoniales de este tipo se orientan a mantener los necesarios equilibrios entre el cielo y la tierra; las pertinentes relaciones entre los hombres y los dioses; en fin, las debidas mediaciones en los planos de la vida y de la muerte; la nivelación de la balanza del bien y del mal. Oraciones y ofrendas son los elementos simbólicos mediante los cuales se instrumentan los ritos. (89)

In this sense, the mythical narratives—and practices—that inaugurate the carnival are also the same narratives that “found” and “articulate” the places indigenous groups occupy and the meanings they embody. Through their gesturing bodies during carnival, Nahuas “found” and “articulate” a place of their own. However, there is a tension that exists between making a place their own versus occupying it. At a socio-political level, it is important for indigenous

groups to lay claims to the places they inhabit. At a cosmological level, however, they can never own them, for they are independent entities in their own. In this case, gesturing indigeneity through carnival allows Nahuas to navigate colonial structures and perhaps even “alter” them (if anything at least to “sense” the possibility of self-determination and world-making). By re-symbolizing the land and re-occupying it, the mecos lay claims to the always already racialized land they inhabit.<sup>61</sup> Land is essential not only for carving out a position to inhabit as a people, but also for fostering a sense of indigenous subjectivity.

To think of indigeneity as gestures through the performance of mecos allows, on the one hand, for the recognition of the ways indigenous people have countered systematic repressive spheres of power and coloniality.<sup>62</sup> Though I’m critical of reading indigenous cultural practices as always already subversive, I believe it is paramount that we continue to examine how these practices may in fact be, provided recent migration patterns and the increasing presence of PEMEX and other international companies in the area that will drastically change their habitat, both culturally and physically. It is also important since land, as a living entity, cannot be separated from their sense of being in the world. The Nahua communities in Chicontepec may be recent ones, as Gómez asserts, but their cosmogony goes back generations as attested by oral histories and by the performance of the carnival itself [Gómez]. Therefore, indigenous people do perform, through their rituals and carnival, their indigeneity.<sup>63</sup> Yet the idea of indigeneity as a mere performance does reduce how they themselves understand it and how indigenous groups may strategically use it. That is why I propose to think of performance as a form of positioning. In spite of or perhaps thanks to how indigeneity operates in contemporary Mexico, the carnival showcases how the performance of mecos or rather its iteration opens up the possibility for them to use their imagination and memory to help (con)figure a sense of queer world-making.

### **Gesturing Queerness: On Nahua Queer Tactics**

It is precisely at the intersection of imagination and memory through bodily acts that the possibility of queer imaginaries emerges.<sup>64</sup> The playful performance of mecos allows for queerness to arise in the horizon of life forms possible while not necessarily amounting to a viable social option, as it is a transgression of hetero-patriarchal gender and sexual norms.

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<sup>61</sup> In the last section of this chapter, I will expand on the notion of the racialization of land.

<sup>62</sup> I follow the definition of coloniality as proposed by Aníbal Quijano and further elaborated by Walter D. Mignolo.

<sup>63</sup> In a very insightful essay, “Activist Research vs. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically-Engaged Anthropology,” Charles Hales analyzes strategic uses of indigeneity by the Awas Tigni in order to lay claims to their lands and questions academic approaches that readily condemn so-called reifications of essentialist indigenous traits. He poses two simple, yet complex questions to illustrate his point: “How do we responsibly address situations in which the relatively powerless are using these same vexed categories to advance their struggles?” (Hales 102). And “[h]ow does one formulate indigenous land claims and represent them in a language necessary to achieve legal recognition from national and international bodies, without portraying them in terms that reinforce internal rigidities or create criteria that other subaltern communities will be unable to meet?” (112).

<sup>64</sup> Hence, Butler’s theorization on the critical promise of fantasy, which I engage in detail below. However, suffice it to say that by taking the body as a site of articulation, fantasy “is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home” (29).

Queerness is therefore gestured.<sup>65</sup> In this section, I follow Juana María Rodríguez's theorization of the gesture as both a noun and an action. A gesture operates as a marker of a code culturally determined and determining but also one that, as it is embodied, enables a singular iteration beyond the citation it purports to represent. According to Rodríguez,

[a]s social actors, we find that our corporeal movements are intelligible only in relation to accepted modes of behavior dictated by our surroundings, but we each bring the particularities of our bodies, experiences, moods, and desires to these everyday performances... Thus, gesture functions as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice that is differentially manifested through particular forms of embodiment. (6)

To think of queerness as gestures is to shed light on the ephemeral of concrete embodied actions. Indigenous embodied actions carry forward the always already marked bodies in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. It is also a way to highlight the "differentiated corporeal deployments of subjectivity" (6).

In this sense, gesturing queerness is a form of tactic: one that may cite dominant discourses but may not be always contained by them. Michel de Certeau argues that a tactic "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (xix). He goes on to say that the "space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (37). De Certeau favors and even champions the temporal qualities of the tactic; his notion of the tactic emphasizes how individuals "make use," if only temporally, of that which is already given by "the law of a foreign power," to borrow his words. De Certeau discusses his notion of uses or "operations" of consumption and production based on an analysis of speech acts. He claims: "Indissociable from the present *instant*, from particular circumstances and from a *faire* (a peculiar way of doing things, of producing language and of modifying the dynamics of a relation), the speech act is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed *on* it" (33, emphasis in the original). I'm interested in analyzing two aspects: first how the tactic uses the grammar of a system to articulate itself—in this case the colonial and patriarchal regime of gender and sexuality; second, as de Certeau rightly points out, how operations are "performed on" the very system that enables them. Indeed, what do these indigenous queer gestures perform "on" the hetero-patriarchal system of gender and sexuality that attempts to define them and condition their erotic practices?

At a very elementary level, the queer gestures during carnival allow performers and audience members to imagine themselves otherwise. In effect, queer gestures enable the recognition of indigenous non-normative desiring subjects. This simple, yet complex possibility is quite radical. If anything else, the possibility of recognition of indigenous non-normative desiring subjects functions as a "resource for a reclamation of erotic-self-determination and world-making" (Rodríguez *Sexual Futures* 21). Framing queerness as

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<sup>65</sup> It is important to insist on not reducing "intimate psychic and corporeal practices," to borrow Juana María Rodríguez's words to "identitarian claims to sexuality" (17). This particular situation acquires more relevance when identitarian categories such as gay and queer are not indigenous and, as a result, continuously appropriated, misappropriated or dis-appropriated by both indigenous and non-indigenous individuals in a Spanish and Nahuatl speaking setting.

gestures then enables me to conceive of these corporeal acts I read as queer, as citations of the grammar of sexuality. At the same time, such indigenous queer gestures enact the iterations of possibilities that exceed the (colonial) sexual and gender paradigms in which indigenous bodies are imbricated as part of a larger cultural matrix of gendered, sexualized as well as racialized bodies. However, as Rodríguez rightly contends, “[i]f it is true that gestures signal the potentialities of our body, they also make public the imprint of our past. Gestures reveal the inscription of social and cultural laws, transforming our individual movements into an archive of received social behaviors and norms that reveal how memory and feeling are enacted and transformed through bodily practices” (5). Not all gestures may be subversive; in fact, some of them may actually enable the power dynamics they aim to contest. In this sense the gesture is not always a tactic, as it may replicate the power structures it opposes through bodily acts—just as the fiesta-carnaval is not always subversive. However, I want to highlight how gestures can and do “enact” and “transform” “social behaviors and norms”—Nahua bodily practices do perform, or at least have the potential to do so, a transformation on the system that enables them and renders them legible.

Therefore, the mere iteration allows the possibility of re-signification—and hence of transformation. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler argues that the process of subjectivation is a process of subjection. As Butler claims, “[b]ound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent” (20). As a result, “only by occupying—being occupied by—that injurious term,” Butler contends, “can [an individual] resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes [her] as the power [she] opposes” (104). What is at stake then when mecos occupy categories such as “gay,” willingly or unwillingly? What possibilities or potentialities are gestured through the dancing indigenous festive bodies? What kinds of scenarios do queer gestures suggest and even enable?

As the result of the tension between ritualized behavior and playfulness, the carnaval enables the performance of femininity—a “ritualized femininity.” However, to ritualize femininity, I argue, simultaneously allows for the exploration of dissident genders and sexualities during a constrained time and place. On the one hand, it enables the community to frame the transvestism they witness as “travestismo ritual”—ritual transvestism, to borrow again Gómez’s term. On the other hand, indigenous individuals who may otherwise be unable to explore their gender identities have an opportunity within carnaval to do so. In effect, ritual transvestism allows them to publicly occupy an important part of the carnaval activities and showcase their wittiness and verbal dexterity. In doing so, their performances become crucial for the success of the group, such as the one from Tepecxitle in the 2014 carnaval which featured, according to some tecomateros, two so-called “gay” Nahuas. At the center of differentiating between men, women, and cihuamecos lies the fact that being born male or female has lived consequences. The patriarchal society of the indigenous towns sanctions, if not encourages, a rigid gender system that is exclusive and excluding. Being a gender non-conforming individual is not a viable social option. Young Nahua males who may not identify with their patriarchal gender-system, therefore, have an opportunity to imagine themselves otherwise and enact it as cihuamecos during carnaval. However, what happens to cisgender Nahuas who perform a non-normative femininity? What possibilities and consequences does such a performance have? (Plate 2)

Jorge de la Cruz, a former meco participant from the community of Tepozteco, Chicontepec and now a student at the *Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas*, claims that:

Las personas [hombres] más relajadas [sic] son las que se visten como mujer... Sacan lo gay que llevan dentro... No es que sean gay sino que tratan de dar vida a la [sic] personaje...

Ya uno empieza así como que a jotear y ya empieza a hacer los modismos de las chavas...

Manuel R. Cuellar —¿Se están imitando a las chavas o se están imitando a los gays?

Jorge: Creo que sí, a los gays.

*Aventados*, that is another word Jorge used to describe the males that dress up as cihuamecos. Being a cihuameco during carnival demands a certain level of courage that “aventado” entails as well as a sense of “relajo” or playfulness that the word connotes in this instance. In this fragment from the interview with Jorge de la Cruz, one can sense that there is something about being a cihuameco that is under the constant threat of slippage: between being a woman and being gay. The boundaries of the heteronormative structures of gender and sexuality are slippery. “Jotear” engenders the bodily acts that render femininity legible. Indeed, Jorge even uses the verb “dar vida” to describe how through a series of embodied iterations a “cihuameco” emerges. Through bodily gestures, each cihuameco must cite the “modismos” that young females perform. Yet, as Jorge’s response suggests, there is an ambiguous terrain between being read as a “woman” or as “gay.” In fact, Jorge’s first reaction when asked who is being imitated was to respond the “gays.” Despite answering first that one imitates gays when performing the role of a cihuameco, Jorge later changed his opinion after hearing a fellow Nahuatl male affirming that they actually imitate young females. However, it is clear that the boundary is slippery. One thing is certain: gay or not, Nahuatl negotiate what Judith Butler has termed “compulsory heterosexuality.”

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler contends that “[i]nsofar as heterosexual gender norms produce approximate ideals, heterosexuality can be said to operate through the regulated production of hyperbolic versions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ . These are for the most part compulsory performances, ones which none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate” (237). Heterosexuality is thus the result of an “imaginary logic” predicated upon gender norms that regulate “hyperbolic versions of man and woman.” For Butler, gendering is actually the “embodying of norms.” “Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity (231-32). In a later work, *Undoing Gender*, Butler further emphasizes how gender is not an instance or domain to be regulated, but rather a regulating mechanism in itself. According to Butler, “gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime” (41). In this sense, gender operates as a norm that “governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and actions to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social” (42). What is at stake then in the performance of cihuamecos is not only the regulatory gender system that governs, legitimates, and renders legible the embodying of norms but also the very bodies that enact the gender imperatives. It is not a coincidence that in her discussion of the hyperbolic versions of “man” and “woman,” Butler resorts to an analysis of drags that highlights the

“understated, taken-for-granted quality of heterosexual performativity” (*Bodies* 237). She argues that “[w]hat is ‘performed’ in drag is, of course, *the sign* of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be read without it” (237, emphasis in the original).

I follow Butler’s theorization and distinction between “the sign of gender” and “the body that it figures” to further explore the implications that “jotear” and “hacer los modismos de las chavas” entail during the performance of cihuamecos. “Dar vida” to the cihuamecos, indeed, (en)gendering them, complicates the iterations of heterosexual imperatives in as much as embodying gender norms allows for the possibility to do, redo, and even performatively “undo” gender. However, Butler reminds us that the norms that regulate sexuality, “as imperatives to be ‘cited,’ twisted, queered, brought into relief as heterosexual imperatives, are not, for that reason, necessarily subverted in the process” (237). Heterosexual imperatives may not be transcended through the performance of gender roles, but they may be exceeded and it is in that excess that lies the possibility of resignification.<sup>66</sup> There is a continued tension between the citation of the norm and the instantiation of a different kind of iteration for the norm—an attribute that Butler terms the “critical promise of fantasy.” For Butler, “[t]o posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not constrained by the body as it is” (*Undoing* 28). Butler re-positions the body as that through which norms can be re-configured and fantasy as the modality that can help us expand the limits of the real. As she argues, “[f]antasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home” (29). Butler ultimately points towards a questioning not only of the real, but also of what constitutes as intelligible within its realm. The critical promise of fantasy, therefore, resides in the possibility of questioning, expanding, or destabilizing our normative field of reality. Fantasy simultaneously repositions the body at the center of its workings, following Butler’s argument, as it opens up the possibility of embodying that excess of the real or that elsewhere.

The transvestism of Nahuas, thus, highlights the complicated—at times repressive and at times redeeming—process during which the mecos deploy heterosexuality as the mechanism that renders them sexualized and gendered subjects. The mere fact of having to perform pre-assigned scripts as sexualized and gendered subjects warrants the possibility to enact them otherwise. Evidently, not all cihuamecos engender possibilities of non normative gendered and sexualized behavior. However, the mecos themselves cannot control nor regulate how their enactments of gender performance are received and processed by others. Juana María Rodríguez emphasizes that “[b]y insisting on gender and sex as acts of interpretation, queers make evident the possibility of disentangling bodies and acts from preassigned meanings, creating meaning and pleasure anew from the recycled scraps of dominant cultures” (*Sexual Futures* 136). Even though carnival creates the framework or

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<sup>66</sup> Butler insists on the fact that “although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix.... [S]exuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender... Sexual practices... will invariably be experienced differentially depending on the relations of gender in which they occur. And there may be forms of ‘gender’ within homosexuality which call for a theorization that moves beyond categories of ‘masculine and ‘feminine’” (*Bodies* 238).

discursive space to interpret these acts, I would be careful to suggest that queer identity practices or rather laying identitarian claims to a queer sexuality is what is expected or desired. As José Quiroga reminds us, the discourse that “defines the sexuality and positionality of the gay and lesbian Latino world... alienates and atomizes and does not take into account the way identities of social and communal nature can also provide mechanisms for survival” (197). In the case of Nahuas, alliances to their indigeneity or even family may take precedence over embracing a sexual orientation or assuming a queer identity.

Furthermore, the very notion of sexuality should also not be taken for granted. Recent critiques from queer indigenous scholars and non-indigenous academics have emphasized how the current power structure that regulates gender and sexuality is the result of the colonial experience. In *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, Driskill et al. argue that as part of the matrix of coloniality, the heteronormative operates as “the normalizing and privileging of patriarchal heterosexuality and its gender and sexual expressions [that] undermines struggles for decolonization and sovereignty and buoys the power of colonial governance” (19). Driskill et al. suggest that the erotic may function as a decolonizing mechanism, as it invokes a relationship to “bodies and pleasures” that aims to displace the colonial power of sexuality (16). Furthermore, in the case of colonial Mexico, Pete Segal has argued that among Nahua communities, particularly in central Mexico, indigenous groups did not have a category that could be defined as “sexuality” or even “sex” for that matter (1). In fact, the “Nahuas did not privilege vaginal intercourse as the *only* or even the *primary* intimate act needed to produce a child, as they... connected many other elements with the continuity of life,” including non human beings, animals and the earth (22, emphasis in the original). While I understand that sexuality is part of the coloniality of power, I cannot claim that contemporary Nahuas conceptualize it as such. Instead, I would like to point out that their erotic practices may gesture toward a decolonial practice—one that cannot be reduced nor necessarily understood just through contemporary regimes of gender and sexuality. Their sexual and intimate practices, therefore, cannot be equated to “identitarian claims to sexuality.” In this sense, I find Jasbir K. Puar’s theorization of queerness quite relevant in this context. As I discuss it in the introduction, Puar makes a case for the importance of thinking about queerness neither as an identity or an anti-identity, but rather as an assemblage — a contingent spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergence (204). This theoretical and political gesture moves beyond identitarian politics that signals a recognition of certain practices that are not only contingent but also complicit with dominant formations. As a result, when queerness is not thought of as that which is “visibly, audibly, legibly, or tangibly evident” but rather as an “assemblage,” then we can focus on the “movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities” (215). Puar asks us directly to consider not just what in this case Nahua corporeal expressions mean or signify but also what they actually do (204).

I would like to go back to how the carnival allows for the articulation of different ways of belonging and repositioning of the body. Although the mecos perform sones that are ritualized or rather confined to a pre-established set of series of steps and gestures, cihuamecos can and do perform and improvise different and differing versions of femininity. Arturo Gómez reminds us that the transvestism of the mecos—“the ritual travestism”—was not a “social transvestism” related to “sexuality.” Instead, it was based on deceit—on “apariencias.” However, the ritual transvestism has now been transformed due to the

“permissiveness” of certain acts. This change has led to the de-contextualization of ever-changing ritualized manifestations (Gómez, interview). Nevertheless, this so-called degeneration has actually generated possibilities for imagining otherwise and embodying gendered and sexualized norms differently. The embodiment of queer imaginaries through clothing and gestures may enable some mecos to dislocate the shaming and policing of their gender and sexual performance, even occupying the space already granted or available to them—an otherwise position of abjection. Although not all of them can afford the material and psychic repercussions of doing so permanently, if only temporarily, they can self-represent themselves and inhabit a world of their own making. They can desire and perhaps even be desired publically, as they flirt with other males while dancing cumbias or simply wandering across towns.<sup>67</sup>

The work of fantasy fostered through carnival is therefore crucial for the survival of certain forms of subjectivities. One of the mecos on a way back from one town to another shared with me that he loved these couple of days of dancing and getting to be his own version of a cihuameco. He disliked studying and hated working in the fields. He would not dare to wear women’s clothes during the rest of the year and that is why he enjoyed these few days where he was able to dress as he pleased and spend entire days dancing around the “mayate” he desired.<sup>68</sup> As Rodríguez claims, “[f]antasy exceeds the limits of the possible and the present, and very often even the desirable.” She further contends that [i]n our sexual fantasies, we can occupy an imaginary time and space of our own creation, devise our own tactile, visual, and auditory codes, assign new queer meanings to gestures and utterances that have preceded our entrance onto the sexual stages we inhabit.... These sexual fantasies work by animating preexisting constellations of images, gestures, words, and memories unique to each person, to a particular moment, and to a specific set of circumstances” (*Sexual Futures* 180).

In a way, the carnival allowed him to live his own fantasy—to inhabit a world, if not of his own making, at least where he had a say. This is the point where the distinction between “jotear,” “imitate,” and simply “embody” femininity through the performance of the cihuamecos becomes blurry and polyvalent for actors and audiences alike. In many ways, Mexican queer indigenous imaginaries remain a precarious possibility. Therefore, when the precarity of such lives is at stake, there is a need to hold on to the possibility of imagining themselves otherwise. As Butler reminds us in *Undoing Gender*, “[t]he thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity” (31). Indeed, the performance of mecos, if only temporarily, allows for the embodiment or simply gesturing of alternative subjectivities to be imagined and practiced within a heteronormative mestizo national discourse.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In several occasions, I witnessed how men commented on the nice legs, tight skirts, and buttocks of the cihuamecos. Many times the diablos “sold” their cihuamecos to raise more funds, charging extra to dance with the sexiest ones. I once overheard a conversation when one male told another one that he would literally fuck a particular cihuameco after checking her out. It turned out it was his nephew. Everyone laughed. On another occasion, one of the cihuamecos had to change into his men’s clothes because a drunken male was harassing her, insisting on dancing with her, paying for many cumbias. He followed us around the town wanting to continue to dance with and touch the cihuameco he desired.

<sup>68</sup> In Mexican Spanish, “mayate” refers to self-identified straight male who has intercourse with other men always being the active one.

<sup>69</sup> I engage the question of a heteronormative mestizo construction of *lo mexicano* in the introduction.

**“Chicontepec: el balcón de la Huasteca.” Festive Renderings of Ethnic Difference**

Juana María Rodríguez reminds us constantly to think of the “corporeal alignments” and “cultural affiliations” we conjure when referring to a given subject—in this case “indigenous” bodies/subjects (*Sexual Futures*). In this last part of the chapter, I would like to address how the corporeal alignments of the mecos cite a complex history of indigenous cultural (mis)affiliations with the mestizo nation. In his introduction to *El fracaso del mestizo*, Pedro Ángel Palou offers a genealogy of the emergence and consolidation of mestizaje as the ideology of the modern Mexican State. Palou presents mestizaje as a state-sponsored, legitimating discourse that established cultural, political, and economic practices embodied through the figure of the mestizo. The mestizo, a “biopolitical” and “biotipological” construct, aimed at modernizing the figure of the Indian, de-territorializing it from his non urban, and hence non modern state. Palou conceives of the mestizo as “habitus.” Building on the work of Bourdieu, Palou thinks of “habitus” as a generating practice: “El *habitus* no solo es un sentido del juego, o un sentido práctico, sino una serie de disposiciones que generan prácticas y percepciones, incorporando las propias condiciones sociales, objetivas, de su inculpación o reproducción” (15). Through the idea of mestizaje as habitus, the author discusses how it referred to a “biological reality;” one that eventually would fail, as it not longer allowed for the social mobility it promised (24).

If Pedro Ángel Palou suggests that mestizaje became an embodied expression of a state ideology—a “habitus”—what happens when indigenous people simultaneously foster and disavow mestizaje through the performance of the mecos? What does it mean to perform the mecos not just for community members, but also for a municipal and even national audience? What does it even mean to perform the mecos outside the context of an indigenous community and yet use it as a marker of ethnic difference? Thus far, I have explored how the Nahuas produce indigeneity and are produced by it through the festive bodies of the mecos. However, how then do we address the issue of indigeneity in relation to a “mestizo state”?<sup>70</sup> In *Intimate Indigenismo: The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*, Estelle Tarica traces the interconnection between indigeneity and land in relation to mestizo nationalism. Following Etienne Balibar’s theorization on national identity as a “fictive ethnicity,” Tarica argues that in the Americas, a common sense of belonging evolved not only from the establishment of language and race as bonding elements, but also from the “racialization of land” (8). Conflating indigeneity, land, and national belonging, mestizo nationalism foregrounds the “essential symbolic linkage: Indian-indigeneity-nationality.” As Tarica argues, “to be Indian involves, essentially, to be of national land, and vice versa: if one is of the land, then one is essentially Indian.” In other words, mestizo nationalism “establishes that indigeneity, the ground of nationality, is in fact Indian” (9).

The interconnection between indigeneity and land, however, is not just related to a sense of nationalism. Rather, it is intrinsically connected to a sense of indigeness. In this regard, land operates as a marker of indigeneity as much as various manifestations of what Gisela Cánepa Koch, among other scholars, has termed “expressive culture.” Cánepa Koch insists on framing cultural manifestations such as dance, music, rituals, and myths, among

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<sup>70</sup> I follow Joshua Lund’s theorization of the mestizo state, which he defines as follows: “it is meant structurally as a reference to Mexico’s institutions of sovereignty;” “the mestizo state resonates symbolically as a way of indicating a ‘state of being’ that can define a national subjectivity and a national family;” “the mestizo state resonates materially as a historical-political process of state formation and capitalist penetration that explains itself to itself, indeed sustains itself, by drawing on a discourse of race” (xv).

others, as “forms of expressive culture” in order to think of them as performative acts, and, therefore, as “eventos comunicativos, los cuales generan experiencias mientras crean significados y viceversa” (12). If one can claim that land functions as a generative force, so can one make the argument that expressive culture too re-creates and re-generates indigeneity. According to Gisela Cánepa Koch, the body accrues important symbolic value when it simultaneously operates as a generative force of experience as well as the experience itself: The body as producer of experience as well as the product of experience (12-14).

It is at the juncture of the body as both the producer and the product of experience that I posit the performance of mecos. How does the performance of tradition, memory, and imagination impact the enactment of indigeneity? How does the dancing history of mecos point at once towards a rehearsal of Nahua futurity through the iterations of this dance while touching other forms of past Nahua citations— “el pervivir” [survival] of Nahua as a way of knowing and being in the world? The performance of memory and imagination through ritual, as Schechner suggests, literally function as a form of re-member-ing the past. José Rabasa insists on the “continuation of indigenous life”—“el pervivir”— after the Spanish conquest as the emergence of the EZLN in Chiapas demonstrates. The indigenous uprising of the EZLN in 1994 and its concomitant material and psychic consequences reveal “the ever-present possibility of [indigenous life] breaking from the structures of power and the narratives that have inscribed (and continue to) indigenous life under a series of frames” (*Without History* 1). Dipesh Chakrabarty also conceives of the present of subaltern pasts as “a category charged with interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1” (*Provincializing* 66). Chakrabarty emphasizes the potential of such pasts as a “life possibility” (108)—“el pervivir.” However, how do we access these other non-western and modern forms of life? I believe is here where there lies the critical potential of performance. Ashis Nandy invites us to go beyond the notion of “alternative histories” and instead focus on “alternatives *to* histories” privileging subaltern or non western forms of life “by reconfiguring the past and transcending it through creative improvisations” (66). It is in this sense that I have analyzed the mecos—as instances of “creative improvisations” that, if only temporarily, reveal other forms of knowing and being in the world. Conceived as instances “embodied in the person’s bodily habits, in unselfconscious practices, in his or her reflexes about what it means to relate to objects in the world as a human being and together with other human beings in his given environment” (Chakrabarty *Provincializing* 66), these creative improvisations allow us to address other forms of being and knowing.

Because the performance of Nahua memory and imagination is in continuous flux and in constant re-enactment, how is it re-imagined and re-configured beyond the context of the indigenous community? In what follows, I explore what happens when the mecos become one of the ways cultural institutions such as *La casa de cultura de Chicontepec* use them to mark an idea of ethnic, regional difference within Mexico; in other words, I examine what happens when the mecos have undergone a process of “folklorization.” William Rowe and Vivian Schelling’s seminal study, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, argues that folklore has been conflated with an idea of national unity. Folklore, according to the authors, alludes simultaneously to “a kind of bank where authenticity is safely stored” and to “contemporary cultures which articulate alternatives to existing power structures” (4). In Mexico, the process of folklorization has implied the transformation of cultural goods into symbols of the nation and the integration of peasant and indigenous cultures to the national imaginary.

The process of folklorization has been therefore mediated through the intervention of cultural governmental institutions. This process reveals how power structures—i.e. governmental institutions—have used folklore as a means to control, contain, and condition difference, sexual, ethnic or otherwise, as a necessary step for modernization and national integration. In her insightful analysis of the process of folklorization of racial and ethnic difference in Peru through dance, Zoila Mendoza challenges us to ponder the impact that public and private cultural institutions have had in the (con)figuration of traditions that result from this process and how indigenous and mestizo groups have negotiated and accommodated its contradictory effects (149-51). Crucial for the consolidation of “folclórico” as an important means to define and re-define ethnic and racial difference was the ambiguous signification of the term itself. Any “folclórico” practice,

debía ser, por definición, el producto de una comunidad descontextualizada, idealmente prehispanica, rural e indígena; y en segundo lugar, que debido a este origen comunal y distante, debía ser anónimo. Teóricamente, no debería ser atribuible a individuos identificables. La auténtica creación debe venir de una comunidad hipotéticamente unificada (*folk*) que tiene que ser el producto de un conocimiento común igualmente hipotético (*lore* o, en español, ‘sabiduría’). (157)

“Folclórico” alluded to a communal practice that denoted the knowledge of a people, not an individual creation, that “ideally” connoted a pre-Hispanic, rural *and* indigenous community. Any “folclórico” manifestation therefore implied a distanced knowledge, displaced in time and place—a community located geographically in rural areas and historically in a different temporal frame.<sup>71</sup> The ambivalence that the term conjured, like in the case of Mexico, allowed intellectuals and artists in Cuzco to disavow the contribution of contemporary indigenous groups and define “la idea de una identidad anónima ‘auténticamente indígena.’” As Mendoza rightly points out, similar to the rest of Latin America, Peruvian intellectuals and artists faced a contradiction: “la ambivalencia de tratar de definir una particularidad nacional (regional en el caso del Cuzco) basada en una presumiblemente auténtica herencia racial, a la vez que intentar distanciar tal nacionalismo (o regionalismo) de esa parte de la

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<sup>71</sup> This characteristic, of course, directly relates to Johannes Fabian’s theorization of the “denial of coevalness.” Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, I’d like to point out how racial discourses in Latin American have been intrinsically related to national ones. In effect, the consolidation of national identities has been “constructed in racial terms and... definitions of race have been shaped by processes of nation building” (Appelbaum et al 2). The interconnection between race and nation, however, cannot be separated from the colonial experience. In “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina”, Anibal Quijano reminds us that “la codificación de las diferencias entre conquistadores y conquistados [se proyecta] en la idea de raza, es decir, una supuesta diferente estructura biológica que ubicaba a los unos en situación natural de inferioridad respecto de los otros. Esa idea fue asumida por los conquistadores como el principal elemento constitutivo, fundante, de las relaciones de dominación que la conquista imponía” (202). The colonial experience, according to Quijano, led to a “re-identificación histórica” of Europe (209), reconfiguring the world from and through its own position, thereby creating or rather reducing other subjectivities spatio-temporally differentiated. This event resulted in the creation of a “nueva perspectiva temporal de la historia [que re-ubica] a los pueblos colonizados, y a sus respectivas historias y culturas, en el pasado de una trayectoria histórica cuya culminación era Europa. Pero, notablemente, no en una misma línea de continuidad con los europeos.... Los pueblos colonizados eran razas *inferiores* y—por ello— *anteriores* a los europeos” (Quijano 210-211; énfasis en el original).

herencia identificada muy fácilmente como retrasada o inferior en términos de la modernidad global” (150-51).

The recent folklórico rendition of mecos illustrates the tension between preserving Nahua ethnic difference while simultaneously claiming a sense of regional and national belonging through festive dances. In effect, the emergence of *Ballet Folklórico Nacional Meztli* highlights the crucial significance that folklórico continues to have as a site of negotiation of ethno-racial identifications and differences. The creation of a “national” ballet, however, is just one part of the process of folklorization that has taken place in the last years, particularly during the municipal presidency of *panista* Pedro Toribio Martínez (2014-2017), who was elected president of Chicontepec in July, 2013. In 2014, I attended the first competition of mecos organized by Toribio’s presidency through the *Casa de Cultura*. It took place on the Sunday before carnaval, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the community of Xocócatl—approximately one and a half hour away by foot from Tecomate. “Miktotiliztli 2014” [Mihtotiliztli—“tiempo de baile”] was in its eighth edition. There are 183 pueblos in Chicontepec, and even though not all communities have a group of mecos of their own, only four groups of mecos out of potentially a couple of dozen neighboring communities participated in this edition—Cuahuitzil, Cerro de Ixcacuahtitla, Tepeica, and Xocócatl.<sup>72</sup> This is, of course, because the majority of the groups of mecos prefer to inaugurate the carnaval as supposed to participate in a formal competition—a competition that, if anything else, poses a financial burden to move the group from their town to the community where it takes place.<sup>73</sup> The mecos from Tecomate, for instance, decided not to participate. However, the event itself highlights how the government utilizes the celebration of the fiesta-carnaval as a marker of its indigenous heritage and a way to reach out to these pueblos (Plate 3).

“Mekotiliztli 2014” served as a stage to project Toribio’s municipal presidency as that of a Nahua people. In fact, the performance of Nahua indigeneity was crucial and continuously emphasized throughout the event. Pedro Toribio was received with a “Trio huapanguero” and with necklaces made out of regional flowers strung together by women of the town. After parading the basketball court/outdoors mini-auditorium, Toribio took the microphone to welcome the community and the four groups of mecos in Nahuatl. Among other things, he emphasized the importance of celebrating the “costumbre” and keeping it alive. After Toribio welcomed the four attending groups of mecos, their “trios”—who in reality were duets—performed a couple of songs. They showcased their musical talents as well as their abilities to improvise verses on the spot. One of the trios, as local people refer to these duets, dedicated their huapango to Pedro Toribio.<sup>74</sup> They started with the traditional “Querrequé” and improvised very dynamic and witty verses. While each trio performed their

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<sup>72</sup> I mention 183 pueblos, which is the number that Pedro Toribio used in an interview in 2013 after his election. However, according to a state publication of 2014, “Cuadernillos Municipales, 2014: Chicontepec,” there are 299 rural locations and only 1 urban one. Chicontepec is a municipality with a population of 55,094 in 2014. In 2010, 70.37% (37,001) of the population spoke Náhuatl. However, it is also important to note that 36.2% (20,086) of the population lived in extreme poverty.

<sup>73</sup> Members of the community of Tepeica told me they had paid a pick up driver \$400 pesos to be able to make it to the competition. Musicians usually charge that for the day. The monetary rewards consisted of \$3,000 pesos for the first place, \$2,000 pesos for the second, \$1,000 pesos for the third and, since there were only four present, Toribio donated \$500 pesos for the fourth one. In 2015, the activities organized by the municipality took place the weekend after carnaval in order to allow local groups of mecos to celebrate their “costumbre” first without creating a conflict of whether or not to participate in a competition.

<sup>74</sup> Huapango is the traditional musical genre of the region.

huapangos, I noticed how younger Nahuas, especially children and teenagers or the youth in general, actively recorded the tríos from their town and took pictures of them with their cellphones and tablets.

As the competition was about to start, however, the groups were asked to refrain from “inappropriate acts” and to behave accordingly or else they would be sanctioned and/or disqualified due to the presence of children and elderly people. This announcement came to me as a surprise. While the groups waited for the arrival of Toribio, various mecos, especially the cihuamecos, took advantage of the band that was playing to dance and display their steps and skills. Two of the cihuamecos from the community of Tepeica challenged one of the cihuamecos from Xocócatl to dance at the center of the basketball court. The cihuamecos showcased not only how good they were at dancing, but also how “feminine” their performance was—exaggerating the movements of their hips and their mannerisms, as well as trying to seduce their dancing partners. The whole point was to improvise a performance that would intimidate the cihuamecos from the other groups, while getting the approval of the spectators by making them laugh. While the males are the center of the performance of mecos when they wander through various towns, at the competition females occupied the chairs that were available around the court and the males stood in the back. Therefore, once the competition started, one could witness how much the dancers constrained their movements. I had already seen the group from Tepeica in two different communities, and their cihuamecos really “tuned down” their performance because they did not want to get disqualified.

Then I noticed something else unusual. The group from Cuahuitzil—a town that is located right next to Chicontepec—had members who were female. None of the other groups from the communities not associated to the municipal center had female members. But that was not the only characteristic that distinguished that group of mecos: their costumes were not improvised, but rather designed. When I asked Eduardo as well as members from Tepeica, they informed me that it was because they were from the “municipio” and that it was allowed.<sup>75</sup> When I heard that Cuahuitzil had won the contest, then it became clear to me the extent to which the process of folklorization had already taken place. A more unified vision, both in terms of performance as well as costumes, was privileged by the judges comprised mainly by delegates from the municipality and Toribio himself. In addition to giving a monetary reward to the winning group, the best costumes were also recognized. A “parca,” a “curandera,” and an “abuelita” were fighting for the first place along with an “oso hormiguero” from Cuahuitzil, whose costume was made out of corn husks. The “oso hormiguero” won. During “Miktotiliztli,” the audience and the groups were, through these contests, educated in regards to what gets the recognition from judges, what performances of mecos are celebrated, and what sense of Nahua indigeneity is validated by the local government.

In April of 2014, a month after the carnaval, I returned with Eduardo to Tecomate and Chicontepec. This time, we both interviewed Lenin Gómez, director of the *Casa de Cultura de Chicontepec*. He was one of the main organizers of the competition in addition to the rest of the festivities that took place during carnaval, especially the parades at the municipal town. Gómez started to work for the municipality of Chicontepec in 2011, under the

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<sup>75</sup> In a latter interview, Lenin Gómez, director of the *Casa de Cultura*, informed me that the members from Cuahuitzil use a typical costume that represent the “comanches,” which are very colorful with a mask made out of cloth, representing the diversity of carnaval.

presidency of Francisco Martínez Martínez. During our interview, Gómez insisted in the preservation of traditions, especially carnival, from “modernity” and “globalization.” He emphasized that around 67% of the population were indigenous and that they continued to practice their “costumbres.” When I asked him about carnival, he clearly revealed his role as an educator. Although folklórico then was in an emerging state, there was not doubt that he saw the competitions and his work as the director of the *Casa de Cultura* as a means to educate people of the municipality about indigenous “costumbres”—their preservation and their promotion. Gómez, among other things, informed us that he had interviewed an “abuelo” at El Cerro who shared with him that cross-dressing is performed by males and females alike and that the carnival is for el Diablo. However, he also emphasized that “soltarse” and just letting go have led some youth to dress up like women and behave in a vulgar manner—hence the importance of censuring this kind of behavior during the competition. According to Gómez,

hay algunos chavos que pues tienen como que otras ideas u otras preferencias, y pues que se toman como que su papel de mujer muy enserio y se ve un poco mal porque se cae mucho en lo que es la vulgaridad, ¿no? Y yo les decía que hay que tratar de mantener el respeto hacia la gente, sobre todo que es la que nos está observando y tratar de también tener respeto por sus compañeros... porque se ve un poco como de, de que anden haciendo cosas que no están permitidas... Y por eso desde el inicio del carnaval el que estuvo de conductor del evento pues sí marcó mucho eso de que hubiera un respeto hacia el público y un respeto hacia la gente para que no fuera motivo de sanción para las comparsas. Y pues bueno... creo, ahí es de acuerdo a la persona o al chavo que se viste y es muy respetable. Más sin embargo, pues sí, se les ha enmarcado de que conserven los trajes típicos del municipio.  
(Interview)

Again, though the display of individual “preferences” that may come across as “vulgar” takes plays and “es muy respetable,” he has continued to insist on both the preservation of the “costumbre”—the carnival itself—and the “trajes típicos”—the performance of gender and indigeneity. In fact, he shared that upon choosing Xocócatl as the location for the competition, he talked to the local group of mecos in order to stress the importance of preserving the tradition, such as the presence of what he considers the key characters of carnival: the devils (red, black and even purple), the cowboy, the pregnant lady, and the curandera. However, there is a significant discrepancy between his version of carnival and the carnival practiced by groups of mecos in the various communities, including El Cerro. None of the groups have female dancers. Moreover, groups do not always have the traditional characters Gómez insisted on. Their costumes are improvised (generally wearing short skirts and not “trajes típicos”) as well as the dancing during the “cumbias”—which were actually missing during the competition—: in effect, the elements that needed to be restricted to preserve the “decency” that Gómez emphasized during the interview as the master of ceremonies did during the competition.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Gómez shared with me that when he went to Xocócatl, members of the local group asked him to show them how they danced at the “municipio.” But he declined insisting on the fact that each town had a unique way of doing it. Mendoza also recalls one occasion when she was asked to be a judge in one competition for the

Gómez's attitude demonstrates how his understanding of mecos impacts (or at least attempts to) how others perceive the "costumbre" due to his position as the director of *Casa de Cultura*. He establishes and implements cultural public policies, indeed a form of pedagogy of cultural citizenship, in order to preserve and promote Nahuatl traditions.<sup>77</sup> For instance, he emphasized that in 2014 the presidency invested \$180 thousand pesos in the festivities of carnaval—Mekotiliztli 2014. Considering the level of poverty in the area (as mentioned more than 20,000 people live in extreme poverty of the 55,000), to allocate close to \$200 thousand pesos for a cultural event highlights the kind of investments the administration is ready to make. There is an investment in a particular kind of ethno-racial marking: "Chicontepec: el balcón de la Huasteca," as one of the most commonly known ways to refer to the municipality. This phrase highlights this longing to position Chicontepec as an important site within the region of the Huasteca, and by extension within a national imaginary. Gómez mentioned that the use of technology has helped to promote the carnaval but that it has also impacted how indigenous communities see themselves, especially the TV. Nahuas are and need to continue to be "celosos" of their culture and their traditions, according to Gómez, and that is why he considers his job as crucial for Chicontepec.

In the spring of 2014, Meztli had the first invitation to participate at a national folklórico event during the annual folklórico festival in Aguascalientes. As representatives of the state of Veracruz, they prepared two programs, one of which included their choreography of a Huasteca wedding. The folklórico rendition of their traditions marked their singular entrance to the national stage. Half a year later, in the month of October, it was now their turn to host the first national folklórico event in their own municipality, where they performed their local repertoire. This time around the local municipal plaza became the stage where

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Peruvian comparsas that at a given point, the leaders of the comparsas themselves would ask the judges to show them how to dance properly: "En muchas instancias, los líderes campesinos de la FDCC pidieron que los artistas e intelectuales miembros de cada jurado les enseñaran la manera correcta de representar sus propias tradiciones" (168).

<sup>77</sup> Gómez's self-perception is worth mentioning here. When I asked him whether he considered himself Nahuatl, he said that he did even though he does not speak Nahuatl and that his parents are not "100%" indigenous. What does it mean for the director of *Casa de la Cultura* to become an influential figure regarding cultural policies and not be able to speak Nahuatl? Certainly, in my own experience, when I asked about the significance of the figure of the devil and of carnaval itself in Nahuatl, elderly people simply shared more—including several stories about appearances of the devil in the region. Although I did not understand it all (Eduardo would later help me translate the interviews and would clarify my questions), the fact that the question was posed in Nahuatl opened up other possibilities, especially when I formulated follow up questions, demonstrating I could handle the gist of the story. It is also interesting to note that when I interviewed Gómez again in 2015 surrounded by the members of the folklórico group he directs, he mentioned almost in passing in reference to the significance of carnaval that it was important to celebrate it even if one does not speak Nahuatl—one does not need to in order to participate in the festivities. He then went on to say that he has found himself a number of occasions listening to jokes of Nahuatl speakers despite not understanding what they said. None of the members I met spoke Nahuatl and I was left with the impression that the others (who were actually dancing in the various groups of mecos in Chicontepec) did not either.

I would like to note the training and experience of Gómez as a "gestor cultural." As many protagonists in "gestión cultural" in Mexico, Gómez is highly educated in a university system and an active participant of various folklórico dance associations. I would also like to clarify that my reading of him. I do not assume that Gómez does not question nationalism, folklorization, globalization, and even notions related to gender and sexuality. As a matter of fact, he has participated in carnaval as a cihuameco thereby opening up the possibilities for other iterations of his own gender, sexual, and racial alignments.

chicontepecanos witnessed folklórico renderings of other states, alongside their own. Margarita Tortajada, one of Mexico's leading experts on dance, reminded me in a personal interview the importance that *folklórico* dance has paradoxically played in the preservation of dances and the loss of so many others [January 2015]. Gómez selects and choreographs the indigenous dances that will represent the municipality of Chicontepec as a Nahuatl region and, consequently, the dances that will most likely be preserved. However, although there are some continuities, there remains one final question: does the Indian still mean the nation?

### **By way of conclusion**

In *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice interrogates the role of culture within a globalized society. For Yúdice, although cultural politics are still shaped by local and regional forces, they cannot longer be isolated from transnational processes. He proposes we look at culture as a “resource” (9) and traces the development of culture as an important sphere to understand politico-economic and socio-cultural processes at play in our modern world. In doing so, Yúdice argues that the “content of culture recedes in importance as the *usefulness of the claim to difference* as a warrant gains legitimacy. The result is that *politics* trumps the content of culture” (23, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, Yúdice goes on to propose that we should understand the interconnection between culture and economy not just as “a commodity—which would be the equivalent of instrumentality—but as a mode of cognition, social organization, and even attempts at social emancipation” (28). Culture then is not simply a realm but a means: “culture is expedient as a resource for attaining an end” (29). What does it mean, therefore, to think of culture as a commodity in Chicontepec? What is the impact of the process of folklorization of “el balcón de la Huasteca”?

I offer Yúdice's theorization about culture as a concluding insight to ponder about the increasing entanglement between community and culture in Chicontepec. Community is expressed through indigenous culture and culture embodies a community-making paradigm. The urgency of recognition and the legitimacy of its claims become significantly important as their entire community is threatened by the increased use of fracking in the region. An article published in *La Jornada*, one of Mexico's most prestigious newspapers, as recent as March 1, 2015 by Hermann Bellinghausen states that “[I]ntenta pero inexorable, corre la alarma en las serranías del norte y la tierras bajas de la Huasteca: una amenaza se cierne sobre los derechos territoriales de miles de comunidades. Y ésta tiene un nombre, aunque no sea el único: fracking, o fractura hidráulica, nuevo y agresivo procedimiento para extraer gas y petróleo debajo y dentro de las grandes rocas subterráneas” (2). If this is the current scenario, what does it mean to perform Nahuatl indigeneity in 2015? What does it mean to make a claim to ethno-racial difference through folklórico and other festive renderings such as carnival? What would the role of culture be as a resource to negotiate claims to the land? At stake is the very survival or better said, “el pervivir,” not just of a people but literally of the earth itself.



Plate 1. Mecos from Tecamate. 2014. The black devil offers a cihuameco to one of the audience members in exchange for money and/or alcohol. Photo by Manuel R. Cuellar



Plate 2. "Cihuamecos from Tecomate." 2014. Photo by Manuel R. Cuellar



Plate 3. “Mekotiliztli 2014.” Community of Xocócatl. March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. Photo by Manuel R. Cuellar

## Conclusion

On October 13, 1921, *El Universal Ilustrado* published as an editorial device a letter “Ecos del Centenario” in the section titled “La semana en consonantes por Zas.”<sup>78</sup> Allegedly composed by an Indian named Juan Pitasio Bielas, copied by Zas, and directed to Cuca, Juan’s wife, the letter recounted the events that he had witnessed in the preceding weeks during the centennial celebrations of 1921. It was accompanied by drawings depicting three scenes from the festivities that framed the two columns of writing capturing the voice of the Indian Juan. The writing drastically contrasted with the three different drawings representing the bourgeois character depicted at the top and the bottom of the letter (Plate 1). By highlighting the tension between the visual and discursive registers, the letter offers competing “echoes” of the centenary—indeed a cacophony. One immediately notices that the drawings illustrate a bourgeois male as the main spectator of the various events taking place. Dressed as a typical *catrín*, in the first illustration, however, more than a spectator, he is actively intervening in the parade that is depicted. The parade had been one of the major events during the centenary celebrations. Among various moments of Mexican history, such as the arrival of the Spaniards to Tenochtitlan, the parade featured *El Universal*’s float with María Bibiana Uribe, the recently proclaimed winner of the “India Bonita” contest. The actual float, as it can be roughly appreciated in the sketch, presented the monumental figure of Cuauhtémoc at the front of the vessel and in the back María Bibiana Uribe crowned atop the pyramid with the “Aztec Calendar” behind her and, on top of her, the effigy of the newspaper—an eagle with open wings and a globe. Six other indigenous women were part of the float, which was decorated with typical Mexican plants, such as magueys and cacti. The illustration in the newspaper, however, offered a much simpler rendition of the float. The vessel, pulled by a group of oxen, only featured the monument of the “Aztec” warrior and the figure of “La India Bonita” atop the pile of rocks, including the effigy of *El Universal*.

The most striking aspect of the illustration, however, is not the simplification of the float portraying a glorified and monumentalized Cuauhtémoc vis-à-vis the recently elected “India Bonita,” but rather the presence of the big, bold barefooted, sweaty figure of *el catrín*, holding his pair of shoes over the heads of the oxen. The distressed pose of the monumental bourgeois male suggests an eminent clash with the float, or rather with the indigenous figures. Not only is he leaning as if walking towards the float, heading west, but also his facial expressions and his shoes threaten to smash the small indigenous figures heading eastward towards him, rendering them vulnerable to destruction. Is this the imminent fate of the indigenous people heading against the march of the cosmopolitan, civilized bourgeois male? The two scenes portrayed at the bottom of the page, however, suggest a completely different picture marked by the complete absence of indigenous people. The one on the left captures what seems to be the same bourgeois male contemplating from afar the main stage of “La Noche Mexicana” and the fireworks. Lounging back on his cane, the contemplative *catrín* admires from a distance what was described by commentators of the actual events as one of the highlights of the festivities—the pyrotechnics. Letters and scrolls dominate the last scene. The *catrín* places into a big envelope a series of written documents; even though it is not clear what they contain, his presence seems to suggest that he is sharing reports, declarations or perhaps official documents from the festivities, as the celebrations were

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<sup>78</sup> I would like to thank art historian María de las Nieves Rodríguez for sharing this article with me.

attended by numerous dignitaries from various parts of the country and abroad. What is the significance of sending such reports? To whom would they be going and for what purposes? The uncertainty of the images paradoxically mirrors the discursive tension found in the body of the letter purportedly composed by the Indian Juan Pitasio Bielas. The writing offers a textual performance aimed at capturing the linguistic expressions of an indigenous male who went to Mexico City and experienced the festivities. Addressed to Cuca, the letter uncovers that the “indio ilustradito” Juan, as he describes himself, is the *catrín* depicted in the illustrations. His report to Cuca focuses precisely on the activities captured in the illustrations: he went to the parade to see the “India Bonita” and “La Noche Mexicana” and he sent Cuca the newspapers with the descriptions of the events. In this sense, there emerges a visual and discursive tension that underscores what I have addressed in this dissertation: the public cultural performances bring to the fore the complex interplay between the representation of the nation, of *lo mexicano*, and its actual embodiment. The images and the language used to represent the nation during the festivities of the centenary are performatively undone by the actual embodiment of the people whom they aim to represent. The bodies undo the representation of *lo mexicano*, of *el pueblo*, gesturing towards an excess that fails to be contained by nationalist iconography.

The cultural performances witnessed by Juan Pitasio Bielas demonstrate the ways State-sponsored cultural projects attempted to in-form the nation, yet they were always exceeded and contested through the bodily actions of Mexican citizens. In effect, the letter offers a textual and cultural performance of its own. It pretends to capture the orality associated with the indigenous, rural population of Mexico. In this sense, the writing showcases the elisions, pronunciation, and vocabulary associated with *el pueblo* or rather with its linguistic performance as imagined by the editors of a news magazine. The letter opens with a reference to a regional product, “lo ques la cajeta de Celaya.”<sup>79</sup> Right at the beginning of the letter, it is clear that this is a cultural textual performance not only in terms of content but also in terms of form. The “cajeta” was probably one of the regional products showcased at the various expositions and events, maybe even at “La Noche Mexicana” as a so-called “authentic” Mexican product, as was the register of Spanish that described it and the rest of the events—“lo ques” versus “lo que es;” “enviten” versus “inviten;” “Nochi” versus “Noche;” to cite some examples. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the third line of the letter: “no ha habido fiesta en donde no me enviten.” Juan, the narrating voice, emphasizes the accessibility of the festivities, which as I have analyzed and contextualized in this study, were designed for “all social classes.” The imagining of *el pueblo*, however, is complicated by what follows next: he is unable to attend a party because, as the reader finds out later in the letter, his frock coat, his “levita,” was dirtied by the masses, the “hervidero,” at “La Noche Mexicana.” Is the bourgeois attire of the Indian Juan mocking, praising and/or simply imagining a different vision of *el pueblo*? And if so, for whom and why? Was it an attempt to elevate the status of *el pueblo* to the international scene, yet paradoxically reducing it to some sort of neo-colonial and cosmopolitan mimicry? The answers, I have argued, lie precisely at the core of the actual staging of the nation discursively, performatively, and, as I have illustrated, corporeally.

Before moving on to the description of the events, the letter calls attention to the role of the press covering the centenary celebrations. The newspapers indeed played a crucial role

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<sup>79</sup> I follow the spelling as it appeared on the original article to capture the imagined verbal expression of *el pueblo*.

during the festivities not only informing citizens but also discursively forming an ideal of a national citizenry as described in the articles. In this sense, the media functioned as a means to create a national public. Cuca was not present at the festivities, yet Juan sent her the newspapers along with his letter to make her a part of the celebrations: “En los periódicos / que te envío / van tiatros, toros, / desfile y carros.” The nationalistic cultural performances as lived events were to form citizens of the nation, but in so doing, they also created a Mexican audience, as did the newspapers aimed at establishing their own national readership. In fact, this letter written by an “indio ilustradito” precisely gestures towards how these two seemingly unrelated instances were completely interrelated. The rehearsal of the nation performed at the centennial celebrations was to be captured, disseminated, and re-staged by the national press. Juan directs the reader’s attention to two of the most massive public displays of the nation: the parade and “La Noche Mexicana.” He recounts his experiences attending both events as follows:

¡Y de los carros, uno! ¡es la sangre que grita!  
 Tú bien sabes, mi Cuca, que nací en Panzacola;  
 soy indio ilustradito como tú y esta sola  
 ilusión me condujo a ver la India Bonita...  
 No te enceles, Cuca,  
 no te enceles, hija,  
 ¡si al cabo tú eres  
 mi india bonita!  
 No grité, ni nada,  
 me estorbaba todo:  
 cubeta, los guantes,  
 el paragua, el choclo...  
 ¡Malaigan las prendas  
 que la moda trajo:  
 así ni es uno indio  
 ni civilizado!...  
 No quiero, por más que quiero,  
 recordar el hervidero de la Nochi Mexicana,  
 pues por culpa de esa broza mandé planchar mi alevosa  
 y no juí a casa de Juana.  
 Y repitieron la Nochi  
 Mexicana con derrochi de todavía más ecesos...  
 No juí por tonto o por vivo y por este otro motivo:  
 que costaba cinco pesos.<sup>80</sup>  
 Después el desfile, los charros, clarines...  
 ¡y yo en las tribunas! ¡y aquellos botines  
 mi apretaban todo lo que no imagines!  
 ¡con decir que quise verlo en calcetines! (6)

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<sup>80</sup> I have not been able to corroborate if in fact they charged five pesos the second evening that “La Noche Mexicana” took place. It does seem unlikely that the committee was able to print thousands of tickets and sell them before the event, though it was announced in *El Universal*.

Juan describes his experiences at the two events calling attention to a number of contradictory statements. He first positions himself as an “indio ilustradito” as well as Cuca, his wife. Simultaneously, however, he aligns himself and his wife to “la India Bonita.” Juan and Cuca share the same “sangre” as her, and hence the same indigenous heritage. In a rhetorical maneuver, Juan reduces the parade to a single float—that of María Bibiana Uribe. The praise of her indigenous beauty already captured in her title, “la India Bonita,” gestures towards a shared understanding of an embodied sense of a national aesthetics. Juan’s reaction to María Bibiana’s indigenous beauty, compared to that of his wife’s—“tú eres mi india bonita”—underlines the racial and gender tensions associated with a sense of national pride: the Indian woman as the actual embodiment of the nation.

In a way, Juan partakes of that sense of national indigenous belonging, yet his body performatively reveals the implications, failures, and excesses of an emerging sense of Mexican nationalism. He complains how “[le] estorbaba todo: / cubeta, los guantes, / el paragua, el choclo... / ¡Malaigan las prendas /que la moda trajo: /ansí ni es uno indio /ni civilizado!” His attire visually and discursively contrasts with that portrayed by “la India Bonita” and the legendary figure of Cuauhtémoc in the first illustration. The drawing schematically represents a sense of indigenous aesthetics that contrasted drastically with the figure of the bourgeois male. The sense of indigeneity visually represented, however, is discursively complicated once the reader realizes that the *catrín* is the Indian Juan. The simultaneous presence of multiple signifiers of Mexican indigeneity—the ancient glory of the “Aztec” civilization and the contemporaneous manifestation embodied by “la India Bonita”—collides with the notion of a “popular” and also “cosmopolitan” sense of national belonging represented by the “indio ilustradito.” In fact, the cosmopolitan iteration of Juan calls attention to the conflicting and contradictory implications of embodying a cosmopolitan sense of the nation. Juan’s fashionable attire constrains him and renders him neither “Indian” nor “civilized.” Both iterations of the nation are not coeval and Juan implies they are actually oppositional. The parade, the nation on a stage—“el desfile, los charros, clarines”—, allowed for the people to witness the nation and in so doing to become a public—“en las tribunas.” Yet the experience of participating in the cultural performance of *lo mexicano* as a cosmopolitan, modern Indian triggered an embodied reaction that further emphasized the tension at stake: “¡y aquellos botines /mi apretaban todo lo que no imagines! /¡con decir que quise verlo en calcetines!” What seemed to threaten to destroy the indigenous figures of the float, as depicted in the illustration, symbolizes the failure and excess of the staging of *lo mexicano*. Juan’s bodily actions, his rejection of shoes, ultimately captured the ambivalence, complexity, and failure of an indigenous male performing as a member of the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, rehearsing the modernizing project of the nation.

I choose to end my dissertation with an analysis of a textual and visual representation of *el pueblo* in a newspaper in order to examine the ways cultural performances of *lo mexicano* bring to the fore the significance of focusing on the bodies to interrogate the actual experience of the nation. Even though the visual and textual registers capture the complexities of the ever-changing field of *lo mexicano*, I want to draw attention to the ambivalence of the experience of the nation and its concomitant iterations at the level of the body. Despite the fact that Juan is a discursive invention, it is one that pays very close attention to embodiment. As the drawings and the letter remind us, the staging of the nation was mainly conceived as a dichotomous confrontation between the Indian and the civilized; between the great indigenous past and a modern cosmopolitan future. Nevertheless, perhaps

paradoxically rendered throughout the letter, the visual and the textual may not necessarily circulate the same fractured, ambivalent, and incomplete project of the nation that the bodily actions reveal. The indigenous man wearing a frock coat embodies at once the clash of different and differing temporal and cultural frames. The nation was certainly displayed on a stage, but *el pueblo* could not witness it either as an Indian or as civilized audience—“malaigan las prendas.” Although the newspaper operated as a stage in itself, one that was not for *el pueblo*, it still exemplified the power that mass communication was to have. The articles it circulated, as clearly represented in the illustrations and the letter, set the stage for the nation by literally imaging it and then discursively performing it. In this sense, the events such as the parade and the massive celebration of “La Noche Mexicana” functioned as a means to rehearse and hence embody the nation. To think of the nation as a fiction that is put to practice, indeed to practice the nation, draws attention to the ephemeral but concrete gestures that bodily actions produce while performing *lo mexicano*, thereby showing complicities, fractures, failures, and even resistances to normative ideas of Mexican nationalism. By privileging the body, I ultimately embrace a generative approach that cannot reduce iterations of *lo mexicano* to a static, monolithic idea but rather one that is always changing, incomplete, and hence in a continuous process of becoming.

In this dissertation, I have therefore focused on the contradictory ways, at times complicit and at times resistant, Mexican bodies signify the idea of the nation. Chapter one explored the tensions of embodying vis-à-vis representing the nation. By looking at photographs, programs, and newspaper articles, I underscored the impact of staging the idea of Mexico during “La Noche Mexicana” celebrated in 1921 as part of the centenary of Mexican Independence. I examined how the contrast between imaging, imagining, and embodying the nation created different publics and hence iterations of *lo mexicano*. At stake in the chapter is an emphasis on the frictions and slippages between being part of the Mexican public and part of Mexican citizenry. I argued that one can think of the idea of *lo mexicano* as an assemblage in order to focus on the contingency of the temporal, spatial, and corporeal registers that render the nation legible and consumable. In this sense, the chapter highlighted the ways bodies in motion bring to the fore the limits and the excesses of the fiction of the nation. Performing the nation through bodies calls attention to how corporeal actions reveal the contingent nature of re-presenting Mexico. The committee of the centennial festivities, which included Martín Luis Guzmán, promoted the “popular” and accessible character of the centenary while insisting on the cosmopolitan nature of such important celebrations. Hiring Adolfo Best Maugard as the organizer of “La Noche Mexicana,” the committee sponsored the creation of an aesthetic Mexican yet cosmopolitan rendition of the nation. Nevertheless, if the staging of cultural performances of Mexico during the centenary aimed to form a national body, the actual embodiment of the nation complicated the coherence, legibility, and even unity of the “popular” character of the nation. Yaqui Indians, teuanas, jaraneros, chinas, and charros were summoned to embody Mexico, yet in so doing, their own bodies conjured other Mexicos. Just as the Indian Juan experienced the “hervidero” of people at “La Noche Mexicana,” thousands of Mexicans witnessed the staging of the nation and experienced the accessibility of the festivities open to the public for the first time. On the one hand, the regime made most of the festivities of the centenary free and accessible to everyone; on the other hand, it still sought to appeal to a discerning, educated international audience. “La Noche Mexicana,” as the chapter demonstrates, ultimately signaled the ways the post-revolutionary regime simultaneously continued and

changed the Porfirian politics regarding the configuration of a modern, Mexican nation, particularly vis-à-vis notions of indigeneity and authenticity.

Chapter two showed how dance, particularly the configuration of *folklórico* dance, contributed to the formation and circulation of imaginaries of the nation, of *lo mexicano*. Specifically, it addressed the role of Nellie Campobello, known today as a novelist of the Mexican Revolution, in the dissemination and eventual institutionalization of Mexican dance. As a dancer herself and an influential choreographer along with her sister Gloria Campobello, Campobello's career at once contributed paradoxically to the consolidation of *lo mexicano* as hyper-masculinized and mestizo while creating spaces for female and queer enactments of national subjects. Campobello actively participated in the public scene and constantly fought for the recognition of Mexican dance as an important cultural sphere and artistic practice. In this chapter I analyzed her collaboration with the Ministry of Public Education, *Secretaría de Educación Pública*, her involvement in the establishment and work of the National School of Dance, *Escuela Nacional de Danza*, as a founding member and director from 1937 to 1983, and her writings regarding dance, particularly the publication of *Ritmos indígenas de México, Indigenous Rhythms of Mexico* in 1940. In these instances, I examined how Nellie Campobello contributed to shaping *folklórico* dance as a lens to understand the ethnic, sexual, and racial diversity of Mexico. Though she continued to foster an understanding of indigenous practices as the essence of *lo mexicano*, engaging in indigenista cultural politics and rendering indigenous communities non contemporaneous and sources of primary materials, Campobello approached Mexican indigeneity as an embodied cultural expression and not just a discursive, symbolic, and aesthetic marker of the nation. My study underlines how Nellie's own rendition of *lo mexicano* complicated hegemonic understandings of the nation through her own body. Her corporeal and choreographic practices performatively challenged and undid what she purportedly aimed to represent, particularly in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. Campobello's work and bodily actions therefore underscore the ambiguities and tensions that I read as queer, particularly in this period of the consolidation of a unified, masculinist, mestizo nation.

Finally chapter three explored the performance of discourses of the nation as lived experiences. By analyzing the dance of mecos in Veracruz, Mexico, the chapter drew attention to thinking of cultural manifestations as embodied practices. I argued that the dancing allows the mecos to ethnically mark their space while simultaneously enabling Nahuatl performers to gesture towards queer imaginaries that challenge hetero-patriarchy. I explored how indigeneity produces and is produced through the festive bodies of the mecos in relationship to the folklorization of the nation, of *lo mexicano*. This chapter drew heavily from ethnographic performance research and the interviews I conducted in the Nahuatl-speaking community of Tecomate, Chicontepec, Mexico in the spring of 2014 and 2015. I actively participated with the group of mecos from Tecomate together with Eduardo de la Cruz, my Nahuatl instructor and one of the "devils" for those years. In this chapter, therefore, I advanced an approach that queered the archive of conventional studies on indigeneity in the humanities by engaging the topic as a lived experience and an embodied problematic and not just as an ideological manifestation. At stake in the chapter was also the question regarding knowledge production and producers of knowledge. I contended that the mecos, through their dancing, at once enact and contest conflicting discourses about indigeneity in contemporary Mexico. The moving bodies of the mecos conjure not only normalizing regimes of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but also a sociality and a world-making praxis that operate as a means

of indigenous knowledge production and transmission of social memory. The chapter concluded with the current process of folklorization that has recently impacted the municipality of Chicontepec, thereby influencing communal indigenous ritualistic practices. The recent and ongoing *folklórico* rendition of the mecos by the municipal *folklórico* group, Meztli, at once demonstrates the tensions and contradictions of claiming a Nahuatl sense of identity while simultaneously proclaiming a sense of regional and national belonging through dance.

This dissertation has traced the relationship between embodied performances and knowledge production, between public performances of dance and discourses around national identity in Mexico. By analyzing staged instances of *lo mexicano* as festive practices that created contested, polyphonic fields of action, this approach centers on embodied iterations of Mexican cultural productions. In so doing, it contributes to recent ongoing debates of *lo mexicano* as a trope that has been privileged in the analysis of Mexican nationalism, particularly as they engage questions of discursive and visual modes of representation, such as muralism, golden age cinema, and the novel of the Mexican Revolution. Indeed, *lo mexicano* as a trope has been rigorously examined in Mexican historiography. Nevertheless, as Pedro Ángel Palou argues in his astute book, *El fracaso del mestizo*, conventional studies on Mexican national identity take cultural constructions as empiric realities. Palou challenges us to question current approaches and reconsider how the study of Mexican cultural and political practices examine the Mexican State using the very same categories it has created to reproduce and legitimate itself. Palou proposes instead to focus on the bio-politics of *mestizaje* in order to understand culture as the product of the tensions within a field of power and the material realities conditioned by the economic practices that generate it.

Palou analyzes *mestizaje* as a State-sponsored, legitimizing discourse that established cultural, political, and economic practices exemplified by the figure of the “mestizo,” a biopolitical and biotipological construct, that would aim at modernizing the figure of the Indian, de-territorializing it from his non-urban, and hence non-modern state. The Mexican Revolution as an event, Palou reminds us, triggered the creation of a symbolic order that fostered the configuration of Mexicanness:

El país no era, el mexicano no pertenecía, y de pronto existió como ciudadano de un proyecto estatal en tanto sujeto político. Más aún, en tanto que *mestizo*, cuerpo político del proyecto ideológico que unifica y sostiene el proyecto estatal, es la encarnación de la *mexicanidad*, al tiempo factual—biotipológica y biopolítica—que ideal—como sujeto construido por la propia empresa política que la revolución *instaura* y que, como tantas otras cosas en realidad recuperó del antiguo régimen, como sus formas de propaganda y distribución de lo sensible. (8, emphasis in the original)

As Palou contends, *mestizaje* was an intellectual and political project. The so-called organic intellectuals of the Revolution made it possible for the ideology of *mestizaje* to become public policy, as they worked for the State. Vasconcelos was paramount for this undertaking, especially through the consolidation of public education in Mexico, as I have also shown in this dissertation. According to Palou, the educational system became fundamental to foster a

mestizo “habitus.” Building on the work of Bourdieu, Palou thinks of “habitus” as a generating practice: “El *habitus* no solo es un sentido del juego, o un sentido práctico, sino una serie de disposiciones que generan prácticas y percepciones, incorporando las propias condiciones sociales, objetivas, de su inculpación o reproducción” (15). Through the discourse of *mestizaje*, the State established an ideology not only to reproduce and legitimate itself, but also to dominate. The critic recognizes that the “mestizo” can still signal a “biological reality,” yet as a State project of social mobility, it failed. According to the author, “el fracaso de la ideología del mestizo se da cuando la gente percibe la falta de movilidad social, las pérdidas económicas que hacen que se pierda la eficacia simbólica del discurso mestizófilo y no, como lo sostiene Poniatowska o Monsiváis por el desarrollo del pensamiento político de la sociedad civil” (24).

Key to his analysis, therefore, is the understanding of the production of the “mestizo” habitus as an embodied occurrence in order to reproduce the system it is a product of. Even though he still focuses on an identitarian paradigm of *lo mexicano*, the literary and cultural critic recognizes the importance of embodied praxis. Following the work of Gareth Williams, Palou ultimately proposes that the Revolution changed the way people perceived reality and that it transformed artistic practices, transporting and translating them from the realm of the aesthetic to that of the social (26). He asks that we analyze the biopolitics of *mestizaje* from the realm of social praxis. I discuss Palou’s cultural and theoretical approach at length to further emphasize the significance of understanding the actual embodiment of *mestizaje*. Yet Palou privileges cinema as the cultural means that has registered “los cambios en los modos de percepción de la realidad y en la construcción social de la realidad misma” (26). I, however, follow his theorization to draw attention to and further elaborate on tensions that the enactments of cultural performances of nationalism bring to the fore. By exploring the implications and repercussions of the embodiment of a mestizo nation, I, too, embrace Palou’s call to think of social praxis in order to explore the shift of cultural praxis from the aesthetics to the social and hence to the body.

One of the primary questions that this dissertation has sought to address was therefore the methodological nature of our scholarly work within literary and cultural studies. The body requires an interdisciplinary approach that at times exceeds, at times reproduces the realm of representation. In analyzing *lo mexicano* as an assemblage, this study demands a careful consideration of the archive and the means for and of archiving for its realization. In privileging the body as the focus of my analysis, I needed to pay attention to the construction of discourses and archives; indeed to embrace a methodology that would account not only for the cultural practices I addressed but also for my own positioning within the field of humanities. At stake is the legitimacy not only of objects of inquiry but also of legibly disciplinary practices. I have borrowed heavily from Diana Taylor’s argument that hegemonic transmission of memory, identity, and knowledge systematically excludes and erases forms of transmission that are directly ingrained in our bodies. Thus, the very notion of archive could not be taken for granted in the realization of my study.

In “History and/as Performance,” Taylor contends that despite the fact that history separates the source of knowledge (the archive) from the knower, history is still the product of a process or a “system of selection.” Therefore, the “archive” is the “product” not the “source” of a historical inquiry, since it has to be classified as such (69). In a Foucauldian gesture, Taylor asserts that the object of analysis is thus constructed by the discourse that sets out to explain it. I have followed Taylor’s understanding of the archive to propose an analysis

that would reveal the ways I have produced my own corpus of study. In so doing, I wanted to call attention to how the archive always already requires the repertoire, to use Taylor's concepts, in order to re-produce itself. By analyzing photographs, periodicals, essays, and embodied practices vis-à-vis the active witnessing of and participation in a live performance, I have explicitly sought to underline how the archive of *lo mexicano* I explored was already mediated by my own intervention.

In this sense, I followed María Elena Martínez's call to show how archives are inherently framed and embedded in genealogies of power in order to reflect upon the ethical responsibilities that those of us who, in an effort to address past and present lives and experiences, face—particularly in regards to indigenous populations and gender and sexual minorities. Martínez's insightful article, "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics," explores the interconnection between history, historical investigation and representation, and politics. She advances a methodological approach that re-thinks how historical sources and performative acts—embodied knowledge transmission—can shed new light on the making and remaking of history and politics. She studies the case of Juana Aguilar, an intersex individual in Guatemala in the late 17th century and early 18th century to analyze not only the performative, fictional, and imaginative components of history as a craft and discipline but also the importance of understanding history as a process that engages our imagination as well as our body and experiential knowledge. In fact, Martínez argues that imagination is part of historical writing. Moreover, all of our experiences shape how we approach history through "one's other life experiences [in addition to academic training] and more generally through the memories, conceptual categories, and world understandings achieved, living, and fluctuating in the historian's own body and psyche" (171). Simply stated, according to the author, the study of history is "a process that entails the imagination and the use of the body and experiential as (re)sources" (171). In so doing, she highlights the significance of trans-, inter- and post-disciplinary dialogues that force us to expand how we engage knowledge production and implicitly how, as I contend, the archive always involves the repertoire. As she goes on to say, "the privileging of writing by historians cannot entirely conceal the interpretative and imaginative dimensions of historical writing, the role that the experiential knowledge lodged in our bodies and minds plays in shaping how we understand and write about the past and the ways that the study of history in turn influences how we view the present" (172).

Even though Martínez primarily focuses on the intersections between history and writing, she reminds us of the ethical dimensions and the power relations embedded in our scholarly work. Moreover, her insistence on the ways our bodies and experiences shape our own understanding of our objects of study illustrates the personal stakes of our intellectual endeavors. As feminist and queer of color critiques have challenged us, we must continue to expand what constitutes as evidence and as "legitimate" modes of inquiry. By proposing my dissertation as a queer assemblage, I choose to position myself vis-à-vis the archive of *lo mexicano* I analyzed. I have approached the study of performances of national identity, indeed, dancing histories of Mexico as a practitioner of *folklórico* dance for over twenty years. This study greatly benefitted not only from my academic training as a literary scholar, but also from my experience and knowledge of a complex nationalistic performance art. My own understanding of dance as a form of knowledge led me to reflect upon the significance and impact of movement as a system of signification. What is the impact of my own

enactment of “el jarabe tapatío” upon analyzing its discursive and visual representations? What is at stake between studying indigeneity as a conceptual category versus experiencing an indigenous celebration? Ultimately, in this dissertation, I have explored the limits but also the possibilities of engaging in an interdisciplinary scholarly endeavor that foregrounds the body as an object but also as a subject of inquiry. More than suggesting the need to move beyond literary analysis, my objective has been to explore the interconnections between archives, disciplines, and indeed bodies.



Plate 1. “Ecos del Centenario.” *El Universal Ilustrado*. October 13, 1921. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada.

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