

## CONTESTACIONES: The Music Genre of Cyber-Hociconas

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, mexicanas and Chicanas have taken to social media to creatively respond to the increasingly explicit misogynist themes promoted in contemporary Mexican regional music. Their contestaciones seek to express the silenced stories and voices of women who are portrayed as mujeres abnegadas, unworthy of being in a relationship, deserving of mistreatment, and as mere bodies for men's sexual enjoyment. Instead, contestaciones offer versions of empowered women who scorn and dismiss undesirable men and express their romantic aspirations and sexuality. I present the singer-songwriters of YouTube contestaciones as "cyber-hociconas"; that is, women who effectively voice transgressive positions that counter misogyny through the use of online media. I am critical, however, of the extent to which contestaciones work to reinscribe patriarchal institutions and heteronormativity, thus limiting their potential as a transformative medium for the empowerment of women. Nonetheless, given the continuous violence that Latina women are subject to in areas of conflict tied to narcocultura, and the infiltration of narcocultura aesthetics onto mainstream popular culture, contestaciones represent an important form of popular feminism and cultural activism of mexicanas and Chicanas deserving of attention.*

**Key Words:** *contestaciones, gender politics, hociconas, narcocultura, popular feminism, popular music, social media*

Emerging in the late 2000s, amateur women singer-songwriters have taken to social media, particularly YouTube, to issue women-centered musical statements that oppose the more explicit misogynistic messages in contemporary Mexican regional music, which includes the genres of norteñas, banda, grupera, and other instrumentations in between. Their musical parodies known as "contestaciones" attempt to empower women by inverting sexist narratives of gender normativity in romantic relationships heard in mainstream songs.

Contestaciones tap into a tradition of songs and countersongs in the Chicana/o community where contesting ideas are collectively aired (Broyles-González 2001).

YouTube contestaciones are typically performed by young women who record their performance at home using a low-tech web camera. Clues in the videos and in users' profiles reveal that they originate as far south as the state of Michoacán, México and as far north as Chicago in the United States. As such, contestaciones are a transnational phenomenon representing "multispatial, multilayered, hybrid identities and cultures that coexist at cross-border, regional, and global levels" (Piñón 2014, 21).

The specific transnational context where these contestaciones are situated is one that is greatly influenced by narcocultura—the violent cultural imaginary corresponding to the world of drug smuggling across México and the United States. The narcocultura musical aesthetic influences mainstream music where narratives of physical violence and drug consumption are replaced by misogyny and violent sexual innuendo, which proves to be more acceptable for broadcast across popular media channels. Over the last ten years, narcocorridos—songs that celebrate the feats of drug smugglers—have evolved into more violently explicit songs by artists grouped in what is known as "Movimiento Alterado" (Ramírez-Pimienta 2011). The graphic representations of violence as well as the celebratory retelling of excess consumption and sexual exploits of men as depicted by Movimiento Alterado performers convey a model of hyper-masculinity and misogyny that is typical of wartime narratives. Due to their offensive language, their airplay across Spanish-language radio in both México and the United States is very limited. There is, however, a variant of songs associated with the performers and style of this music genre that have a significant presence in mainstream radio. They are "romantic" ballads that (re)inscribe the perspective of a hyper-masculine subject by portraying a male narrator as the victim of the "wicked ways" of a woman whose public chastising is thusly justified. Melodramatic songs that speak of heartbreak and are motivated by vengeance and jealousy are known as canciones de despecho (Vera 2005). Here, I introduce the term "narcodespechos" to refer to the misogynist ballads that I reference in

this essay because they are closely associated with the artists and soundmarks associated with narcocorridos and the Movimiento Alterado genre. Like narcocorridos, narcodespechos celebrate violence and dominance over an enemy; in this case, it is a celebration of the feats of hyper-masculine subjects to socially, physically, and emotionally oppress women.

This essay concerns the artistic response of women as expressed in YouTube contestaciones. I begin by situating contestaciones within the herstories of transgressive women singers whose music is heard across the US-México border. I then theorize the popular, transnational, and cybernetic character of contestaciones and their performers to advance the concept of “cyber-hociconas,” which takes into account the political act of using language and voice to enact a transgressive woman-centered position through cyberspace. Finally, I outline the heterosexist gender stereotypes in the Mexican cultural imaginary and how these are reinscribed in narcodespechos and contestaciones. My discussion centers on three themes: 1) challenges to male excess and macho womanizing, 2) assertions of women’s worth, and 3) affirmations of women’s sexuality. Each section introduces a narcodespecho that is exemplary of an offensive theme and two corresponding contestaciones. My analysis pays attention to the lyrical and visual narratives of each contestación and how they articulate a model for women’s empowerment. I am critical, however, of the extent to which contestaciones work to reinstate patriarchal institutions and heteronormativity, therefore limiting their potential as a transgressive and transformative medium for the empowerment of women. Lastly, I discuss the possibilities offered by social media as a medium for feminist activism.

### **From Hociconas to Cyber-Hociconas:**

#### **Transgressive Women’s Voices in Transnational Mexican Music**

Narcodespechos and contestaciones evolve from narrative musical genres heard throughout México and along the US-México borderlands that have been

traditionally divided along gender lines. These are the corrido for “masculine” narratives and the domestic drama and boleros for the “feminine.” As Deborah Vargas (2008) has noted, the male-centered corrido has come to signify “heterosexual masculinity and heteronormative narratives of resistance” (173). Corridos tell the deeds of heroic men who stood up for social justice particularly along the border in conflict with Texas Rangers or *rincheros*, and during the Mexican Revolution. More recently, narcocorridos narrate the feats of men involved in the illegal narcotics trade, but, unlike the earlier corridos, these do not necessarily engage in a social justice project. Although it is fair to note that some narcocorridos do denounce the Mexican government’s corruption and its involvement in perpetuating narco-related violence. Also, there is a number of narcocorridos that sing the praises of women drug lords and traders.

The bolero genre, meanwhile, has been the preferred venue for feminist interventions throughout the twentieth century. Bolero singers include artists such as the Texan star Chelo Silva, who sang about broken hearts, dramatic rumors, and sexual innuendo in the 1950s and more recently, Paquita la del Barrio who uses the bolero to channel her “feminist rage” to denounce lovers’ betrayals (Foster 2000). Songs popularized by Paquita—as she is popularly known—generally expose male privilege and men’s social, moral, and physical shortcomings. Her boleros insist on passion, erotica, and betrayal, and, as such, provide critical counter-stories featuring “nonnormative gender and sexual subjectivities [that] disrupt the conventional borders of canonical Chicano music narratives, offering critical counter-herstories that complicate accounts of gender and sexuality in the borderlands” (Vargas 2008, 173). Many *contestación* performers attempt to emulate Paquita’s sly and somber performance style and the cutting lyrics that have won her a passionate following amongst everyday Latinas in México, the United States, and beyond.

Another women-centered music genre is the “domestic drama” (Barrera 2012) popularized by the Texan Lydia Mendoza in the 1940s and 1950s. These songs comment on women, work, and marriage. Their popularity during these decades reflected the increased personal freedoms of women in the United States and the growing societal anxieties because of those very freedoms. As Yolanda Broyles González (2001) has noted, the repertoire popularized by Lydia Mendoza across her nearly sixty years as a recording and touring musician de talón—singing and commingling with a principal audience of working poor—“are important feminist blueprints that deeply engaged (and continue to engage) our thinking about gender and sexual relations” (189).

More recently the self-identified “Chicana jalisciense” banda diva Jenni Rivera, continued this tradition by standing up for “malandrinas” and “mujeres chocalosas.” Rivera sang and spoke out on issues such as domestic violence, divorce, and women’s self-image (Cobo 2013; “La Divina” 2015). Rivera’s songs convey undisciplined desires or “testimonios of gender nonconformity” (Vargas 2014, 286) that appealed to a new generation of Chicanas and mexicanas alike. In the transnational US-México radio and music industry, which has been dominated by male perspectives, male-centered stories, and sexist heteronormative narratives, the music of artists such as Chelo Silva, Paquita la del Barrio, Lydia Mendoza, and Jenni Rivera represent important oppositional voices. Each of them is an *hocicona*, as defined by Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz (2011) as a woman who rebels against “patriarchal norms of decency, decorum and language in order to continue to voice her demands” often risking “censorship and physical violence when her words are considered offensive or distasteful in nature” (107). Urquijo-Ruiz goes on to note that the term derives from the Spanish noun “hocico,” meaning an animal’s snout, placing an emphasis on the animal-like, or unruly speech that grinds against the social and political norms of patriarchy.

YouTube contestación performers are also *hociconas*, but with a cybernetic twist. As such, they are also representative of the new generation of “Xican@s,” as foretold by Dora Ramirez-Dhoore (2005), who are versed in the lingua franca of the Internet and who are able to “write their bodies, minds, and identity while opening up a critical discussion about embodiment, which leads into the question of how Xican@s racialized and gendered bodies are perceived on the internet and elsewhere” (11). Xican@s in cyberspace create “a place for their bodies in cyberspace while promoting the use of Mestiza language that serves the Xican@ community specifically” (17). Responding critically to the language directed towards them, “Their bodies become the texts spectators read, and this in turn provides a site of discourse reality beginning to create new images of Xican@s in cyberspace” (17). Combining Urquijo-Ruiz’s concept of *hociconas* and drawing from Ramirez-Dhoore attention to cyberspace as a place for the exercise of a transformative agency for Xican@s, I understand contestación performers to embody “cyber-*hociconas*” for their use of language and bodily performance through cyberspace with the intent of opposing misogyny and creating a new transgressive discourse for women.

Cyber-*hociconas* operate through the semi-anonymous world of social media where participants or “people formally known as the audience” (Rosen 2012) have the ability to participate as producers and consumers and to interact with other participants through a variety of channels. On YouTube, users may respond to a video by creating another video or by leaving a comment on a video’s page. The anonymity of the Internet creates an environment where the regulation of behavior through social pressure is virtually nonexistent. This, in some cases, translates to cruel and sexist commentary against cyber-*hociconas*. “Trolling” messages—messages posted with the deliberate intent to cause harm—comment negatively on the performers’ physical appearance, weight, voice, intelligence, sexuality, and/or sexual attractiveness. Unlike stage performers who are often

surrounded by colleagues and fans, cyber-hociconas are more vulnerable to the cruelty of a virtual and anonymous audience. In response to this environment of scrutiny, *contestación* singers attempt to preempt these attacks through a careful performance of femininity reflected by their use of heavily layered make-up, carefully distributed locks of hair, modest or flirtatious attire, and carefully chosen domestic spaces that serve as the stage of their productions.

The *contestaciones* genre is novel in its use of social media as a public sphere—a common space outside traditional authority where members of a society meet to agree on matters of common interest (Taylor 2002). Online media, such as social media and video-sharing sites, are the preeminent public sphere of our current globalized and transnational reality. The conversations that take place through social media reflect and regulate social norms that are specific to shared cultural imaginaries, including those concerning the dynamics of romantic and sexual relationships. As such these conversations have the potential to shape popular attitudes and views. Rethinking the roots of women's trans-border subjectivity is the starting point for a new manifestation of Latina feminist empowerment, one that questions sexist gender norms in popular culture and utilizes new communication venues to establish a presence alongside mainstream voices, gaining exposure by association, while simultaneously countering misogynist narratives. Chela Sandoval (2000) understands the tactics of subjects in this insider/outsider position as part of a methodology of the oppressed. Specifically, the tactic of “differential mode of social movement and consciousness” (60) constitutes a survival skill for those on the margins of power. By adapting and adopting dominant forms of ideology and identity, US feminists of color are able to take an oppositional stand while working within oppressive institutions. This dynamic is also present in the iteration and performance of *contestaciones* when cyber-hociconas take dominant ideological structures and remobilize them to counter oppressive representations of women.

Normative gender roles in the Mexican cultural imaginary are greatly influenced by the historically hegemonic role of Catholic doctrine in Mexican society that posits women as subordinate to men and instates marriage and motherhood as women's most respected social roles. Men's ideal stereotype is that of the macho while women are socialized to become a *mujer abnegada* (Alegria 2005). The *mujer abnegada* is trained to be subservient to others in the household, especially to the men. Her dignity and her sexuality are one and the same and so she is condemned to a long chain of sexual abstinences. Virginity, fidelity, and frigidity confine her at each stage in life. The macho, on the other hand, is first and foremost an egotistical creature. All societal structures accommodate for his greatest predilection which is in the free exercise of his sexuality. He not only has to have a variety of women but also advertise his conquests and monogamy is deemed for him both impossible and demeaning. The macho subject is self-centered, he sees women as obliged to provide him with comfort and pleasure and is expected to express his manhood by pleasuring his body in excess through drinking, wenching, and the like (Rincón 1971).

In addition to Catholic doctrine, certain ideas of femininity linked to pre-Hispanic origins also play a role in the Mexican cultural imaginary. Namely, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* have paradoxically served to both normalize and contest masculine domination. *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is by the most conservative accounts presumed to represent a passive mother, a mere receptor of her children's pain (Paz 1996). But *Chicanas* and *mexicanas* have reinterpreted her as a "working Goddess" (Cotera 2016) who advocates and labors for her children. Likewise, *Malinalli Tenepac/Doña Marina*, translator and mistress to Hernán Cortés, has been famously written into the ultimate abject subject and traitor as *La Chingada* (Paz) but rescued by *Chicanas* and *mexicanas* who recognize her as a remarkable woman who broke



through the power structures of her time to become a spokesperson and leader (Romero and Nolacea Harris 2005). Finally, La Llorona is not only the spirit of the broken and remorseful mother Malinche, but is also reinterpreted as a wailing advocate against injustice (Alarcón 2002; Cotera 2016). Contestaciones and narcodespechos, as we will now see, work with the more conservative notions of gender normativity in the Mexican cultural imaginary.

### **Duermo tranquila: Challenges to Male Excess and Macho Womanizing**

One of the themes celebrated in narcodespechos is a macho's supposed sexual prowess that prevents him from staying faithful to one romantic partner. This theme is heard in several songs including "Sin evidencias" by Banda Sinaloense MS de Sergio Lizárraga.<sup>1</sup> In "Sin evidencias" the narrator boasts of his ability to fool his romantic partner with a repertoire of excuses that attempt to conceal the evidence of his illicit love affairs:

Como de costumbre voy de madrugada  
Con un ligero aliento de un buen Buchanan's  
Traigo la camisa toda perfumada  
Pa' ver que nuevo pretexto ahora me salva

No debo dejar ni una evidencia  
Mi experiencia puede más que mi conciencia  
Siempre busco la manera de decirle  
Y me cree lo que le digo a pesar de mentirle

In the final verse he assures her "duerme tranquila mi amor." He is proud of his ability to successfully deceive and pacify his female partner, yet he is conscious that his actions are not socially sanctioned as evidenced in the verse "mi experiencia puede más que mi conciencia." Yet, his ability to overrule feelings of

guilt and remorse in order to freely exercise his sexual desire affirms his status as a macho subject. A scene from the music video affirms that this male sexual adventurism is facilitated by the male-only membership that characterizes the majority of mainstream banda music groups. The narrator is seen arriving at a nightclub where a group of friends wait for him with several bottles of liquor and scantily dressed women. He is later seen taking a new conquest through the threshold of a hotel room where they begin to make love. The existence of a narrative that privileges the masculine construction of meaning condones, in this case, male sexual adventurism, excessive consumption of alcohol, and infidelity. The more disturbing part of this song, however, is that its lullaby-like tempo and melody makes for the easy consumption of its misogynist messages by men and women alike as evidenced in YouTube videos of live performances where women in the audience are seen singing along to this song.

Two different contestaciones parody “Sin evidencias.” One, credited to YouTube user SoyBetsy, suggests that she is not as naïve as she will have him believe, she is merely putting on the expected angry act:

Como de costumbre me hago la enojada  
 Mientras él me cuenta donde andaba  
 Piensa que de veras soy tan despistada  
 Y no se imagina quien tuve en su cama  
 No debe asustarte tanto mi imprudencia  
 Aunque mi apariencia sea de inocencia

The contestación goes on to describe that while he is out womanizing, she seduces one of his friends. She takes a jab at her partner’s deteriorating physique and finally concludes, “duermo tranquila, mi amor” in opposition to his directive, “duerme tranquila, mi amor.” SoyBetsy’s version upholds that

“boys will be boys,” that is, that men are naturally incapable of monogamy. Her version of feminine empowerment suggests that women should also be unfaithful, thus gaining benefit by inverting the expected gender norms. However, by continuing to perform the role of a docile and submissive *mujer abnegada*, she may remain the blameless victim thus liberating herself from feelings of remorse and allowing her to fulfill her own romantic and sexual desires. By insulting the male partner’s physique, SoyBetsy also inverts the cliché whereby women are always judged by their looks, whereas men are not. This contestación does not seek to portray women as morally superior to men, but to acquit women of public and private obligations to be morally superior to men. In this contestación the woman remains a *mujer abnegada* to the public eye, but privately she supersedes her partner in her ability to manipulate established gender norms to her advantage. This model of emancipation, however, reduces women’s romantic and sexual desires to the engagement in forbidden sexual adventures, leaving out the values of companionship, mutual respect, and love. Thus, the possibilities for a transgressive feminine subjectivity are limited to the indulging in carefully veiled hostile acts that simulate masculine aggression but do not necessarily challenge the logic of a sexist gender binary.

A different contestación to “Sin evidencias” posted by YouTube user Karitoflak begins with introductory remarks that speak to the relevance of social media as a platform for social and political struggle. Shielding her body behind an acoustic guitar, the young Sinaloan singer speaks to her audience, “Me ha ido más o menos con los comentarios, pero como son comentarios malos de hombres, se me resbalan. Lo que sea que venga de un hombre malo para mí se me resbala.” Karitoflak recognizes that her videos provoke aggressive commentary authored by “hombres malos.” Similarly, her contestación places the female narrator on higher moral ground by ridiculing her romantic partners’ behavior and dismissing him from her life altogether:

He doesn't smell like the high-end liquor Buchanan's, but rather like cahuamas (forty-ounce beers), his shirt is splattered in vomit, and he looks drugged. Her final send-off reads,

Te vas a que te cuide tu mamá  
 Aunque ni ella te puede soportar  
 Tus mentiras ya no quiero escuchar  
 Mejor ve con la zorra que ahora traes  
 Le dices que te ponga un collar  
 Pa' que no te le vayas a soltar  
 Lárgate ya por favor

In referencing the care of other women, this contestación maintains that women's social function centers on her reproductive labor as nurturer and caretaker in the private space of home. In this way men are social orphans always in need of securing feminine affect and care, but in order to earn this care he must act in accordance to certain expectations. Hence, the level of care that a woman may provide him reflects his social worth as evidenced in the verses, "Le dices que te ponga un collar/ Pa' que no te le vayas a soltar". His "wild" behavior warrants that he should be leashed like a dog. Interestingly, this version does not focus on the man's infidelity but rather on his other offensive behavior. He is unfaithful to the presupposed norms of decency that would rightfully earn him feminine care.

However problematic, both contestaciones do oppose male domination and explore possibilities of agency. SoyBetsy's version focuses on the breakdown of monogamy and proposes that women manipulate heteronormative expectations to reverse dominance through the skillful performance of feminine naiveté while Karitoflak's contestación centers on the breakdown of mutual responsibilities as expected per

social norms and proposes feminine empowerment within the exercise of established expectations of a domestic femininity. Consequently, both models of empowerment are limited to a defensive stance that is complacent with the moral order established by male domination because neither condemns the macho womanizing norm directly, nor do they propose an alternative model for a morally superior masculine behavior. *Narcodespechos*, on the other hand, often do propose idealistic models of desired femininity, as observed in songs that comment on a woman's worth.

### **Ni que fuera bruta: Assertions of Women's Worth**

"Cabecita dura" by La Arrolladora Banda El Limón de René Camacho describes a woman who proves to be unworthy of a man's love because she is insincere, a gold digger, capricious, vain, and ultimately unmarriageable. There are at least another four songs with this theme, all of which have merited contestaciones.<sup>2</sup> "Cabecita dura" berates a woman for being controlling, unjustly jealous, imposing, complicated, immature, and stubborn. To punish her, the male narrator takes back his promises of a church wedding, a honeymoon in Greece, and of a family, reserving them for a worthier woman:

No será contigo la boda en la iglesia  
Ni tampoco la luna de miel en Grecia  
Eres complicada, eres inmadura  
No entiendes razones, ya no tienes lucha  
No será contigo, cabecita dura

The music video portrays a sequence of events where a woman is caught cheating on her partner and he, in turn, plots to dramatically end the relationship on their wedding day. At the climax of the video, he is seen walking away from the altar at the moment when he is asked to state his vows. In a final sepia-colored scene, the narrator, who was seen earlier enjoying his

daily routine as a bus driver in Tijuana, now somberly awaits to illegally cross the US-México border with a group of anxious looking men. His new life as an undocumented worker is no doubt the fault of the unworthy “cabecita dura.”

Reinforcing the heterosexist notion that a woman’s ultimate goal is to be married, the narrator in this song employs the supposed ultimate mechanism of machista revenge by abandoning a woman at the altar. Yet, in the end he is not the victor but again a victim of the unworthy woman as she is implicitly blamed for his self-imposed exile to the United States. As an undocumented migrant he becomes a residual non-subject condemned to social forms of nonexistence. In this portrayal, he is liberated from personal responsibility in losing his social agency and political sovereignty. In this way, the unworthy woman unfairly represents all the larger structural forces at play that lead men to emigrate to the United States. His advantage is twofold. First, he engages an exercise of sovereign privilege by objectifying the bride as a non-subject who is reduced in an act of public shame. Then, he reappears as a worthy, blameless victim in exile as an undocumented migrant worker through no fault of his own. Focusing on the experience of migration from a man’s perspective also makes invisible the migrant experiences of women, denying their possible agency as transnational subjects.

Cendy Valeria’s contestación to “Cabecita dura” follows a model of empowerment via moral superiority. In a condescending tone, she declares that he was simply immature and so she has moved on to marry someone else:

Está muy bonita tu idea hermosa  
 Ya olvida lo nuestro y ve busca a tu esposa  
 Esos sueños tuyos que tanto has querido  
 Tengo disfrutados junto a mi marido  
 Digas lo que quieras, tú no me convences

Sigue hablando no me importa lo que pienses  
Tus palabras que no sirven de alivio  
Para tu estrategia de sentirte vivo  
No será contigo, niño inmaduro

She was able to grow and mature from a relationship gone sour to then articulate a newer model for femininity in the social discourse, one more capable of representing her true potential. She does not dwell in the details of the failed relationship or resort to insults. Evidence of her maturity is the fact that she has moved on to a blissful marriage where she thrives in her role of wife. Again, this construction of female empowerment remains imbricated within traditional gender discourses of power limiting women to traditional roles. Her worthiness is based on her ability to ascend to the level of mother/wife, thus gaining social status through playing the prescribed feminine role within a normative heterosexual relationship.

Despite these challenges to patriarchy, Valeria's act is clearly performed with the male gaze in mind. She wears a red hooded sweatshirt, white tank top, heavy eye make-up, a lip piercing, and bright red lipstick. She uses a pop filter over the microphone that hides her mouth for the majority of the song, but she pulls away from the filter during musical intermissions to flirt with the camera by batting her eyelashes and shyly pursing her lips. This performance conveys the idea that she is an available romantic candidate, but also a "respectable woman" who knows just how much to reveal.

Rosa Elena Chavez's contestación, "Ni que fuera bruta," offers a different model more akin to Paquita la del Barrio's "feminist rage" (Foster 2000). Chavez, a middle-aged woman in a neatly decorated living room, maintains a somber expression, holds her head high, and avoids looking into the camera;

her disdain for the offending man is too great to deserve eye contact. She lists his many defects:

Eres un borracho, te quedas dormido  
 Eres un idiota, nunca te he querido  
 Contigo no salgo ni a tomar cervezas  
 Mucho menos pienses te acompañe a Grecia  
 Eres dominante y eres un machista  
 Quieres una esclava, no me cabe duda  
 Contigo no sigo . . . ni que fuera bruta

The tone of Chávez's *contestación* clearly aligns this song to the tradition of *canciones de despecho*. She is not "bruta" or stupid, but only comes to this realization, and to reject his machista ways, after he ends the relationship. Nonetheless, she asserts an expectation for gender equality in romantic relationships rarely seen in other *contestaciones* by insisting that a man should not ask a woman to change her ways, nor should he expect that she should indulge him in his many vices. To be a deserving man, and to deserve the beautiful family he desires, he will first have to admit to and change his machista ways.

These two *contestaciones* propose a model for a desired masculinity that rejects machismo and qualities that prove men to be "immature." Exaggerated masculinities result in an unviable model of male superiority even within heterosexist norms. By focusing on the attributes of men, these *contestaciones* offer a model of feminine empowerment through the exercise of agency in determining a man's worth and by articulating desirable modes of masculinity. Yet they also uphold the idea that women are motivated by the attainment of a blissful marriage for a positive recognition within society thus limiting their defense of women to the restrictive parameters of the "virgin-mother/whore dichotomy" (Anzaldúa 1987; Alarcón 1987; Castillo 1994; Lara 2008).



**“Hay que tener valor”: Affirmations of Women’s Sexuality**

The gender politics in contestaciones extend into expressions of sexuality and sexual relations. A particularly violent and sexually suggestive song, “El tierno se fue” by Calibre 50, reduces the female sexual partner to the role of torture victim. Sexual roles as defined by this male-centered narrative normalize the exercise of a hyper-violent masculinity. The narrator describes his sexual fantasy where he is completely in control forcing a woman to perform oral and anal sex. The woman’s role is to scream his name, cry, scratch his back, say “enough,” and beg for mercy. In an intermission the lead singer states, “Y esto es para ti chiquita, te va a doler, pero te va a gustar.” In a final act of aggression, the song ends with the narrator stating that he has been recording everything on his cell phone (presumably without her consent). The cell phone recording adds another layer of violence. The mediation of the video screen—as featured in the music video—manifests the male gaze where, “pleasure in looking is split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 2006, 346). We witness both a male as an active agent serving as director, producer, and consumer of an erotic video, and a female who participates in a passive manner as object of desire to be consumed physically in the moment and as an erotic image to be visually consumed in the future.

In response to this song, Maritza Pérez performs a contestación that closely resembles the original storyline. Unfortunately, Pérez, who looks very young and at times uncomfortable with her song’s lyrics, offers a complete surrender:

Yo también te diré  
Lo que oculto mi amor en la intimidad  
Ya no me va a importar  
Lo fuerte que grito por tu intensidad

Que oigas mis gemidos, me voy a entregar  
Te doy una idea de lo que va a pasar

Mirroring Calibre 50's lyrics, she will scream his name, cry, beg for more, and become more aroused when he uses his cell phone to record. The only act of agency for the woman portrayed in this contestación is the guidance of his hand to give her pleasure. Not surprisingly, comments posted to this contestación are mostly negative. Many comment negatively on Pérez's physical appearance and her singing ability, others insult her intelligence and call her "vulgar," which connotes not only being lowly or tasteless but also lewd. One commentator posted,

Hay que tener valor, primero no veo la contestación, sólo una aceptación, y la neta te oyes media sorry, no se logró la rima ni la intención, se oye vulgar igual que la versión de Calibre 50 . . .<sup>3</sup>

This comment highlights a salient critique of contestaciones as a feminist methodology; writing from a woman's perspective does not necessarily equate to an empowering or transgressive expression. Pérez's contestación clearly accepts the passive role and normalizes a violent male sexual dominance.

A more subversive contestación by Yanet Beltrán boasts a feminine sexual prowess that surpasses that of men. She begins by promising to live up to his PlayboyTV inspired fantasies. She promises to tie him to the bed and let her imagination run wild. She will direct him to give her oral pleasure and there will be no time to touch his phone:

Ahorita te aclaro que la monja se fue  
Con látigo y esposas te la voy a . . .  
Amarrar de la cama, besarte hacerte adivinar

Que rincón de tu cuerpo te voy a tocar  
Abrirme de piernas, acercarme a tu cara  
Mientras paras tu labios y me das una ma . . .  
. . . nera distinta de acariciar

Here, both sexes are active participants in lovemaking. She directs the fantasy but references his enjoyment as well. Moreover, there is no violent language, violent threats, or forced sexual acts. This *contestación* appears to be one of feminine gender positionality by which the subject is empowered through sex and exercises agency by virtue of controlling the narrative of the sexual act. It substitutes the violent sex described in Calibre 50's song with erotic bondage and dominance/submission play. Nevertheless, her sexual dominance continues to service a masculine fantasy that does not substantively modify traditional heterosexist normativity. The format of this expression, as a *contestación*, already situates the female performer in an objectified position as opposed to playing a proactive role in defining female sexuality. One is left to wonder what would be a form of female sexuality in this cultural imaginary without references to PlayboyTV or other heterosexual male-directed erotic symbols as referents. Because the majority of contemporary Mexican regional music is dominated by male artists, it is very difficult to glean a female perspective on sexuality and romantic relationships that is free of the male oriented expressions of sexual desire.

What is at stake in these two different *contestaciones* is the very definition of female sexuality; a submissive sexuality that gives into male sexual aggression within traditional norms of heteronormativity versus one that creates the illusion of female empowerment by asserting her own desire and sexual gratification while still servicing masculine desire. This brings to light the problem of getting to a genuine expression of feminine sexual desire through popular music where there are so few examples written or commissioned by women in comparison to the number authored by men.

### Conclusion

Social media, as I have shown, provide a valuable tool with which cyber-hociconas can attempt to work towards social, cultural, economic, and political equality by circumventing the male-centered entertainment industry to reach their audience. This discursive space proves to be a new source for theorizing on the cultural production of transnational Latina and Chicana communities. Still, the extent to which online media can serve as a medium to promote female-centered narratives in the Mexican regional music genre is yet to be seen. As of the writing of this article, Yanet Beltrán's contestación to "El tierno se fue" has been viewed over 1,070,000 times on YouTube. According to her profile on reverbnation.com, a music streaming and marketing site for emerging artists, Beltrán ranked as the top national artist in August 2015 and her songs are played in Mexican radio stations per listeners' requests. In comparison, Calibre 50's official YouTube post of "El tierno se fue" has been viewed over forty-two million times and yields over fifty-one thousand search results including karaoke versions, live performances, guitar and accordion tutorials, cover interpretations, and even cartoon parodies. Yanet Beltrán's reach, although impressive, is limited as compared to all-male group artists promoted by the transnational Mexican regional music industry. The same conclusion can be extended to all other contestaciones.

In a culture that is increasingly violent towards women, both symbolically and in the real conditions of physical violence and sanctioned murder that are currently experienced in areas governed by narcocultura, women's cultural production accomplishes important cultural work attempting to cope, negotiate, and reject a victimized subjectivity. Limited by their reactionary role, the attempted subversions of heteronormative roles in contestaciones come short of a radical feminist critique. Proposals include simulating aggressive masculine behavior, maintaining a supposed moral superiority in the exercise

of the domestic role, and accepting male sexual dominance by privileging different degrees of masculine versions of desire. These models for female empowerment fail to imagine femininity outside heterosexist stereotypes and very rarely do they give specifics on what an ideal masculinity should be.

As a transgressive musical genre, *contestaciones* offers for the possibility of the expression of queer perspectives. In my research I did not find any such examples, but this would be another potential application that could possibly make a more transformative interruption of patriarchy. Although *contestaciones* fall short of transgressive feminist interventions, in the sense that they do not advocate for social justice or reject gender binaries altogether, they do speak against the more offensive misogynistic narratives of a violent male-centered culture that is currently promoted by the mainstream Spanish language transnational entertainment industry. Given the historical invisibilization of women's perspectives and artistic contributions in transnational Mexican culture and the current state of heightened violence towards women as evidenced by the feminicidios along the US-México border, *contestaciones* deserve to be recognized as models of women's empowerment within the tradition of transgressive Mexican, Latina, and Chicana art forms. In the landscape of *narcocultura*, women's attempts at articulating a voice for women's empowerment, even if imperfect or incomplete, deserve our attention as we look to ways in which women enact survival.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Also in “Te estoy engañando con otra” and “Callejero y mujeriego” by Calibre 50.

<sup>2</sup> These are: “Ni que estuvieras tan buena” by Calibre 50, “La llamada de mi ex” by La Arrolladora Banda El Limón, “Y ahora resulta” by Voz de Mando, and “La doble cara” by Banda Carnaval.

<sup>3</sup> Spelling and punctuation marks are corrected for clarity.

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