

ROSA BLANCO CANO: *Cuerpos disidentes del México imaginado. Cultura, género, etnia y nación más allá del proyecto posrevolutionario*. Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2012.

Using the framework of “dissident bodies,” Rosa Blanco Cano explores the ways that contemporary women artists have literally and metaphorically deployed their bodies to challenge received mythologies about monolithic nationalism, sanctified motherhood, and tradition-bound indigeneity. Starting from challenges to regime legitimacy in the 1960s and continuing into the first decade of the twenty-first century, Blanco Cano demonstrates the persistent imbrication of politics and cultural production to show how these artist activists identify and transgress what José Manuel Valenzuela Arce dubs “cultural frontiers.”

Blanco Cano shows us a decidedly anti-nationalist world — some protagonists have a lexicon heavy with English words and see themselves as members of a cosmopolitan community that disregards political borders, while others belong to decidedly regional, ethnically specific communities that resist Mexico City’s hegemony and may identify more closely with migrant networks than with national compatriots. She states in her introduction that the book “seeks to signal key moments and figures in the construction of interpretive spaces and cultural intervention for women framed within distinct geographies of (trans) national Mexico” (30-31). The book’s principal actors cross borders, collaborate with expatriates, and borrow liberally from cultural practices outside Mexico.

Cuerpos disidentes makes an important contribution to the significant, multi-disciplinary body of literature that has shown the limitations of Mexican nationalism on the ground. Indeed, as early as Lesley Byrd Simpson’s 1941 environmentally driven *Many Mexicos*, scholars have questioned the legitimacy of a unified Mexican identity or experience. The past forty-five years of revisionist and post-revisionist scholarship has shown how official efforts to cultivate Mexican nationalism often met with resistance among geographically and socially marginalized populations. Blanco Cano examines cultural dissidence among Mexican feminists who use humor or candor to highlight the hypocrisies of Mexican patriarchy and the *pluriculturalidad* of gendered identification.

Following the introduction, *Cuerpos disidentes* is divided into four chapters, each focusing principally on one artist or team of artists, often incorporating a comparative frame. The first chapter examines the group Polvo de Gallina Negra, formed by Maris Bustamente and Mónica Mayer, which demonstrates the brazen, often sardonic humor of 1970s feminism and its particular critique of the conflation of womanhood with motherhood. As Mayer explains, “We formed *¡Madres!* as a way of integrating life and art for which our first step was to become pregnant ourselves to understand the topic in depth. . . . Since then, we

presented ourselves as the only group that believed in birth as art” (54). Blanco Cano includes reproductions of scripts and artwork to compellingly capture the group’s parodic voice that allowed them, as Edward McCaughan has indicated, “to break with the seriousness of the heroic left and solemn feminism” (47).

Chapter two continues in its attention to satire and irony with examinations of Astrid Hadad’s cabaret performances and Carmen Boullosa’s novel *Duerme* to show the eponymous dissident bodies challenging nationalist historical narratives. Blanco Cano offers readers a sense of Hadad’s clever playfulness and queer sensibility that makes her work “not only feminist but also contestatory to any discourse that categorizes individuals: the constant use of satire impedes, in all her representations, the perpetuation of the models she seeks to subvert” (82).

The fourth chapter discusses how the activist theater of the *chiapanecan* Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA), established in 1994 by Isabel Juárez Espinosa and Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, presents a simultaneous critique of neoliberalism and the romanticized invocation of *usos y costumbres*. FOMMA offers classes in baking, management, accounting, literacy, and (surprisingly) the Spanish language; it uses theater to advocate for a “contemporary feminism that breaks with divisions between theory and social practice to conceive of theatrical work as a space of personal transformation in diverse Maya communities” (123). Although Blanco Cano laments that FOMMA’s work has not received more critical attention, she applauds the collective for having broken the “long and painful silence of the Mayan women of Chiapas from more than five centuries of oppression of the first peoples of Latin America” (156).

The final chapter considers two Oaxacan visual artists productive during the same period as FOMMA: the Zapotec photographer Martha Toledo and the Chatina filmmaker Yolanda Cruz. Blanco Cano explores how their “aesthetic dissidence” troubles visual conventions in representations of Juchitecan women and the binational community living between California and Oaxaca. These two artists, Blanco Cano explains, “conceive of bodies dissenting from the stable notions not only of the woman in Zapotec, Mixtec, and Chatino culture but also of the woman in the Mexican nation as well as in the transnational contexts inhabited by Oaxacan migrant communities” (198).

Blanco Cano draws upon the conceptual frameworks of Jean Franco, Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhaba, and Carlos Monsiváis and acknowledges other intellectual debts to Chicano and queer scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Judith Butler. Surprisingly missing from this roster are engagements with performance theorists — most notably Diana Taylor, mentioned only for having conducted interviews with several artists — and decolonial feminists such as María Lugones who have covered much of the same ground. In particular, Taylor’s comparison

of archived and ephemeral performances seems better suited to the materials Blanco Cano has chosen to examine than Anderson's print-centric analysis.

Although I very much enjoyed the opportunity to read these four essays together, I found two elements of Blanco Cano's analyses a bit disconcerting. First, reading these four chapters in sequence leaves the impression that only Mexico City *mestizas* can assume parodic, ironic, or satirical postures; the latter two chapters portray southeastern indigenous women engaged in earnest social justice movements. Among the many things that the Zapatistas' international prominence has taught us has been the prevalence of humor among indigenous movements as well. Second, for the purpose of demonstrating dissidence, Blanco Cano often relies upon straw-man representations of scholarship, particularly history and anthropology, and in places offers distortions. She asserts that the nationalist postrevolutionary film industry promoted the gendered dyad of the abnegating Virgen de Guadalupe and the promiscuous, traitorous Malinche, but this dichotomy long predates the revolution. Her characterization of Mexican historical studies as nationalist and homogenizing badly misrepresents the historical scholarship of the past several decades, which asserts that history "almost always rests on the necessity to legitimate a governmental regime and not to respond to the plurality of citizens" (76). Although it becomes clear that by "history" Blanco Cano means officially sanctioned textbooks and nineteenth-century historians such as Vicente Riva Palacio, she might acknowledge that the material for these performances came itself from critical historical scholarship.

At just over two hundred pages, the book is a reasonable length for classroom use, but it does assume both a reasonable background in Mexican history and an understanding of the texts and performances under consideration. Although the book includes ample visual evidence and Blanco Cano offers rich descriptions of the texts and performances, classroom discussions would work best if individual chapters were paired with the material under consideration.

Jocelyn Olcott

Duke University

SANDRA MCGEE DEUTSCH: *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Sandra McGee Deutsch has produced a significant contribution in *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955*, a moving and beautiful book assessing how women pursued meaningful lives in difficult circumstances. This study deepens our understanding of women's