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The Mother Figure in the Mexican Cartoon *Madre Santa* of Ricardo Peláez and Eric Proaño Muciño

[English Version]

La Figura de Madre en la Historieta Mexicana Madre Santa de
Ricardo Peláez y Eric Proaño Muciño

A figura da mãe na tirinhas mexicana Madre Santa de
Ricardo Peláez e Eric Proaño Muciño

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Abstract

Objective: to determine the way in which the mother figure is represented in the independent Mexican cartoon *Madre Santa*, created by the cartoonist Eric Proaño Muciño "Frik" and drawn by the illustrator Ricardo Peláez Goycochea. **Methodology:** a qualitative approach takes up the paradigm of indicial inferences proposed by Carlo Ginzburg to identify details in the image and narrative of the story, taking into account narration and iconography. With the purpose of unfolding the story, we used the proposal of

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Jenaro Talens, who resumes from Charles Morris the three levels of meaning of the sign: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. The aforementioned allowed the access of a first level of interpretation of the primary source and facilitated the identification of clues in both its image and narrative. **Results:** it was found that the cartoon *Madre Santa*, created within the countercultural movement of Mexican comics, satires the vision of the selfless Mexican mother. In its representation, the authors dramatize the generosity and altruism of the mother when relating her to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but, in a parallel way, they play with irony when representing her as a proprietor of transgressive and violent actions, which leads her to reproduce her captivity. **Conclusions:** *Madre Santa* was created at a time when the opening of frontiers of the neoliberal model introduced new ways of creating, narrating, and producing comic books; this expanded the vision of local creators. This cartoon makes a satire of the image of selfless motherhood in Mexico, which, however, reproduces the notion of the divided image with which the woman in Mexico has been typified.

Keywords: Cartoon; Comic; Mother; Mother-wife; Counterculture; Religion.

Resumen

Objetivo: determinar la manera en la que se representa la figura de la madre en la historieta independiente mexicana *Madre Santa*, creada por el historietista Eric Proaño Muciño “Frik” y dibujada por el ilustrador Ricardo Peláez Goycochea. **Metodología:** se partió de un enfoque cualitativo que retoma el paradigma de inferencias indiciales propuesto por Carlo Ginzburg para identificar detalles en la imagen y narrativa de la historieta, tomando en cuenta narración e iconografía. Con la finalidad de desdoblar el relato, se utilizó la propuesta de Jenaro Talens, quien retoma de Charles Morris, los tres niveles de significación del signo: sintáctico, semántico y pragmático. Lo anterior permitió acceder a un primer nivel de interpretación de la fuente primaria y facilitó la identificación de indicios en la imagen y narrativa de la misma. **Resultados:** se encontró que la historieta *Madre Santa*, creada dentro del movimiento contracultural del cómic mexicano, realiza una sátira a la visión de la madre abnegada mexicana. En su representación, los autores dramatizan la generosidad y altruismo de la madre al relacionarla con la virgen de Guadalupe, pero, de manera paralela, juegan con la ironía al representarla como dueña de acciones transgresoras y violentas, que la llevan a reproducir su cautiverio. **Conclusiones:** *Madre Santa* fue creada en una época en la que la apertura de fronteras propia del modelo neoliberal, introdujo nuevas formas de crear, narrar, producir consumir historietas; esto amplió la visión de los creadores locales. Esta historieta realiza una sátira a la visión de maternidad abnegada en

México, la cual, sin embargo, reproduce la noción de la imagen escindida con la que se ha tipificado a la mujer en México.

Palabras-clave: Historieta; Cómic; Madre; Madresposa; Contracultura; Religión.

Resumo

Objetivo: determinar a forma como a figura da mãe é representada nas tirinhas animadas mexicanas independentes *Madre Santa*, criadas pelo cartunista Eric Proaño Muciño "Frik" e desenhadas pelo ilustrador Ricardo Peláez Goycochea. **Metodologia:** partimos de uma abordagem qualitativa que retoma o paradigma das inferências indiciais propostas por Carlo Ginzburg para identificar detalhes na imagem e narrativa da história, levando em conta a narração e a iconografia. Para desdobrar a história, utilizamos a proposta de Jenaro Talens, que tira de Charles Morris os três níveis de significação do signo: sintático, semântico e pragmático. Isso permitiu o acesso a um primeiro nível de interpretação da fonte primária e facilitou a identificação de pistas na imagem e na narrativa da mesma. **Resultados:** constatou-se que o desenho animado *Madre Santa*, criada dentro do movimento contracultural dos quadrinhos mexicanos, satiriza a visão da abnegada mãe mexicana. Em sua representação, os autores dramatizam a generosidade e o altruísmo da mãe ao relacioná-la com a virgem de Guadalupe, mas, de forma paralela, brincam com a ironia de representá-la como amante de ações violentas e transgressivas, que a levam a reproduzir seu cativeiro. **Conclusões:** *Madre Santa* foi criada numa época em que a abertura das fronteiras do modelo neoliberal introduzia novas formas de criar, narrar, e produzir; Isso ampliou a visão dos criadores locais. Esta tirinha faz uma sátira sobre a visão da maternidade abnegada no México, que, no entanto, reproduz a noção da imagem fragmentada com a qual a mulher no México tem sido tipificada.

Palavras - chave: Tirinha; Mãe; Mãesposa; Contracultura; Religião.

Introduction

This article argues that the Mexican cartoon *Madre Santa*, created by the cartoonist Eric Proaño Muciño "Frik", with drawings by illustrator Ricardo Peláez Goycochea for the anthology *Fuego Lento* (1998), satires the archetype of the selfless Mexican mother. In its representation, the authors dramatize the generosity and altruism of the mother when relating her to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but, in a parallel way, they play with irony when representing her as a proprietor of transgressive and violent actions, which leads her to reproduce her captivity.

Madre Santa is an independent comic strip which tells a short, self-contained story about a Mexican woman, a family mother, who has to go through hardships to raise her children after the death of her husband. One day, after she has accidentally eaten her son's hallucinogenic mushrooms, she thinks that she is having a vision of the Virgin talking to her. Her fame, which is a product of the supposed Mariophany, and her rebellion against her bosses in the factory in which she works, provokes a revolt that ends in an explosion. After which, she, in shock, hits her son until he either senseless or dead.

This cartoon was a self-published publication for the anthology *Fuego Lento* in 1998; it was presented in letter-size format with colored covers and black and white interiors. *Madre Santa* inaugurated this anthology, which included other stories from the same authors. Because it is a cartoon of a countercultural and alternative nature, it was aimed at "a faithful, demanding public with high expectations of reading, but a minority by definition" (Peláez, 2002, p.72). *Madre Santa* is an icon of countercultural publications that began in the nineties and has several reissues. It was published in the independent comic magazine *Gallito Comics*, a watershed¹ that opened the path towards to the alternative cartoon in Mexico (Priego, 2002).

Although the Mexican comic book has always allowed adult reading and has gone beyond an audience of children and juveniles (Camacho, 2013), the author's comic movement, in which the creators of *Madre Santa* were inserted, brought to light complex, mature, critical, and satirical topic. The stories were located in their immediate urban environment (Mexico City) and aimed to make visible their particularities and problems from the point of view of the authors: "it is intended to make a story that requires everything and demands a thoroughness of the audience well above the national average in terms of the ability to decode languages in visual and literary messages" (Peláez, 2002, p. 66). Now, the bibliography reviewed that revolves around the cartoon in Mexico has two main

1 Watershed is a Mexican expression to indicate an event that marks a milestone or before and after.

branches: on the one hand, it is analyzed as an alienating and repetitive product in that it is a means by which the masses are manipulated; on the other hand, it is examined as a mode of expression and part of popular culture.

The first perspective belongs Irene Herner and her book *Mitos y monitos* (1979) in which the author makes an analysis of the mass production of comics in the seventies. Herner (1979) is influenced by the perspective of the Frankfurt School representing Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno who conceive mass media as a "genre that is characterized by imposing the logic of number and similarity over the particular" (Zubieta, 2000. p. 72)². Along the same line belong Tomás Serrano and Rocío Trejo, the authors of the book *La vida es una historieta. The role of comics in the daily life of young university students of Autonomía University of the State of Hidalgo* (Trejo and Serrano, 2001), who carried out case studies of university students who performed *cosplay*³ and were involved with anime. From their perspective, loneliness and a dysfunctional family leads young girls to alienate themselves through anime and animated series.

On the other hand, the authors who belong to the second branch are influenced by the counterculture, which during the nineties still persisted, and by popular culture as well. In this perspective, Aurrecoechea and Bartra (1988) study the cultural and social conditions that transformed the production of comics in the eighties and nineties. For Bartra (2002), Mexican comics emerged from humor and comedy; this approach is closely related to the idea of popular culture as the culture of the public square, the mood of the body, the carnival (Zubieta, 2000).

Influenced by the counterculture, Gantús (2014) proposes in the book, *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida historieta y la industria desalmada*, a series of articles in which he analyzes distinguished publications and includes contextual elements such as the role of the publishing industry and the social and governmental agencies, which regulated the production and distribution of comics in the second half of the twentieth century. One of its main proposals emphasizes that what collapsed in the nineties was only the industrial comic strip. For this reason, he stands out in the multiplicity of proposals that are still generated today (Gantús, 2014). In the same vein, there is Genaro Zalpa's investigation (2005), influenced by popular culture and the notion of *habitus* of Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *El mundo imaginario de la historieta*, he makes an analysis of the *Sensacionales*, published in the nineties, by way of the tools of narrative analysis;

2 To this approach also belong Dorfman and Mattelart (1972) with their book *Para leer al Pato Donald*.

3 Contraction of Costume Play consists of dressing up and acting as a character in manga, anime, movies or video games.

Zalpa emphasizes the existence of an audience that reinterprets, imagines, and recreates through what they read.

In the same approach, Harold E. Hinds and Charles M. Tatum are found. In their book, *La historieta mexicana en los años sesenta y setenta* (Hinds and Tatum, 2000), they analyzed the main comic strips published in Mexico in the seventies, and they remain in the middle of both branches because, despite emphasizing the American influence as a form of domination and cultural imperialism, these authors recognize the capacity for reinterpretation and restructuring of the public and the Mexican creators (Hinds and Tatum, 2000).

Due to the orientation proposed by this work, this article adheres to the second position, influenced by popular culture and cultural studies, which analyze the story as a mode of expression and accept the multiplicity of proposals that arise from it. However, the previous review makes it clear that there are no case studies from this approach that address the perspective of gender; therefore, carrying out a work of this nature is an innovative contribution.

Methodology

This article is based on an interpretative-qualitative paradigm, which seeks to produce a type of knowledge based on the interpretation and in-depth analysis of a phenomenon through an information source. It follows that this article is placed under a process of understanding in which a social scientist can have access to knowledge from the recreation of what individuals think, believe, and feel. On this basis, a cut of the social of interest can be interpreted. Since language is the basis for the search for meaning, not as a means of communication but as the expression of the social, it is understood as its raw material and "The text, in its different forms, becomes the object of analysis" (Kornblit, 2016, p. 9).

The approaches of current qualitative methodologies require the unraveling of complex conceptual structures that are not always explicit; this represents an intensive and non-extensive work "with which the possibility of generalizing is lost" (Kornblit, 2016, p. 10). It is a type of approach that seeks to "capture the point of view of those who produce and live the social and cultural reality" (Gurdián, 2007, p.95), which implies a type of fragmented knowledge that interprets and analyzes the social reality transmitted by the source. Discursive practices build reality and collective understanding through language (Kornblit, 2016). In this sense, the starting point is the historical method where the source of information serves as a main element of the research process. This is because it does not seek to investigate the reality of the past as such but the vision that the source communicates (Pappe, 2001).

According to the aforementioned information, this study does not seek representative knowledge in terms of the number of cases to be analyzed, much less that the conclusions may be generalizable. On the contrary, the examination of the source as a case study is proposed to allow the understanding of a vision of life. Its aspects and everyday objects acts "as a particular basic scenario to understand the socio-cultural and historical reality" (Gurdián, 2007. p.95) of an individual who subjectivizes and interprets a series of social imaginaries.

In this article, we start from the paradigm of indicial inferences proposed by Carlo Ginzburg from the micro story, which constitutes an "interpretative method based on the secondary, in the marginal data that is considered revealing. Thus, the details that are usually considered unimportant, or simply trivial, 'bottoms' provide the key to having access to the highest realizations of the human spirit " (Ginzburg, 1986, p.143). It is an inductive paradigm based on the identification of details that open the way to understand broader contextual aspects that are present in the world view of the source being analyzed. In this way, *Madre Santa* is taken as the primary source that will be analyzed from the details present in the narrative and the image.

In the first part of this analysis, the semiotic- narrative proposal of Jenaro Talens (1980) is used, which utilizes elements of narratological analysis of Helena Beristán and Charles Morris. From Charles Morris, Talens (1980) adapts the three levels of significance of the sign: semantic which analyzes the meaning of signs and is constituted by information and indexes, syntactic which examines "the relations of the signs to each other" (p.47), through the functions of the subject of the story, and pragmatic which analyzes the context of creation and the insertion of these elements in a determined social framework.

Through this proposal, a first unfolding of the story takes place in three aspects. First, the subject (the mother) and the scenario in which the story is developed are described through the signs of the graphic and the story. Later, the actantial functions of the mother are explained in which the author, using irony and exaggeration, makes a satire of the vision of the Mexican mother-wife related to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Finally, the way in which the creation context of the work fits in the countercultural movement is explained.

In this story, at the same time the role of dedicated mother is accentuated with satirical intentions, this notion of motherhood, socially constructed, is questioned when representing a mother who tries to transgress her role from the public sphere by feeling empowered by her contact with the "sacred" (popular appropriation of religion). However, this implies a sanction and a stigma when her actions lead her to commit violence against her family in her private life.

For this research work, the gender theories and popular religion studies are especially useful. From anthropology and gender studies, Marcela Lagarde

(2015) is taken up again with her proposal on the captivity of women, in which she states that the notion of women is a sociocultural and historical construct that goes beyond biological conditions. This implies a construction of subjectivity based on the historical and material conditions in which the woman inserts⁴ herself. This is the idea that every society has about motherhood, and it corresponds with this social and contextual construction.

In relation to popular religiosity, for De la Torre (2012), and Rostas and Droogers (1995), subjects are able to autonomously rework religious elements present in their environment and this allows them to establish a relationship of resistance to power exercised from the official religion.

The primary source is the *Fuego Lento anthology* (1998). In this source, the story of the *Madre Santa* is located as well as interviews with the authors of the story and of the images. As for secondary sources, we went to the bibliography, the interviews, and the audiovisual media related to the topic, the authors, and their history.

Results

The Subject of the Story: Space-time, Physical, and Psychological Characteristics

The edition of *Madre Santa* that is analyzed in this research work was published in 1998 although the comic had already been published and participated in contests in previous dates. In 1987, it won the second place of the "*First National Contest: The Organized Alternative Comic Book*" by the Federation of Students of Guadalajara and in 1995, redrawn by Ricardo Peláez. It also obtained first place *Ex Aequo La Palma Real* granted within the framework of the *Fourth Ibero-American Encounter of Cartoonists*, held in Havana, Cuba "(Proaño, 2018, párr.1). It was reissued in 2011, 2014 and finally in 2018 as a result of its 30th anniversary.

The protagonist of the story is a mother whose name is never given, perhaps with the intention of expressing that her story is that of so many Mexican women immersed in poverty and labor exploitation. At the semantic level,

4 There are several feminist proposals that share this vision, such as that of Simone De Beauvoir (Butler, 2007; Badinter, 1981), among others; However, for the present work, the proposal of Marcela Lagarde (2015) is appropriate since her study shows part of the Mexican reality, and it is the same context in which the Mexican cartoon *Madre Santa* is located.

the indexes⁵ presented in the graphic and in the narrative of the story, refer to an approximately 40-year-old woman who is in a precarious situation⁶, as her appearance and life condition demonstrate. Her appearance is the same throughout the entire story, even deterioration and gradual tiredness is observed. She wears a button-down blouse in the front and a calf-length skirt, and she is always wearing an apron. She has a bandana on her head that keeps her hair away from her face. Her face is the reflection of a tired woman, both physically and psychologically discouraged, who works all the time without a moment of rest. She is absorbed, mainly, by domestic activities for the reproduction of the group, and she attends to the chores of the house for her children and her husband.

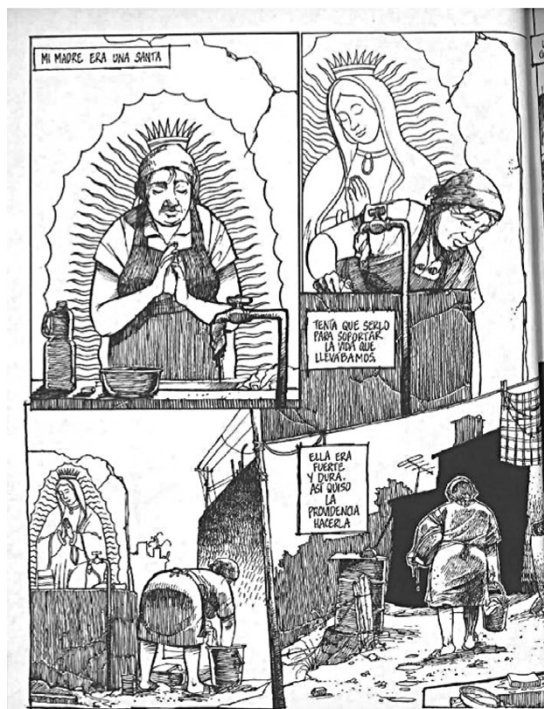
In general, the story does not express specific information about where the story takes place. The details present in the representation of the setting situate the story in Mexico City. This is due to the fact that the authors dedicated their work to exploring and making strong criticisms of the fundamental aspects of said city. The story advances in an urban space of extreme poverty which can be seen from the first two pages. In the first, consisting of four vignettes (Figure 1), the mother is observed in a communal laundry room, and behind it there is a graffiti of the Virgin of Guadalupe which is peeled off a wall that falls apart.

This scene already indicates several issues: the house in which the mother lives lacks drinking water, much less has a laundry room. The two lower vignettes on the same page show us the earth floor and the shadow of the houses with a laminated roof through which the mother passes while carrying her bucket with freshly laundered clothes. This image is one of the first vignettes in the narrative, and from the beginning, the analogy with the Virgin of Guadalupe is used to clearly establish, and even exaggerate, its relationship with purity and sacrifice.

5 Indexes and information were found in this first semantic level. The first ones are details of the graph and narrative that provide data on the physical and psychological characteristics of the subject of the story; the second ones give data about the space-time in which it takes place (Beristáin, 1984).

6 This is understood as the person who has "little stability" or who "has insufficient resources", so he does not have the necessary means to live (Real Academia Española [RAE], 2018). For the workplace, precariousness has some dimensions that characterize it, such as: 1) Temporality: insecurity of the employment relationship, 2) Vulnerability, degraded working conditions, 3) Wage insufficiency, level below the minimum for food, education, health, and housing; and 4) lack of job protection, reduction of benefits and protection (Rubio, 2010, p. 79).

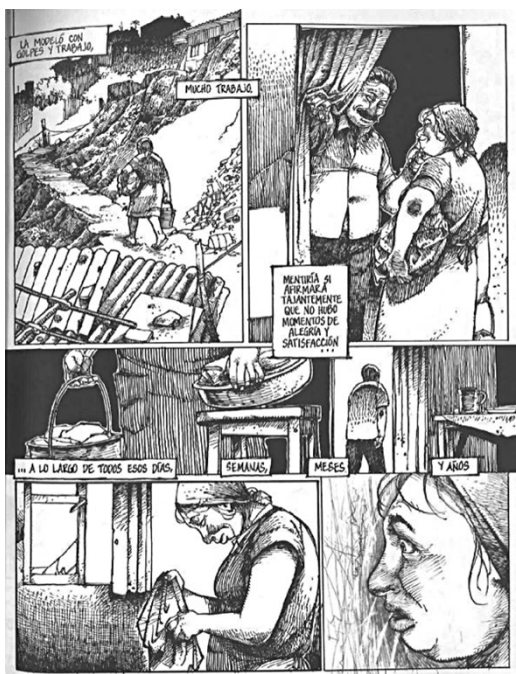
Figure 1. Urban environment in which the story is developed



Source: Peláez (1998, p. 8)

In figure 2, the first vignette on the left shows the laminated roof of a house in the lower part and a complete house located on a ravine in the upper right part of the vignette. The woman climbs the slope with the bucket in her right hand and her cleaning supplies under her left arm. She lives in an area of high marginalization and poverty.

Figure 2. The representation of poverty



Source: Peláez (1998, p.9)

The representation of poverty that is made, through the space and the interactions of the characters with the same and between them, is directly linked to the "subversive demystification" that Obscura (2011) describes when he speaks about the third form of popular representation urban that is made in the Mexican cinema of the golden age. This third way of representing the context of urban misery, as in the case of *Madre Santa* which is closer to the critical avant-garde of the moment (constituted by the North American black cinema and Italian neorealism), was modeled after the film *Los Olvidados*, directed in 1950 by Luis Buñuel. In it, an attempt to demystify misery and its effects based on real cases of juvenile delinquency and red note was observed for the first time in Mexican cinema.

The story of *Los Olvidados* avoided explaining poverty as positive or negative so as not to provoke a false indignation of the spectator. Its intention was to explore human behavior in situations of poverty, showing a closed world of survival and orphanhood without judging or moralizing, appealing basically to

the violence of the images, in which an implicit criticism of the profound social inequality of the "modern" Germanist⁷ Mexico was warned (Obscura, 2011, p. 166).

This model of poverty representation would have to be taken up again in the cinema of the seventies and eighties as a way to make a strong criticism by contradicting the official discourse on poverty (Obscura, 2011). This question is observed in the primary source of this work clearly. Even if later, not only because of the country's context but also because the production of its authors, it is inserted in the critical, counter-cultural comic movement, which explodes in the eighties and nineties in Mexico.

In the images, one plays with the representation of a space immersed in misery, houses and spaces without basic services. What exists is shared; it is communal. It is a space in which the characters develop their actions which seem to be carried out in relation to that space that frames them and seems to constrict them. Human behavior linked to survival is presented where situations of violence are produced and reproduced on a daily basis.

The Subject of the Story: the Ambiguous Mother

In addition to the information and the indications that provide data about the subject of the story as well as the space and time where the actions of the story are developed, at the syntactic level, the actions of the subject are examined along with their functions in the story. Helena Beristain (1984) identifies six types of actors⁸ represented by binary oppositions according to three types of relationships: love (subject who wants an object), making confidences (sender and recipient), and help/opposition (assistant-opponent) (Beristáin, 1984, p.70). Therefore, if the mother is taken as the subject of the story, her object would be to take her children forward through their effort, sacrifice, and work. Her sender is her socioeconomic and gender condition, which forces her to leave everything to work in exchange for a minimum wage. Her children benefit from her work and effort. Her assistant is her eldest daughter, who tells the story. Again, their socio-economic and gender status is opposed.

Before moving on to the next level, it is necessary to emphasize that, during the development of the story, the mother's actions take her from an initial

7 It refers to the presidential term of Miguel Alemán Valdés, who served as president of Mexico in the period 1946-1952.

8 It refers to a "Term taken from Lucien Ternière and used mainly in linguistics where, within a certain conception of syntax it serves to name the participant (animal, person or thing) in an act, whether executed or not as well.

situation where she works and struggles hard, to the transformation that occurs when she cooks and eats the hallucinogenic mushrooms of her child thinking that they are edible. In the final situation, she is involved in a brawl at the factory where she works which ends in an explosion in which the mother momentarily loses her reason and hits her son when he claims his mushrooms. The final situation of the mother is of degradation and not that of improvement.

***Madre Santa*, the Author Comic Criticism in Mexico**

The creational context of the work is approached at the pragmatic level, which "analyzes the relationships that are established between the signs and their users" (Talens, 1980, p.47). In addition, it examines the place of insertion of the author and his reader "as subjects of a significant practice, within a set of practices that constitute a social formation" (Talens, 1980, p.47). In this section, not only is the creational context of the primary source shown, but the main argument of the text is developed. That is, the premise that *Madre Santa* makes a satire on the vision of the selfless Mexican mother. In its representation, the authors dramatize the generosity and altruism of the mother when relating her to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but, in a parallel way, they play with irony when representing her as a proprietor of transgressive and violent actions, which lead her to repeat her captivity.

There are two important aspects of this comic: its incorporation into a broader countercultural context that was conceived in the eighties and emerged in the nineties and the reflection on gender (from the daily reproduction of violence, as well as precarization labor) in the comic. In relation to the first aspect, a brief review is needed on the background of the comic strip in Mexico and the main events that take place in the field in the eighties and nineties, at which time it was conceived and its first version was published.

The origins of the Mexican comic go back to the publications illustrated with cartoons that proliferated in the second half of the 19th century, in which the satirical graphic went from showing a situation in a cartoon to developing a story as a sequence. At the beginning of the 20th century an incipient Mexican cartoon was published in the press, its influences were the stature, the French cartoon⁹ and the American comic strips. Between the 30s and 50s of the twentieth century, the so-called golden age of comics began. It was characterized by the proliferation of editorials and the creation of comic strips that the population consumed in large quantities.

9 The Comic of El Buen Tono made by Juan Bautista Urrutia, published from 1904 to 1914 and in 1922, correspond to this branch; In particular, they are inspired by the prints of Epinal (Camacho, 2013).

The existence of a market for the product favored the consolidation of the publishing industry based on the mass production and sale of comics that was consolidated between the 60s and 70s, a period known as the silver age of the Mexican comic strip. From the 1980s, the industrial production of comics declined due to factors such as the economic crisis that the country went through or the large number of cultural products that entered Mexico and gave a variety of consumption options to the public. This was the case with television, VCR, arcades, etc. In this context, and while the industrial comic went into decline, the countercultural was in a boom, and it is in the latter that the authors who created the *Madre Santa* at the end of the nineties were inserted.

The countercultural comic movement in which the authors of *Madre Santa* exist was not isolated or unique; it was not generated from nothing. One of its main predecessors dates from the eighties when the publication of comic strips and critical comic strips began, which were published in supplements of newspapers such as *Unomásuno*, with its supplement *Masomenos* and *Las Historietas de la Jornada*. In the same decade, the publication of the magazine *Snif* was highlighted, it was a project sponsored by the Ministry of Public Education, Editorial Penélope and the direction of Armando Bartra, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, and Juan Manuel Aurrecochea (Camacho, 2014).

The effervescence of counter-cultural, self-published, and alternative products was not only in the field of comics, but it also corresponds to a broader movement derived from the expansion of consumption and production options: in the same decade the Tianguis del Chopo arose, located in front of the Museo del Chopo in Mexico City, which was placed as an exchange and sale of countercultural books and magazines site and also for material related to rock (Ortiz, 1996). In the field of art, a proliferation of alternative spaces occurred to present, like *Panadería* who was named in such a way for its location in an old local bakery located in the Hipódromo neighbourhood; in this place, numerous installations, video sessions, magazine presentations, etc. were exhibited. There were also magazines such as *La pusmoderna*, which was created in 1989 under the direction of Rogelio Villarreal.

In the nineties, and thanks to Víctor del Real, *El Gallito Inglés*, which later would be called *Gallito Comics*, was influenced by rock and European comics. The first issue of the *Gallito* was published in 1992 and lasted sixty numbers: six per year for almost a decade. It contained original cartoons by artists such as Ricardo Peláez, Edgar Clément, José Quintero, Luis Fernando Enríquez, and Eric Proaño Muciño (Frik) etc. In 1998, Edgar Clément left *Gallito Comics* to found the *Taller del Perro*, and *El Gallito* issued its final issue in 2001.

Both Ricardo Peláez Goycochea and Erik Proaño Muciño were part of the original nucleus of *Gallito*. These authors were influenced by the European

comic, and their production focused on urban scenarios in Mexico City where complex plots that narrated urban problems were developed. The above is clearly observed in *Madre Santa*; a story that cannot be separated from its context of creation because not only the notion of the self-sacrificing mother is satirized, but the conditions of poverty in marginalized areas, such as labor exploitation, issues of violence, and gender oppression are made visible.

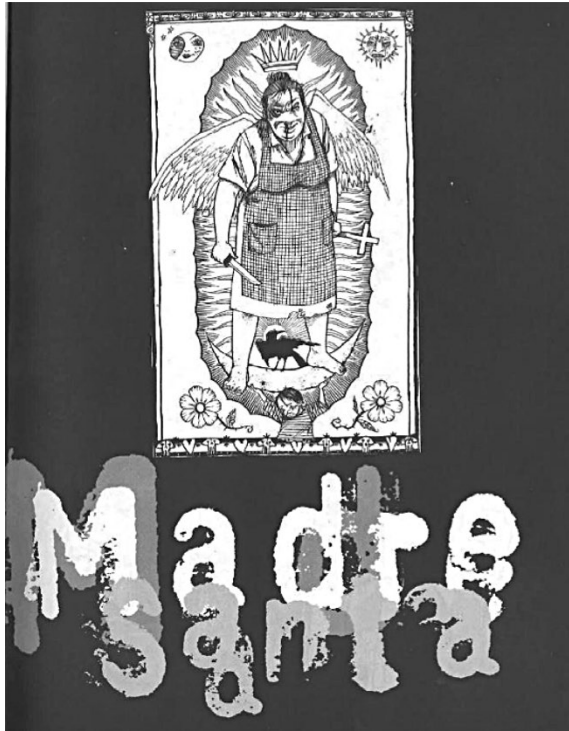
The second aspect to be highlighted in this section is the reflection on the genre from the academic perspective that has been carried out in parallel to the aforementioned countercultural movements. In the 1990s, the category of gender was visible within the university community ever since the creation of the University Program on Gender Studies in 1993 at the UNAM (Lamas, 2013), or before it marked a milestone to an important era in relation with the reflection on gender in Mexico. The concept of gender also involved other issues of equal importance as consequences of neo-liberalism arrival as a policy of the Mexican State and, consequently, the living conditions of workers.

The expressions of neo-liberalism are present in the 1980s, but its consequences are clearly visible in the nineties with the rupture of the welfare state that left behind the relative equality of life conditions among Mexican people with respect to health, housing, education, and workplace which is present in *Madre Santa*.

The breakdown of trade unions is also reflected to promote competition and breaks the solidarity of the working class, through a natural rate of unemployment allowing the emergence of an industrial reserve army which forms the main part once the husband dies, that would ensure available cheap labor to the owners of capital. The flexibilization and precariousness of work closely linked two processes to the transformation of the economic policies that reflect the transition from a welfare state to a neoliberal state (Anderson, 2005). In *Madre Santa*, the condition of gender is reflected, and violence in relation to the growing precariousness as result of the reduction in social spending by the Mexican State in the 1990s.

In this research, the mother is the subject and agent, and she is the main source of interest all the time since the first page of the story. It makes a transposition of its image with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Image 3 occupies the entire page on a black background. To the center, it represents the mother. Her dress comes to the knees, and she wears a square apron. In the right hand, she carries a knife and on the left a crucifix. A pair of wings arise from her back. This woman is barefoot and standing on top of a moon, on her head sits a crown.

Figure 3. Dual representation of maternity



Source: Peláez (1998, p. 7)

In this image, Goycochea eliminates the Virgin as a main figure, save her halo, the moon, and the crown. Instead, the mother is a disheveled woman with a black right eye, a bloody nose, and a malignant look crowned with a smiling mouth. Instead of angels, a tearful child holds the moon. Instead of the dove, a black crow is standing on the moon between her bare feet. In the top right, there is a waxing crescent moon, and the sun is on the left. The mother, with evil eyes, focused her face on the viewer. Under the image, the story title highlights *Madre Santa*. This image, on the cover of the publication, highlights two aspects that characterize the maternal representation in the story: on one side, her dedicated nature links her with the Virgin of Guadalupe, kindly and motherly, and on the other side, her malignant nature, mad and treacherous (Figure 3). Therefore, there is a double meaning between the title of *Madre Santa* cartoon and the represented image. Since the beginning, it uses irony as one of the main features of satire (Bruzos, s. f.).

The starting point of the story is to insist on the role of the self-sacrificing mother. It remarks on her sacrifice to make an analogy with the Virgen, symbol of the Mexican mother¹⁰ Motherhood, the mother are something sacred, "the maternal model is characterized by constant care, rescheduling own projects, and attention to the wishes and needs of the others" (Juliano, 2010, pp. 52-53). Therefore, the mother-wife is represented, and from some feminist approaches, it could be understood as an internalized fulfillment of a social mandate, supported by scientists and religion as strong allies.

The use of the Virgen to highlight the character of the mother-wife as the woman's role is not strange. The Virgen of Guadalupe represents the mother of Mexican people and, therefore, to all mothers of Mexico (Traslosheros, 2002). It is shown in the first bullet of the first page where the dialog box begins and reads: "My mother was a saint". The image (Figure 4) is of the mother that elicits this dialogue. In the middleground, she holds a sponge between her hands while she looks down with her hands together as if a pray. In the background, there is a crown in her head and a halo surrounds it. The foreground shows the water faucet and cleaning products.

Figure 4. The mother as a saint



Source: Peláez (1998, p. 8)

10 According to Jorge E. Traslosheros (2002), the Coronation of the Virgen in 1985 was held within the sermon and touched upon three main aspects: 1) the Virgen of Guadalupe is the homeland history, 2) Mother of Mexico 3) Queen of Mexico (p. 120).

In the second vignette of the same page, the crown is shown leaning next to the water faucet and behind a graffiti, and on her back a graffiti of the Virgin of Guadalupe can be seen painted on an old fence. The dialogue continues: "She had to be that to support the life that we live" (Pelaez, 1998, p. 8). At least the first ten pages of the story, the dedicated mother character is highlighted: her widowhood condition, her effort to support her children, her hardness with the daughter, and the selflessness to forgive her son. The *Madre Santa* as Virgin points to her sacrificed character with the same force that later will be used to emphasize her betrayal and madness.

The image that appears is of the crowned Virgin, who was crowned on December 11, 1955 as Queen of the Labor as an attempt of Mexican hierarchies to activate the social bases of the worship and its inherited unionism from the time of Lázaro Cárdenas (Cua driello, 2017). It was a project inspired by the social doctrine of the Church, that highlighted the selflessness, the devotion to work, and the Virgin Mary as the mother of Mexicans and the one asked to protect them from red danger (Velázquez, quoted by Huerta, 2017, p. 43). The mother of Mexicans, Queen of the Labor, does not correspond to a common Mexican mother nor to a reference to labor movements, in which her image will become important. This last aspect is also represented in the story.

In this part of the analysis, the notion of the mother as a mother-wife is highlighted. The authors exacerbate her characteristics and put in extreme narrative situations in order to satirize or mock this representation. This image of the mother set a clear analogy of the Virgin in the cartoon. This is not surprising as Lagarde (2015) thought that the "Virgin symbolizes the woman as mother-wife" (p. 282). For Bartra (2005), as the mother of Mexicans, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the "most evident national expression one of the archetypes in the history of mankind". (Bartra, 2005, p. 191).

The condition of gender, as well as the idea of motherhood, is a historical creation "whose content is the set of circumstances, qualities, and essential characteristics that define women as generic social and cultural being: a being of and for others" (Lagarde, 2015, p. 87). This statement helps to understand the construction of women's gender as a sociocultural framework and not as a natural condition. That is to say, as a biological condition that is the result of a historical construction which its inherited circumstances and constraints will be framed and will be subjected or revealed.

This condition of biological reproduction has different characteristics according to the historical context. Therefore, the concept of motherhood is social, cultural, historical, and psychological. Although it is not possible to modify this construction in relation to the past, it is possible to understand the woman as an agent that can gain consciousness and transform her present in relation to

the current concept of maternity and to act accordingly (Badinter, 1981; Binetti, 2013; Palomar, 2005).

Therefore, the representation of *Madre Santa* implies a construction of subjectivity based on historical and material conditions in which the character is inserted from the experience embodied by the author. As noted, Lagarde, (2015)

The status of women is built by the set of relationships of production, reproduction, and all other vital relationships in which women are immersed regardless of their will and conscience, and the ways in which they participate in them (p. 87).

In *Madre Santa*, since the first vignette the mother figure is represented doing chores for others: washing the clothes, staying up to wait for the husband, cooking, and working informally to complete expenses, working double shifts when the husband is missing, etc.

To be mother-wife demands from women to live according to the rules that express their being-for-others and being-of-others, to perform activities of reproduction and to have relationships of voluntary servitude, both with the duty embodied in others and with the power of different manifestations "(Lagarde, 2015, p. 280).

In this regard, the mother's attention is focused on the others, mainly her children, so she will have to forget any of her own ambitions as woman because she will be mother before herself. (Badinter, 1981). Juliano (2010) states that

In this way, the social duty of caring for the offspring could be assumed by both members of the couple, by the adults of the community group, or by even wider organizations like the State, mothers were unilaterally assigned, and they were normalized with this as the biologically determined option. (p. 50).

Even though the role of the mother has changed over time and in different contexts, there is still a "Maternal Love" discourse from which certain duties are assigned as natural and unquestionable that responds to the nature of mother and not to an asymmetric relation of gender (Badinter, 1981). Juliano (2010) states that "What women are and do is not read as socially constructed in an asymmetric system of power relations but as a consequence of their innate impulses" (p. 44).

Thus, the mother serves, sacrifices, and struggles for her children; she is selfless works double shifts if necessary. Her sacrifice is highlighted when she wor-

ks a paid job; she does the household chores as a mother (non-paid job done for love) and works double shifts (non-payment job and paid job). When her duties at home exceeds her efforts, she delegates it to the people of the same gender, *i.e.* her daughter, and she actively inserts her into the reproduction of her captivity. This reaffirms the asymmetric relationships between the genders and prepares new generations for the naturalization and no visibility of non-paid jobs.

The double shift of these women consists of the same activities each day in the same journeys. However, if they are public, for strangers (not relatives) through a contract in an foreign house [in this case of a factory] with a measured salary, then the chores they do at home for their relatives naturally, instinctively, or because it is demanded by God, becomes work (Lagarde, 2015, p. 135).

As mother-wife, the mother of *Madre Santa* recreates her captivity with her daughter; she teaches her violently how "it must be". She violently teaches her in the same way she was taught: "Symbolic violence implies a devaluing construction of the other person, putting her into a stigmatized category and denying her the possibility of expressing or asserting her own intentions" (Juliano, 2010, p. 68). Not only is this an asymmetrical position of power, but she reproduces this asymmetry with her daughter. This is clear in one of the first scenes told by the eldest daughter. She remembers a time when her mother cut her with a shard of a broken dish that she had accidentally broken. To this fact, Julian (2010) wonders "What kind of maternal role are we imposing when we ask them to give their life for a task, and then we harshly judge their results? (P. 52). Her narrative says,

Daughter: To me, who was the eldest daughter, she ordered me to make the food and to assist the children. The truth is that mom became stricter because she got desperate when I did not obey. "

Brother: Victims, she arrived

Daughter: She had a thick rope with knots that she would wet to hit us with when it was necessary. With me, she held onto a habit that was learned from my grandmother when she broke a plate by mistake... then, with tears in her eyes, she asked me, please, not to repeat that nonsense again (Peláez, 1998, pp. 18-20).

However, the two mentioned authors stated a profit growth for this comic in Mexico. The comic is a kind of counter-cultural and critique that placed the stories in the immediate context of their creators: Mexico City. In that way,

these authors are characterized by criticism and social satire, and they consider motherhood as one of the main targets despite the fact of "focusing on marginalized and excluded provoke social discontent, especially if those categories add the aggravated factor of 'genre'" (Juliano, 2010, p. 10).

Now, parallel to the presentation of the mother as a selfless figure what is highlighted is her strong character, her violent resistance to the power exercise and the male violence when once after being hit in her face by her husband, she threatens him with a knife. Besides, she hits her children, punishes them and teaches her older daughter violently, etc. The mother lives her captivity, suffers it, reproduces it, and feels frustrated. She is a doubly oppressed woman: by gender and by her social class (Sabater, 2014; Lagarde, 2015). In this regard, Lagarde (2015) explains that

Women share within their gender the same historical condition, but they differ in terms of their situations of life and their degrees and levels of oppression. Women have differences among their class position, access to technology, relationship with different wisdoms, and in their way of life be it rural, jungle, or urban. These are significant features to the degree of forming women's groups: The women's group is subjected to both gender-based and class oppression. There are those subject to only gender-based oppression but not that of social class, and then there is the group of women is subjected to a triple oppression of gender, class, and ethnic or national discrimination, and the groups (p. 59).

At this point, it is necessary to present one of the nodes in story: The mother's consumption of some hallucinogenic mushrooms that she takes from her son's backpack and proceeds to cook and taste, believing that they are edible. The mother hallucinates; she thinks that the painted Virgin spoke to her in the graffiti of the communal laundry room. The people of the neighborhood find out. They are astonished, and they feel sad.

Daughter. Then we saw her enter; her eyes were frightened, her face reddened... and scorched lashes. She blended herself on her knees to the ground and as she prayed, she interrupted to shout with all her strength...

Mother. The Little Virgin spoke to me! Yes, the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of God, the One painted on the wall next to the sinks had touched her shoulder and felt like a burning that ran through the whole body. The light she emitted was so powerful that her eyes watered just to see her. But, none of these

discomforts prevented her from enjoying the pleasure given to her by these words.

Virgin. I listened to your prayers, and I forgive you. I will help you from now on because I understand you. (Peláez, 1998, pp. 26-27).

The type of apparitions the mother seems to see is called "Mariophany" within the religious context, and it is distinguished from the simple appearance because it describes more ways of contact of subject with the Divinity. Mariophany "means all demonstrations of Mary, including apparitions, visions, locutions, even tearing, meetings, and the sweating of statues" (Guitton, cited by of the Gaudio, 2017, p. 97). The Marian apparitions and mariophanies are addressed to only a certain number of people in the Catholic faith. In this way, "the visionaries participate on particular experiences of supernatural world. The perception of the supernatural allows them to experience, and they are called to tell to the others" (Del Gaudio, 2017, p. 11).

It is not any random saint that appear to the mother; it is the Virgin who is the one to call her. In the religious context, the Virgin Mary apparitions differ from saint appearances. The latter are manifestations of something new in relation to the gospel, and the first are considered private apparitions. The Virgin Mary always appears to help believers to learn and follow the rules of the gospel (Del Gaudio, 2017, p. 11). In this sense, the apparent contact with the Virgin could have been understood by the mother as a sign that her mission as mother-wife was going well, as a sign of that she should continue with her selfless attitude and resign herself to a life of poverty and submission in pursuit of a better life after death, but that is not the case.

Instead of following her mother-wife actions, the mother rebels. She unveils her vision; the neighborhood where she lives gets sad, they listen to her, follow her. There is a phenomenon of popular appropriation of religion; a way of resistance to the official version of the religion; "the popular religion can be an instrument of resistance, in the same way in which the official religion can be one way of domination" (Rostas and Droogers, 1995, p. 84). In this way, the power management and resistance by the religion, the leaders, the believers, have their own power equivalent to popular leaders. (Rostas and Droogers, 1995, p. 86).

If captivity is the way in which the positive and negative power act to place women under specific conditions of domination, as the mother-wife argued, then in the story, the supposed vision of the mother makes her move within her captivity in relation to her new position of power. This situation does not start

from an affirmation of passivity and peacefulness by women as if they had no possibility of change. On the contrary, it is stated as a dialectical relationship.

Each captive is dialectically a space of oppression and freedom at the same time. It is an area of freedom because the woman is fully in it. The woman exists due to any of her definitions as historical being, hence her place is oppressive because her existence has not been decided by women, nor has it been decided by men on a voluntary basis but decided by the needs of a patriarchal and classist society, and because as women exist, they are oppressed (Lagarde, 2015, p. 153).

In this story, for a short time, the mother empowers, rebels, and moves her dissatisfaction of her private life at home to the public in her job: in the factory where she works, she begins to spread the word about labor exploitation and power abuses, she meets with former union leaders of the factory,

Mother. Christ loves everyone, but especially the poor, and He despises the rich that keeps everything for themselves, because Christ never wanted us to be miserable, and if we are it is because of the rich that pay us little and sell us expensive things, that is why the Virgin reminded me of the words of her son: "Help me I will help you" let's meet to fight against the rich son of Beelzebub (Pelaez, 1998, p. 31).

However, the mother, with that ephemeral power provided by the supposed apparition of the Virgin, fails to break away from her captivity despite trying to do so in private when she hits her child and despite trying to do so in the public sphere when she causes a worker uprising at the factory. This outcome shows a violent end because she violates for whom the "maternal mandate" showed she should care and protect. She moves from her captivity of self-sacrificing mother-wife to another role she started to show since the beginning of the story: that of insanity.

The mother's insane actions in *Madre Santa* are part of transgressive behavior that satirize to the concept of the original mother-wife: a pure, selfless, dedicated mother and martyr who should not be paired with rebellion and discontent. When the authors satirize, they show in the story their dual concept of motherhood, and it coincides with Badinter (1981) about the mentality of change in regarding the new subjectivity of motherhood. This situation generates two consequences; on one hand, the existence of "a joy and pride on motherhood" that other generations did not have while on the other it shows "an authoritarian conception that created an unconscious maternal instinct and a discontent as an ideological prison, guilt, and frustration" (Badinter, 1981, p.

213). The frustration in *Madre Santa* leads the main character to pass into the grip of the insanity and try to empower herself, according to Lagarde (2015)

The insane women are the suicidal, the saints, the hysterics, the spinsters, the witches and the bewitched, the nuns, the possessed and the illuminated, the mother-wives, the stepmothers, the filicides, the hookers, the celibates, the lesbians, the menopausal, the sterile, the abandoned, the political, the wise, the artists, the intellectuals, the spinsters, the feminists (p. 497).

As well as selfless and martyr, the mother of our story is hysterical, enlightened, a bad mother, and in the end is represented as filicidal, but this first sign of insanity arises from the beginning when the story highlights its exemplary character first. Due to the resistance to the violence that her husband exerted on her and for her violent actions to their children, this situation, according to Lagarde, is because "the female madness does not appear as a state of sanity, of rational behavior. The line that separates both is sometimes invisible. In each case and from the general rule, the power establishes if the woman is sane or insane." (Lagarde, 2015, p. 501).

The mother is represented as being insane for not wanting to be in the captivity of the role of the selfless mother and for not taking the supposed manifestation of the Virgin Mary as an indication that her way of self-denial is the right way. She moves to the state of captivity of insanity for wanting to rebel not only in privacy but in the strike on the factory, she hits her drug addict son so as to tear out all of his hair (Pelaez, 1998, p. 38). However, also in public the given power by her supposed contact with the divinity to preach against their bosses, she is tired of the long journeys and the poor payment. The mother is the insane one who in latter part of the story, sets aside her selfless character to rebel and tries to exercise power to improve living conditions.

In *Madre Santa*, the satire is shown in the selfless, model, and sacred character of motherhood. It is represented by praising her self-sacrificing characteristics while emphasizing the violence that is reproduced. This approach coincides with what Lagarde (2015) calls "the mythical and divided image of the Mexican woman" (p. 57). This concept is based on Jewish-Christian culture and capitalist society (Lagarde, 2015). Bartra (2005) remarks about this ambiguous and dual representation of women in Mexico when expresses that "it is not until after independence that a cultural catalysis starts, and a complex myth about Mexican woman emerges, tender and abused; protective and uncaring; sweet and treacherous, maternal Virgin, and Babylonian female" (p. 208).

The dual Mexican woman is represented on the notion of maternity described by the authors of *Madre Santa*: sweet and treacherous, the mother and the Babylonian female, the one who "must behave with the tenderness and the sacrifice of a Virgin to cleanse her deep sin: inside her lives the *Malinche*, full of lasciviousness and heiress of the old female treachery". (Bartra, 2005, p. 209). This treason is observed from the first moments of the story when the mother is selfless but not tender; when the mother betrays her son when she is tired and in shock, and she hits him so much that he is left without hair.

At the end, the mother is unable to break away from her captivity; she reproduces it and returns to her maternal character as the culprit in the final scene, (Figure 5). She is represented in the foreground as a disheveled woman wearing torn clothes and holding her innocent son, in the same place of *Pieta* by Michelangelo. In the balloons, the daughter, the narrator of the story, says "when the patrols arrived, mom had already left him well bald" (Peláez, 1998, p. 38).

Figure 5. The Pity



Source: Peláez (1998, p. 38)

Conclusions

Madre Santa is a cartoon created in a Mexican context whose borders were open to other cultural products and received multiple inspirations that influenced local authors and young people like Peláez and his partners at *Gallito Comics*. In these comics, new styles, trends, and methods of storytelling were introduced and mixed with the local tradition and the immediate surroundings of the creators from the graphic reflection on gender and vulnerability.

In this story, there is a mockery of the selfless and demanding notion of motherhood in every act of daily life, in the media, in men and women actions, and in society in general. Such an idea is in accordance with what Bartra (2005) and Lagarde (2015) state in relation to the divided image that has constructed the reality for Mexican women, as Jiro Suzuri (cited by Proaño, 2018) mentions in a fragment published by the same Frik on his blog:

Madre Santa Frik and Pelaez have made a heartfelt critique of ideal motherhood, undermining the tendency to inspire the material to Holiness, more for hypocrisy than for conviction. But it is still more important that her story celebrate the fragility and the strength behind the mother – claiming her, condemning her – with the certainty that is amazing mainly for her human being condition, full of contradictions and troubles, and not due to her. (Jizo Suzuri, cited by Proaño, 2018, Phara. (2).

In this story, there is a concept of socially constructed motherhood, therefore, likely to be analyzed, criticized, and rebuilt. It is a construction that is not only isolated from women or of the couple but of the entire socio-economic, political, and cultural structure as "the oppression of women is defined by an articulated set of features within the subordinated situation, vital dependence, and discrimination in the State" (Lagarde, 2015, p. 100).

The satire that the authors produce is observed from the first image of the cartoon, since on one hand it appeals to the sanctification and the "natural" goodness of the mother while on the other hand (Lagarde, 2015) she is represented as a human being whose harsh life conditions and frustration make her insane, treacherous, and filicidal. The main question that direct the authors in this cartoon coincides with the one elaborated by Juliano (2010): "Is it true that motherhood completes women and gives meaning to her existence which otherwise would remain incomplete and cause her frustrations?" (p. 43).

The reality is that this discourse constantly becomes more questioned concerning the supposed innate ability of women to find the fullness of their gen-

der in the state of motherhood, along with the pinnacle of their existence and naturalized operation of actions that will guarantee their happiness as well as a growing precariousness. Motherhood is not synonymous of happiness, on the contrary, "recent research on elderly women who have dedicated their lives to the care of the family are found to be poor, alone, and neglected" (Juliano, 2010, p. 57). It matches with the reflection of *Madre Santa*.

Finally, the concept of motherhood presented is not intended to be unique. There are many ways to see and live motherhood in Mexico. In *Madre Santa* is observed the vision developed by a couple of authors who present their particular worldview. In this case, they are based only on references present in the image and the narration of the cartoon. It mainly highlights the link of the Virgin of Guadalupe, with the concept of maternity as self-sacrificing under the precariousness. However, it does not imply that there is more concerning historical and cultural referents in the concept of the mother-wife expressed. They are not addressed in the current research since it follows the indications of the primary source.

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