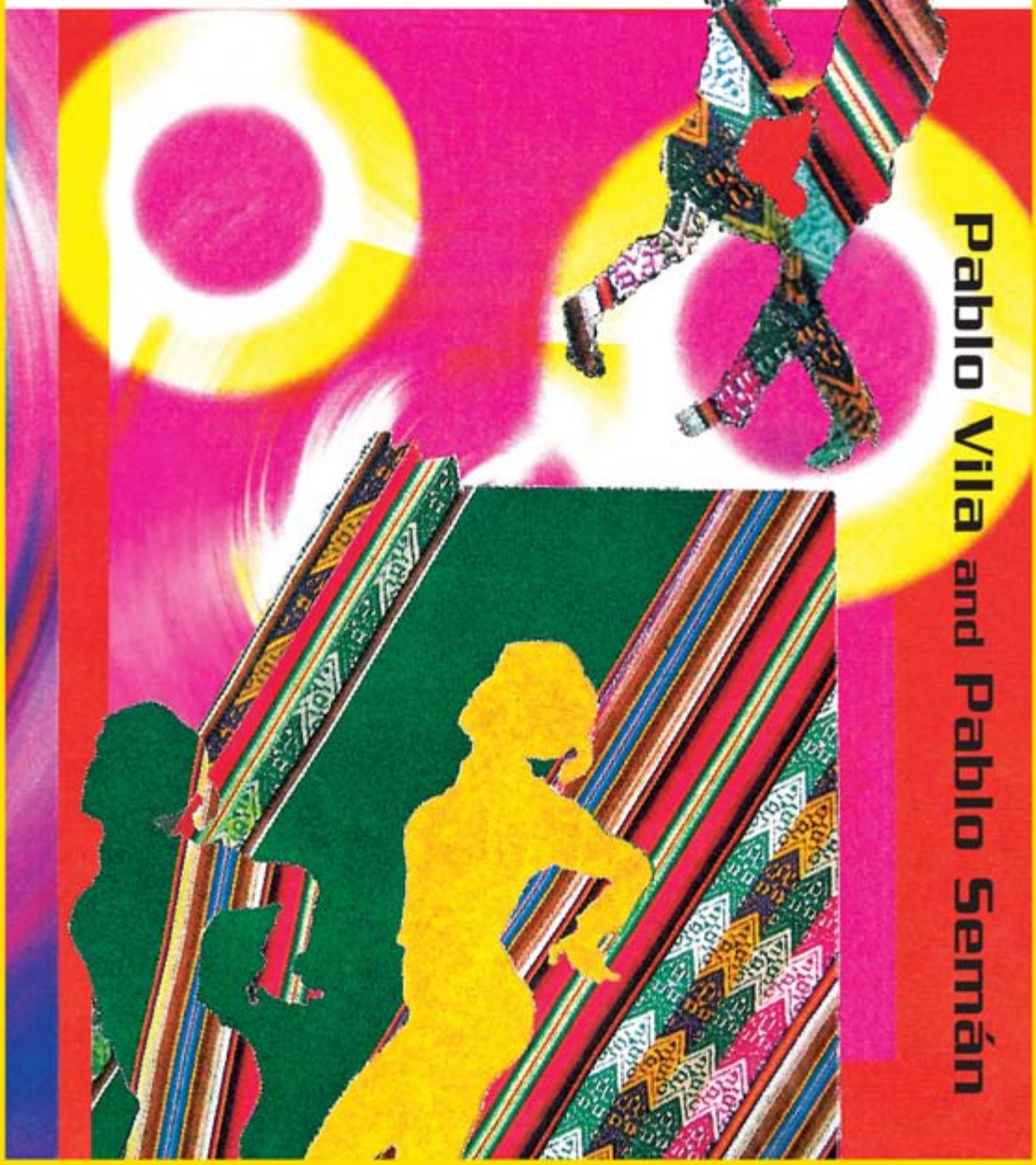
Troubling Gender

Youth and Cumbia in Argentina's Music Scene



Pablo Vila and Pablo Semán

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with contributions by
Eloísa Martín and María Julia Carozzi

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Pablo Semán
Mexico City
March 21, 2011

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Pablo Vila
Philadelphia
March 22, 2011

Troubling Gender

Introduction

Perhaps the song the DJ was playing was "María Rosa," which states, "She provokes you with her dancing/She is waiting for you to buy her a drink/She is a very easy girl/Her panties are very loose/If you don't take her to your bed,/she gets very angry." Or it could have been "Se Te Ve la Tanga," whose lyrics say, "You dance in a miniskirt; it makes me laugh/because we can see your thong, and you can't wait/to be taken by the hand and invited to a motel/You don't do it for money; you just do it for pleasure." David, one of the members of our research team, still can't remember which song it was. However, he does remember clearly what happened with the three girls he met briefly that night at one of the hundreds of *bailes* or *bailantas* [cumbia dance halls] that are packed each weekend with low-income young people who, joining a scene that has experienced explosive growth, go to dance to variations of cumbia music—including, most prominently, cumbia villera [shantytown cumbia].[1]

As he and a member of the group he was with were walking toward the bar, three girls younger than twenty, with braids and bangs and dressed identically in rolled-up sweatpants, tiny tops, and sneakers deliberately crossed their path. They fixed their eyes on the guys, and one said, "Wouldn't it be great if some sharp guy bought us a drink?" David looked at his friend Alejandro and, laughing, the young men turned away. Apparently, however, the girls took the laughter personally: a minute later, one of them butted her head into the middle of David's back. Surprised by the girl's reaction, David turned around, came face to face with her, and said, "Are you crazy, friend? How can you hit me like that? Do you think you're some kind of rich girl?" (an insult in this lower-class milieu), to which she responded, waving her hands in his face, "Hold on, prick. You think you're some kind of hot dick, but you're really a jerk. . . . You can't

treat me like that."[2] At that point, Alejandro tugged David's arm to get him to leave, and the other girls grabbed the headbutter. David said, "You're really crazy, friend. That's not the way to go about it," and the incident came to an end.

The lyrics of popular cumbia villera songs and the behavior of some girls who go to the bailes to dance to those lyrics reveal the profound changes that gender relations in the popular sectors of Argentina in general, and in Buenos Aires in particular, have undergone in the past decade.[3] Linked to the activation of women and expressed and fueled by the lyrics, music, choreography, and performances of cumbia villera songs,[4] the relationships between low-income young men and women have definitively changed. The goal of this book is to try to understand the most important vectors of the problematic gender scenario that now characterizes how young people of Argentina's popular sectors relate to one another.

In the chapters that follow, we present a brief history of cumbia villera and then analyze the complex and contradictory ways in which its lyrics portray this activation of women. From there, we move to how young men interpret the new attitudes of the girls they relate to, interpretations that range from the idea that cumbia villera portrays young women as they actually are to positions that point out that girls have become much more sexually proactive since cumbia villera lyrics appeared. What young women think about how cumbia villera lyrics portray them and their new sexual behavior is the topic of Chapter 4. On the one hand, they like their newly acquired sexual freedom; on the other, however, many do not like how cumbia villera lyrics portray the changes in their gender and sexual repertoires.

Cumbia villera is one of the most popular dance genres in contemporary Buenos Aires and is thus the perfect scene to study how gender relations have changed. Since its popularization in the late 1950s and early 1960s by groups such as El Cuarteto Imperial and Los Wawancó, cumbia, which originated in Colombia, has become a dance of choice in Argentina's popular sectors. While the genre initially followed the format made popular by the pioneering groups, it underwent a variety of mixtures with Argentine folk rhythms. Cumbia villera, a more electric variant of cumbia in which keyboards usually replace the traditional accordion and an electric drum set replaces acoustic percussion, developed in the 1990s. Thus, cumbia villera developed from a genre that had already been hybridized in Colombia, its country of origin.

Cumbia villera uses a limited register—generally a fifth—for its melodies, which is very accessible to untrained voices. The binary meter, in a moderate tempo, supports two rhythmic levels: the patient redundancy of the quarter-eight-eight figures, which represent the Andean element and simultaneously serve as a background for the rhythmic intervention of the Afro-Colombian level, and a sputter of syncopated rhythms released by the Latin percussion. All of these musical resources are enveloped by the sophisticated electronic sound that helps to sever many kinds of popular music from their places of origin and adapt them not only to international circulation but also to local re-terri-

torialization, as cumbia villera demonstrates. A very important non-musical element—the lyrics—has helped to give the cumbia genre its local specificity in Argentina.

There are several ways to dance cumbia villera that are related not only to the setting of the dance (e.g., bailes versus homes) but also to the many possibilities the rhythm suggests and the steps' uncomplicated choreography compared with salsa or merengue. Cumbia can be danced either by couples or in groups, which adds another layer of variety. We sketch here only two widespread ways to dance to cumbia—one linked to cumbia romántica [romantic cumbia], which we describe as traditional, and the other, meneaito [to wiggle], a more modern step that generally is danced only by women.

Traditional, or romantic, cumbia is danced, almost without exception, by couples holding hands. The choreography is similar to that of salsa, but the rhythm can be faster, and it consists of a combination of steps in four movements in which feet are moved back and forth and from side to side. The genre is characterized by very marked movements of the hips and waist; women's movements are more pronounced than men's. The male partner is in charge of turning the female partner around (as in rock and salsa), taking the lead role. The ideal way to dance cumbia is to travel around the entire dance floor.

The meneaito is a more individualistic way to dance. It features a step in which the dancer opens her legs with her knees apart and, moving her pelvis in circles, descends toward the floor. The move is then repeated to stand straight again. As this description illustrates, meneaito is a much more provocative dance step than those used in romantic cumbia, and when women dance it, they attract a lot of attention. Interestingly, romantic cumbia and meneaito are not exclusive to particular dance halls or groups of people; generally, they are combined and danced consecutively. Many people know how to dance both, but meneaito requires more expertise, and fewer people actually dare to dance it. Over time, meneaito has inspired other sexualized ways to dance to cumbia villera that are either variations of or innovations on the original step.

Finally, as noted, people dance to cumbia villera in halls popularly called *bailantas* or *bailes*. The venues are widespread in and around Buenos Aires and attract young people from the popular sectors. Entrance tickets to bailantas are relatively cheap; the consumption of alcohol is very high; and, thanks to laws whose execution depends heavily on negotiations among local mayors, the police, audiences, and entrepreneurs, the venues usually allow minors (sometimes as young as thirteen or fourteen).

Bailes offer both recorded music played by DJs and live music—usually one or two short performances (twenty to thirty minutes each)—by popular cumbia villera combos. The venues often resemble warehouses with dance floors in front of the stage, bars where drinks are sold, restrooms, places to check coats and jackets, and some seats that double as private booths for couples or for people who just want to sit for a while on the sidelines. Many provide special-effects lighting of the dance floor and, more markedly, the stage,

which makes the spaces look more like disco dance clubs than traditional cumbia venues.

Antecedents for the Treatment of Cumbia Villera, a Highly Sexualized Genre

In this book, we discuss the complex relationship many young men and women in Argentina have with the seemingly sexist and obscene lyrics of cumbia villera, which often portray young women as "sluts." In the process, we also show how a certain activation of women's sexuality is at play and how this activation produces the fear that the male-centered lyrics and men's commentaries about them seem to depict. That is, as Terry Lovell (2003, 4) points out, "Through performances that have no prior authorization in social norms," some young women in Buenos Aires are contributing to the derailing of sexist institutional norms and doing so "with authority."

Studies of music and identity are relatively rare in Argentina, which makes providing a thorough review of the literature and a positioning of the topic at hand in relation to that literature, as is mandatory in social science research, difficult. In most cases, only a small amount of previous research is available from which to glean ideas or with which to contrast our findings. Thus, most scholars of Argentine music have to rely (very unwillingly) on what has been written about similar musical genres elsewhere to "position" their research in the academic field. This creates a problem and an opportunity simultaneously: problematizing a particular musical phenomenon without taking the historical processes that make it unique into account can produce perverse effects of interpretive projection. However, if one is fully aware of those possible effects, it is still possible to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation and, at the same time, reveal the situated character of the interpretive proposals. This productive tension has been a constant in our research, and its outcome is a radicalization of the anthropological dimension that is its guiding muse.

Thus, while the genre of popular music we are studying approximately resembles something "out there" (e.g., there are variations of cumbia in several Latin American countries), during the research process our perspectives on the topic changed gradually, enabling us to understand the idiosyncrasies of cumbia villera in a novel manner. On the basis of an interpretation that recognizes the feminist perspective but, at the same time, radicalizes and singularizes its effects (we fully understand gender power dynamics and the need to dismantle male domination in both society and the social sciences), we stress the singular historical circumstances in which cumbia villera occurs to make visible nuances and complexities that we believe are very important. In addition, the current conditions of the performance of our research subject are so idiosyncratic that any comparison with musical genres elsewhere makes little sense.[5]

While looking for ideas on how to analyze gender relationships in cumbia villera, we did not find much previous academic research done in Argentina,

but we did find a few path-breaking studies done in Latin America on salsa and bachata (Aparicio 1998; Pacini Hernandez 1995). Therefore, our analysis of cumbia villera lyrics is influenced by what Deborah Pacini Hernandez and especially Frances Aparicio found in their research (which was highly influenced by feminism's second wave), but it departs from it in most cases, because the complex web of linguistic and non-linguistic practices (what we call "discourses") in which these lyrics are performed and interpreted (what we call the different layers of enunciation of the lyrics) is completely different. In this regard, as we pointed out earlier, we are fully aware that gender power relationships are constitutive of any social interaction, and as such they should always be present in any analysis of the social. But at the same time, we agree with Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1998, 159–160) when they point out that "most men benefit from patriarchal practices and most women do not. There is certainly a considerable 'patriarchal dividend' most men accrue which produces masculine characters. But it is also possible to identify 'subordinate masculinities' and complicit masculinities' where the alignment with hegemonic forms of masculinity is more complex" (see also Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1995).

In addition, we believe that gender power relationships are only one component (one of the most important, to be sure) of any social relationship, and such a universal presence is always actualized in a singular way because it is shaped by all of the other components of the particular whole to which it belongs.

If this is so, to fully understand how those power relations work in the specific case of cumbia villera, we need a brief detour to offer the reader background information about gender relations in contemporary Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires. It is also necessary to make explicit certain assumptions relative to how popular-sector experience is taken into account, paying special attention to the ever-present risk of underestimating the racism and classism that disavow the perspectives of social groups that, although part of the same society, are different and distant from the academic world.

Sexualization

In 1997, at a very special fifteenth birthday party, a girl opened her presents, announcing to the guests what each contained. Suddenly she fell silent and blushed, and the audience laughed when she showed the gift: erotic lingerie. The situation, which would have caused concern in any adult—at least, in those not present there—was striking, not only because of the event itself but also because it took place at a Pentecostal church, the female pastor laughing along with the rest. This first clue, which became a conviction over time, opened up a line of research whose results we have published in a series of articles (see, e.g., Gallo and Semán 2009, 2012; Gallo, Semán, and Spataro 2011; Semán 2010; Silba and Vila 2010; Vila and Semán 2006, 2008) and, with the addition of new data, is the subject of this book.

We postulate that in the course of the past two decades, sexual practices among young people from the popular urban sectors in Argentina have undergone a change that "has led to the erosion of their taboo nature, to sex being considered in an 'objective' light as a source of pleasure, amusement and interpersonal knowledge, and to sexual practices assuming explicit, visible and, according to a certain morality, 'transgressive' forms (a heteronormative morality and/or based on a romantic commitment emphasizing certain specific limits in the physical expression of love and in the number of participants in a sexual act)" (Gallo and Semán 2009). Or, to put it more succinctly, "There is a perceptible shift in the way young people who belong to the popular sectors perceive and perform sex, a shift that clearly goes towards the notion of sex as self-pleasure—as indulgence, treat, luxury and, above all, a right" (Silba and Vila 2010, 2). This shift, of course, closely resembles what is occurring in many Western cultures, in which Anthony Giddens (1992, 58) has underlined the contemporary plasticity of identities and with regard to which William Simon (1996, 29) and Feona Attwood (2006, 87) have described the decentered and dislocated sexualized expression of these identities anchored in individual desire.

The central theme that traverses the book is this: cumbia, especially cumbia villera, is linked both to the heteronormative and to the sexist dynamics that are present in most Latin American societies, as well as to certain dynamics of cultural change that tend to pluralize and objectify the sexual plane. In other words, this is a cultural change that has led to an increasingly diversified series of gender positions and relations that, at the same time, are formulated in terms of plain sexual practices—not simply in terms of courtship, seduction, or suggestion. Sex is the recurrent subject of everyday dialogue; it reigns in the mass media and, consequently, is present in both the production of music and the uses to which music is put.

As is happening in most Western countries, in Argentina we are living in what many scholars call a "sexualized culture," in which sex functions as a privileged site through which the ordinary, the personal, and the individual are embodied in the public sphere:

> "Sexualized culture" [is] a rather clumsy phrase used to indicate a number of things: a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay . . . ; all those manifestations that indicate that in our era, "Sex . . . has become the Big Story." (Plummer 1995, 4; quoted in Attwood 2006, 78–79)

In Argentina, sex as subject matter has broadened its scope and is thematized as never before. It has assumed a plurality of forms in the space where

products originating in the cultural industry circulate, running from Internet blogs to television programs during family viewing hours, formerly "protected" from sex exhibitions that were considered off-limits by a sexist ideology. This phenomenon is intricately intertwined with the gender positions and relations that characterize the everyday life of social actors, singularizing the kinds of gender relations generated through music. Thus, although sexism exists in most societies, and in most of Argentine society, in general, it articulates itself in particular as a peculiar relation of forces that is traversed by dimensions that are different from asymmetrical relationships between genders but, at the same time, intervene in them in complex ways. As a result, the norm (the asymmetrical relationship that is the effect of an androcentric definition of gender) becomes no more than an abstraction (the isolation of one feature and the taking of it as the whole).

In other words, sexism exists in every society. The novelty is that, impelled by women (even women from social sectors associated with traditional sexism and machismo) and through sex, a dense, conflictive sense of gender positions and gender and sexual interests is developing that has made the Argentine situation complex and idiosyncratic. It is precisely this idiosyncrasy that is made invisible by one-dimensional analyses limited to demonstrating masculine domination in general.

In terms that can only be precarious, it can be said that these interrelated dynamics are the context for the elaboration, reception, and putting into practice of the musical contents brought to bear by groups that interpret cumbia. In other words, the sexualization and objectification of sexuality that is found in the milieu in which cumbia villera circulates are present in a much broader series of social relations while also being part and parcel of the way this music is produced and received—as is the case for many other juvenile genres.

In this sense, in contemporary Argentina, as elsewhere in the Western world, gender relations (a tautological expression, because gender by definition is a relationship) are changing. In complex association with other aspects of Argentine society, the ways in which men and women relate to each other are quite different from what they were, let us say, thirty years ago. Those changes are not uniform, and different people in different social situations experience them differently. In fact, those transformations are not uniform in the everyday experience of a single individual either, because the changes impinge differently on his or her diverse identifications. Gender, like many other subject positions (age, ethnicity, race, and the like), is always articulated in how people live their other identifications as classed people, ethnic people, and so on. However, some common trends regarding gender can be identified, and those shared trends can be a good point of departure for understanding what cumbia villera adds to the picture of gender relations in Buenos Aires today.

Some of the changes we refer to have been at least forty years in the making and are related to what was called the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Others

are more recent and are linked to the profound change Argentine society has experienced in the past twenty years or so. In terms of the so-called sexual revolution, one of the most important changes was the separation of sexuality from reproduction that opened up the possibility for women to have a new relationship with their bodies, which in the past (much more than they are today) were under surveillance by the family, the church, and the state. In this way, sexuality by itself, and not because of its linkages to reproduction, became a valuable component of people's identities and a source of pleasure. A number of researchers have corroborated the incidence of the classic processes that implicate the accelerated transformation of the social space occupied by women in Argentina (when compared with that of men) and how those processes have changed both the patterns of women's activities and how women are perceived by men (see, e.g., Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003b, 51–52).

Argentina is completely different in many ways from what it was in the early 1980s. Gender and sexual relationships are not an exception in this regard. In the past twenty years, the public presentation of sexual subject matter has greatly changed in urban Argentine society. At a minimum, this transformation indicates a historical mutation in cultural aspects of Argentine society, especially in urban nuclei. We can point to a time in the not-so-distant past when sexual norms and the way sexual subject matter was presented were very different from what we postulate as emblematic in present-day Argentina. In 1983, for example, Argentina did not permit divorce. Although divorce was legalized in 1985, the law was passed against a backdrop of declarations by legislators that expressed a need to remain faithful to the ideal of a family-oriented society held by the Catholic church and leading sectors in the country (Pecheny 2010). During the same years, which saw the end of a military regime identified as "occidental and Christian," juvenile figures who identified with the symbols and trappings of rock music were viewed with suspicion and censured. In the 1970s, for example, the police compulsorily cut young hippies' and rockers' hair, and in the 1980s, homosexual rights did not figure in the platform of any major political group, with even the left taking a medical or moralizing view of the subject.

During the dictatorship, movies and TV programs were censored not only for political reasons but also for sexual and moral ones: nudity, sexually explicit language, and allusions to sex or sexual desire severely limited the circulation of, or caused notable transformations in, the cultural products that contained them. The rock group Queen's album *Fat Bottomed Girls* circulated in Argentina with a cover that did not show a partially nude woman riding a bicycle. In the film *Coming Home*, which starred John Voight and Jane Fonda, the act of cunnilingus performed by the paralyzed war veteran was cut out.

Allusions to homosexual love not only were censored by the dictatorship but also were greeted with disapproval by juvenile audiences (which would later become "tolerant"), as witnessed when Sandra Mihanovich and Celeste Carballo, two female singers closely linked to rock nacional, the musical movement that most directly embraced an egalitarian perspective, came "out of the

closet" about their sexual orientation. To this day, the government's decision to make sexual education mandatory is controversial in certain sectors of Argentine society, especially in the Catholic church and among conservative groups, and this affects the state's determination and capacity to fulfill the legal norm. Yet this is a far cry from the situation in Argentina when the Catholic church and conservative social sectors were dominant and the armed forces were in power. This is the case because, although the separation of church and state has been sanctioned for decades in theory, in practice the Catholic hierarchy had veto power over views that differ from its own and the capacity to transmit its views through the education system, in the political sphere, and in the mass media. Even today, with all of the changes described here, the Catholic church retains an impressive capacity to exercise concrete vetoes in these areas.

So twenty years ago, the expression of sexually related subject matter was scrutinized and regulated by law, in the mass media, and even in the expectations of society at large, if public, religious, and political institutions are taken into account. One must then add to this a series of institutions that guaranteed the predominance of machista and heteronormative perspectives, such as gender-exclusive schools and the legal authority of the father over children.

Between then and now, important social and cultural changes have intervened. The demise of economic policy based on the domestic market and import substitution opened the doors to global imports and financing, and reform of the state brought about, among other things, the destruction of millions of jobs, which were replaced by jobs inferior to those that existed before. In the 1990s, 10–12 percent unemployment (soaring far higher in certain years) became the rule, in contrast to unemployment that averaged about 5 percent (and full employment, according to other sources) in the 1980s.

In addition, new jobs are intermittent, offer few benefits, and are poorly paid compared with those that were available to prior generations. Perceptions of a state of pauperization that will extend far into the future thus have transformed the horizons of individual lives. These transformations have affected health care and education provided by the state. State coverage of education not only has diminished to some extent but also, in conjunction with the economic crisis, is no longer the privileged pathway for legitimate social mobility. Several scholars have suggested that the rupture in social-mobility pathways through education was one of the legacies of military rule from 1976 to 1982 (Wortman 1991), and others have pointed to the increased severity of the situation in the 1990s (Auyero 1993). The point of departure for this book is the radical change in secondary socialization brought about by these circumstances.

Which institutions and interpellations for socializing young people came to fill the place formerly occupied by a welfare system that, although inadequate when measured by European parameters, was one of the most developed and comprehensive in Latin America? The answer to this question is necessarily inconclusive and extremely complex. Our aim here is to offer clues that grant at least a certain degree of participation to the mass media.

In the 1990s, other factors added to the pauperization we mention: large segments of the mass media were privatized, and the margin of action for cultural enterprises, along with the scope of leisure activities and consumption, increased. These trends have contributed to the development of a new world of portentous imagery in Argentina. For the first time ever, Argentines have a multitude of TV channels, radio stations, and compact discs (CDs) at their disposal, not to mention the resources offered by the Internet. The segmentation of the media, the interaction among different media outlets, and the greater availability of those media are an important vector for understanding how young people are being socialized today, as, at the same time, young people no longer have traditional socializing referents such as school, state, the working world, and family.

This is the context in which the amplification, objectivation, and intensification of a sexualized agenda of feminine undertakings and the presentation of women in an active position with regard to sex (which may or may not correlate with egalitarian gender processes and the questioning of male predominance)—phenomena that are present in other Latin American countries and to some extent are global in scope—have been processed and accentuated in Argentina. The veil of prohibition that once covered sex has vanished, along with a number of closely related notions. Ideas based in religion that unite sex with and subordinate it to love, the couple, the family, and heterosexuality—at least, among certain age groups—have been weakened. Sex has become an end in itself for many social actors, with no need for further justification. As others have noted, because sex is no longer necessarily transcendental, it can now figure in a varied and challenging menu of leisure activities.

Below, we systematize significant dimensions of this panorama in six points related to the forms sexuality takes; the generational nature of sexual practices; the existence of legitimized variations of sexuality and the detranscendentalization, proliferation, and transformation of sexuality into an objective plane of interaction; and the specific usage acquired in this context by terms such as "slut" and "bitch," which plays an important role in this book.

1. Sex-related topics (e.g., sexual relations and how to carry them out) occupy more space in the mass media than ever before.[6] In Argentina, general advice and comments on how to engage in sexual activities now go beyond the "hygienic" (i.e., scientific) approach presented by medical doctors on TV and transcend the classic communications strategy of cloaking moralizing aims in appeals to morbid curiosity by displaying prohibited images while sanctioning their protagonists. The sexual scenario crosses the old boundary constructed by the media that associated uninhibited sexuality with "artists" and "special people," thus separating it from the average person. A prototypical case in point is the famous sexologist Alessandra Rampolla, who dispenses advice about sexual enjoyment grounded in scientific knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and psychology. At the same time, she appears to be just another woman, albeit a well-

informed one, who can broach any and all subjects of concern to her gender mates without blushing and yet remain somewhere between neutral and complicit regarding their individual preferences.

In live and telephone interviews, radio announcers also take a colloquial tone when discussing subjects such as ménage à trois and the innovative use of sex toys and pornographic movies. And on neither TV nor radio is this sort of sexual discussion the domain of late-night programs on specific channels and stations with limited audiences (what in Argentina is called "*horario de protección al menor*" [minors' protection time]). What we describe in the pages that follow is found in prime-time programming on network TV, when family viewing is supposedly the norm.

Thus it is that celebrities performing audacious choreographies, lascivious sexuality—bathing in champagne, simulated fellatio (acts that are not limited to heterosexual people or to couples)—appear in prime-time TV shows. In the 1990s, a middle-class neighborhood association, with the help of the mass media, expelled transvestites from its community, alleging that they were a bad example for children; in the mid-2000s, the star of a network TV series broadcast in the primest of prime time was a transvestite playing the role of a transvestite pursued by a male character. The plot turned on the male character's ignorance of the situation, and in at least some episodes, the plot structure positioned the audience to favor the relationship.[7]

Examples abound that confirm what can be deduced from the above: as never before in the history of Argentina, sex has a central presence in the mass media, a presence that, as we show, intertwines in complex ways with the growing sexualization of the daily life of the young people who participate in the tropical music movement, within which cumbia reigns.[8]

2. Everything we have mentioned up to this point can be applied generally to the audiovisual media, the Internet, the radio, and music. But it has a very peculiar expression that makes it specifically difficult to understand. Some generations more than others have become familiarized with, as well as affected and interpellated by, this communicational dispositive. People born from the 1970s on live in a social cartography in which secondary socialization is mediated more by the mass media than by the state through schools; more by peer groups than by the family; and more by relatively anonymous interlocutions than by more personalized ones.

For young people, this is the most frequent, most immediate reality. But when social scientists from earlier generations study young people, they either do not see this difference or, when they do, color the new panorama in a negative, moralistic way. This leads some to characterize the epoch insensitively as one in which ideals have been lost and "anything goes." By this we mean to say that if this way to conceive sexuality has spread among the members of one age group, that group is precisely the young people who are the audience for the musical genre analyzed in this book.

Yet if there is anyone who must make a persistent effort to overcome the tendency to transform a particular generational experience into specific parameters, it is precisely the analysts who belong to the earlier generation. They, like any veterans, tend to suppose that the younger generation has really gone beyond what is permissible, that the rules truly have been undermined. In short, the generational shift made by subjects with regard to sex has enabled an age ethnocentrism that, in magnitude, looks much like what was experienced during the so-called sexual revolution in Europe and the United States forty to fifty years ago. Although more silent and less labeled, the current phenomenon is no less radical and reaches beyond the social radius of its predecessor. While these phenomena have not escaped the perception and criticism of feminists, it is also true that they form part of a horizon for structuring action in which specific platforms of comprehension are created that prevent second wave feminism from taking them into account.[9] We fully agree with Feona Attwood (2006, 83–84) when she points out, "Although it is easy to criticize these attempts to re-engage with femininity and with sex, this may be to close down an important debate about how an active female sexuality can be materialized in culture, as well as working to position feminism in terms of an unhelpful and unimaginative 'anti-sex' stance . . . (Stoller 1999). It is also indicative of a feminist tendency to downplay any shifts in representation, so that new developments are only seen as part of the 'same old story' of sexist discourse."

This book is our humble attempt to contribute to the debate about the kind of active women's sexuality Attwood is asking for, showing that the shifts in discourses and performances we have encountered in our investigation are much more complex than the "'same old story' of sexist discourse."

3. Liberation that permits sexual possibilities far beyond encounters between members of a heterosexual couple is an equally important phenomenon. Thus, a radio station with a mainly juvenile audience broadcasts a midafternoon "micro"-program (a format in which a particular section, separated from the main program, repeats each day usually following a particular theme, or dedicated to a particular audience) titled "Truths of a Regular Guy." The announcer, Gabriel Schultz, a professional who in other circumstances lucidly and eruditely analyzes the mass media, refers to common sexual practices, which are then discussed by listeners. For example, he might announce that "women with dyed red hair like to suck two penises at the same time"; girls would then call in to confirm the allegation. We obviously do not know whether the callers are telling the truth, but we do know that, even if they are not and this is nothing more than a game, the program attracts an audience, the jest upsets no one and elicits no moralistic denunciations, and, finally, it is perhaps possible that "women with dyed red hair like to suck two penises at the same time."

A reading of the innumerable blogs by women circulating in Buenos Aires makes clear that, whatever their actual sexual practices happen to be, they have no problem incorporating certain novel sexual repertoires (formerly found in

books or practiced within the confines of the experimental morality of hippies and vanguardists) when constructing a character and formulating a discourse.

Finally, the sheer number and variety of ads offering anal sex for men in *Clarín*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Argentina, removes any doubt that only so-called normal sex can be referred to in print.[10]

4. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which is sold on newsstands throughout Argentina, publishes advice for the young female generation that, unlike the traditional recommendation to be demure, proposes a sexual etiquette that is attentive to the most diverse sexual variations and pleasures: how to masturbate a man; how to enjoy anal sex or organize an erotic evening in which food becomes part of the sex and sex a kind of food. Along with objectifying, intensifying, and multiplying the value of sexuality, *Cosmopolitan* formulates and legitimizes its autonomization and detranscendentalization. In this respect, *Cosmopolitan* contributes to what Brian McNair (1996) terms "'pornographication,' a process evident in both art and popular culture where the iconography of pornography has become commonplace, and in a more widespread fascination with sex and the sexually explicit in print and broadcast media" (quoted in Attwood 2006, 81–82).

Attwood points out that all of these changes occur in the context of the disruption of the boundaries between public and private discourse present in media trends that privilege lifestyle, "reality," interactivity, and the confessional. McNair (2002, 81, 87, 98) has described this change as a movement toward a "striptease culture" that can be interpreted as a new stage "in the commodification of sex, and the extension of sexual consumerism," and as part of a broader preoccupation with "self-revelation," "exposure," and "public intimacy."

Cosmopolitan reveals a second key element in casual sex practiced by women: in classic machista tradition, it excuses (and even praises) men for their sexual conquests while upholding the idea that, for women, sex should come after marriage or falling in love and making a commitment. (These are not innocuous alternatives, given that they are grounded in what can be viewed as lay statutes for sexuality.) If not, stigmatization follows (i.e., characterization as sluts, traitors, and so on.) In the immediate past in Argentina, it would have been hard to find a single cultural sphere that escaped this dichotomy, which was the rule even in so-called progressive circles.

Even members of the left-leaning middle class have found it enormously difficult to do more than pay lip service to new sexual ideas that have broken with the ideal of family-oriented heterosexuality. The panorama is radically different today and covers a much broader social range. *Cosmopolitan* magazine makes the case for casual sex in terms that, although timorous, find no moral problem in the practice, which it views as an exercise in self-control and the recognition of individuality: "If you control your sexuality and your desire, there is no need to feel guilty about one crazy night—or even two! What is important is *to enjoy sex* because, nowadays, you hold the reins and can manage

the situation any way you please. Be decisive, and *if you really feel like having casual sex*, without commitments, you have to try to make *these sporadic sexual relations satisfactory*."[11] But it is not only a question of canvassing what is happening at the "production" pole of the culture industry. Tracking blogs produced by young Argentine women today makes very clear that the symbolic repertoire that presupposes the validity of active, plural, detranscendentalized women's sexuality is alive and well—in the middle class, at least. In these blogs, women between twenty and thirty-five wager that they can give expression to a concept of sexuality in which what matters are conquests, frequency, and pleasure, with love, morality, commitment, marriage, and the family relegated to second place.

5. The terms "detranscendentalized" and "autonomized" refer to pleasure-giving and relational possibilities of sex as consummate that are far removed from the ideas of eternity and absoluteness that traditionally are attached to love. Magazines regale female audiences with advice for improving their performance as both givers and receivers of sex—advice that runs from recommending candy to sensitize and flavor the penis during oral sex to providing the right environment to achieve anal sex, or even advice on how a woman should ask a man to eat certain foods to keep his semen from tasting bitter. How much the size of the penis matters is endlessly debated in Internet blogs and forums, with women's testimony coinciding in valuing men who know how to give pleasure and criticizing those who may be gentlemen but are sexually clumsy and inefficient; some women even go so far as to complain about men's incompetence or about their lack of understanding that sometimes what women want is sex, not love. Even women who have not renounced the ideals of love and lasting relationships demonstrate desire for a rich and, to some extent, transgressive sex life. And even in cases where the ideology of the couple with a commitment to love is dominant, as in the sex blog published by *La Nación* (a newspaper that is so conservative that the fact that it has a sex blog serves as paradigmatic example of our affirmation in the third point above), the objectivation and discussion of sex in terms of technique for giving pleasure are a reality.

6. It is precisely within this context that what we refer to as the sexual activation of women emerges. Furthermore, it is this sexual activation that has led some women to change the connotation of the term "*puta*" [slut]. If it is true that the negative value assigned to the term they use (but whose connotation they want to change) demonstrates male domination, it is also clear that the proposed new meaning is very different from the accusative one. To be a "slut" in these terms is not to be bad, disrespectful, or a traitor; it is to be active, daring—in a word, a woman who is particularly interested in sex. This is the meaning given in one of the abovementioned blogs, for example, in which one woman states that she is as much a "slut" as another of the bloggers in the sense that both she and her friend hold challenging ideas about sex that reveal them

as active and daring: she wants group sex, and her friend wants another woman in her bed.

All of this transformation in the way sex is deployed and experienced in contemporary Argentina has been studied empirically, and what Vanina Leschziner and Silvia Kuasñosky (2003, 101) have found among university students illustrates what we are talking about:

> The younger women [in the poll] are the ones who indicate the existence of a new subjectivity that makes a place for potentially freer (with regard to traditional canons) emotional and sexual experience for women. The opinions of the women interviewed on how satisfied they were with their first sexual experience are significant in this regard: the most unfavorable responses are concentrated among the older members of the group, with the most favorable opinions found among the younger members. . . . [T]he increased impact on the youngest women of the new models for emotional-sexual relations may explain their tendency to regard their first sexual experience positively.

Therefore, young middle-class women also seem to enjoy their sexuality much more than the older female cohort. Other data from the same survey show similar findings:

> Younger women, as opposed to older ones, state in their response that privacy is not important when it comes to where to have sex, an issue we consider relevant because this attitude denotes a symbolic change in the meaning assigned to the act of making love by the society at large. . . . Sexual initiation also occurred earlier among the youngest group members. . . . This phenomenon indicates incipient changes not only in the level of beliefs currently circulating in the social imaginary on "sexuality" regarding what is permitted and what is not, but also in the relations of power between women and men about sexuality, particularly in the daily struggle to impose meaning on social classifications taken as legitimate by the society at large. (Leschziner and Kuasñosky 2003, 102)

The chapters that follow demonstrate how such a struggle for meaning, in the case of the social sector we are analyzing here, is played out around many significations advanced by cumbia villera lyrics—for instance, the meaning of being a "slut."

Something that is also present in middle-class young people's behavior becomes apparent when we show how young men and women of the popular sectors understand a new way to be emotionally involved that they call "*transa*," an affective casual relationship between a man and a woman in which sex often

is the most important part (similar to the American "hooking up"). Leschziner and Kuasñosky (2003, 104) write:

> Young people value an active, contingent relationship that assumes gender equality and even presupposes negotiating sexuality as a key part of the relationship, in contraposition to romantic love, whose origin and basis can be found in the sexual organization of society. Thus, the youngest people polled (both men and women) granted a central place in a relationship to sexual and emotional experimentation. The young people manifest a culture of forming relationships that are not oriented toward marriage or love; what they talk about is "sex" and "relationships." This position does not imply, however, that these young men and women do not desire a stable, lasting partnership; rather, there is a tendency to embark on relationships that do not necessarily lead to that end.

As Attwood (2006, 80) points out, in contemporary Western societies such as Argentina, "Within the context of a 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1992), sex has become domesticated and intimate relationships are eroticized, though at the same time there is a tendency to conceptualize the erotic as a highly individualized form of hedonism which is pursued through episodic and uncommitted encounters and through forms of auto-eroticism. . . . [What we are witnessing is] a 'shift from a relational to a recreational model of sexual behaviour' (Bernstein 2001, 397)."

That middle-class men think of their relations with women in this way can be seen as an extension of a very traditional understanding of masculinity in which, Marcelo Urresti (2003, 147) says, "to be male implies being impulsive and taking the initiative, always being in active situations, reducing sexuality to coitus and practicing it as a release, [and] making the woman the object of possession, passive and gratifying." However, the novelty lies in the fact that middle-class girls seem to be attuned to this kind of sexual behavior, as well. As Giddens (1992, 154) points out regarding advanced capitalist societies, "Pure relationships" have become "the prototypical form of personal life." As we have mentioned, this contemporary ideal of intimate relationship is based on a form of mutual, democratic self-interest: a relationship is "continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1992, 58).

As Attwood (2006, 88–89) correctly reminds us, Zygmunt Bauman has very important insights that go beyond what Giddens inaugurated:

> According to Zygmunt Bauman, contemporary sexual and romantic encounters embody a form of "liquid love" in which relationships have become "easy to enter and to exit" (Bauman 2003, xii) and human bonds have become "light and loose" (Bauman 2003, xi). Earlier conceptualizations of the binding love relationship—characterized by duty, family,

> fate or romance—are replaced by a vision of an individual love life as a series of effortless but intensely fragile encounters. . . .

According to Bauman, as the bonds between sex and reproduction, sex and commitment become looser and looser, eroticism develops "substance," becomes its own and only "reason and purpose." At the same time, it paradoxically acquires "an unheard-of lightness and volatility" (Bauman 1999, 21). A drive towards "excitation" and "adventure," already present in modern narratives of passion, is compressed in the pursuit of "choice," "variety," "transient but renewable pleasures" and the experience of intense and pure sensation (Illouz 1999, 176). According to Eva Illouz, the love experience is flattened and fragmented in postmodern consumer societies, typified by the "affair" rather than the stable relationship or grand passion.

In cases like that of Argentina, inscribing love and sexuality in a framework of egalitarianism and individualism does not necessarily signify the total transitoriness and fragmentation of a conspicuous postmodern condition (like the one described by Giddens and Illouz). While this may occur in parts of Argentine society, the lowest common denominator of such transformation is sexualization plus egalitarianism.

In the chapter on how our female interviewees relate to cumbia villera lyrics, we discuss the similarities and differences in how girls of the popular sector enact a freer, more transient, and more volatile sexuality on their own. Meanwhile, what Bauman (1999, 27) describes as a major characteristic of postmodern society merits further consideration: "Eroticism cut free from its reproductive and amorous constraints . . . is as if it were made to measure for the multiple, flexible, evanescent identities of postmodern men and women. Sex free of reproductive consequences and stubborn, lingering love attachments can be securely enclosed in the frame of an episode, as it will engrave no deep grooves on the constantly re-groomed face being thus insured against limiting the freedom of further experimentation." As we have mentioned, at the center of the changes that affect both women and men—as members of the couple—is the new place *desire* occupies in the interaction of the partners: "What used to take the form of a command—external impositions and regulations (family, community, social class) had to be accommodated—has given way to the absence of external restrictions: the couple, affection, and sexuality have become a private affair. The place occupied by *desire* has expanded, which makes the question a matter of internal freedom and the subjective aptitude to know one's own needs and assume one's own desires" (Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003a, 135).

Thus, desire was always part of how men understood their relationship with women. The open display of women's desire, however, is something new. One outcome of the sexual revolution of the 1960s is that sexual relations must be a source of pleasure for women, as well, not something that is done only for the pleasure of the "other." All of these changes, by definition, necessitate that men

modify how they understand their masculinity; no longer the sole repositories of desire, they have to develop new behaviors to deal with the now explicit and active desire of the "other." Therefore, what Raewyn Connell (1995) defined many years ago as "hegemonic masculinity"—the idea that a culturally normative ideal of men's behavior exists, an ideal that underlines as male characteristics aggressiveness, strength, drive, ambition, and self-reliance—seems to be unevenly changing among men. The problem that emerges in this context in contemporary Argentina, as well, as Urresti (2003, 154) points out, is that "models are lacking for present-day couple relationships: the old model, which to some degree is still in force, is breaking up into multiple, hybridized paradigms to which residual fragments of the past cling. Those fragments serve, in many cases, as opportunities for abrogation in the form of a violent regression, leading to the affirmation of outdated conduct. In this sense, some men opt to hold fast or return to models from the past or to exercise violence against women and children based on the putative authority of the figure of the breadwinner (a figure that is increasingly questioned)."

We think that it is precisely in this uncertain terrain that cumbia villera lyrics intervene to advance a proposal for gender relations to the genre's young male and female adherents. The reactions of many young men and women to those lyrics is the focus of the book. What we found articulated in cumbia villera lyrics and the reaction of boys and girls to their content is, among other things, the contradictory requirements a gender culture undergoing a profound change poses to women in contemporary Argentina—that is, an acceptance of their sexual activation but not to the point at which such an activation constitutes a serious menace to traditional men's roles and, perhaps most important, not to the point of creating a "performance" problem for the young men whose sexual repertoires still do not include the fundamentals that can satisfy the open desire of many young women. As Mario Margulis and his colleagues note:

> Norms with enormous influence in attraction and seduction games still carry weight in the cultural conditioning of men and women. As a cultural product, eroticism also responds to the patterns of a determined epoch. A woman who aggressively takes the initiative is likely to elicit rejection responses in men. She can make her advances, but in accordance with implicit rules, sending indirect messages with her body and couching subtle insinuations in her words that the recipient understands, as the codes for seduction and eroticism, and the legitimate conduct in force at any particular time and in any particular place and social sector, are included in generational and class *habitus*. (Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003a, 140)

However, this complex code of seduction and eroticism is not easy to grasp, above all because of the velocity of the changes gender relations have undergone in the past couple of decades and because many young men and women

continuously equivocate about them.[12] To guide them into this problematic territory, many of these young people rely on what popular culture has to offer and thus "use" what is advanced in cumbia villera lyrics (which can be quite explicit) as road maps. The diverse reactions of many of our interviewees to those road maps are the topic of the chapters of this book.

Young women now confront the question of how to master the intricacies of an ever-changing erotic and sensual etiquette; young men confront questions about how to perform in relation to women's newly activated sexuality, which poses challenges that they often are not able to meet. As Margulis and his colleagues (2003a, 140) note, "Women complain to their partner, seeking greater satisfaction and, in general, the externalization of desire and female needs that were formerly hidden," which implies "changes in a couple's equilibrium, influencing the performance and sexual satisfaction of males." The inertia linked to past models of gender relations can undermine the best attempts by many young men to accommodate the desire of the "other," itself ambiguously advanced. As Margulis and his colleagues (2003b, 55–56) note, "Males called upon to process the greater autonomy and freedom of women often cling to more traditional female models that guarantee them an active role and allow them to hold onto masculine models that make them feel more secure. With regard to women, virginity is no longer culturally emphasized nor is sexuality as stigmatized as before, and there is a high level of stimulation in society at large encouraging greater sexual freedom. However, the persistence of old patterns leads to great ambiguity in the cultural demands orienting their conduct." What a young man told the researchers is thus very revealing:

> I know intellectually that it's all right, I went on vacation with a girl too, and now we know each other, and why aren't we going to have sex if both of us have the same rights, . . . but I can't get it out of my head that she isn't a good girl.
>
> And what would a good girl be?
>
> A good girl would be a girl, I don't say she has to be a virgin, but, for example, a girl who had two long lasting boyfriends, had sex with the one she went with for three years, and the other for two years, and then she met me. (Quoted in Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003b, 56)

The picture, therefore, is complex. On the one hand, the interviewee did not expect virginity from his prospective girlfriend, but on the other, he still held a clearly normative idea of what constitutes a "good girl." In this regard, "good girls" are those who have sex within stable, more or less long, relationships. Fast girls—the "sluts" referred to in the testimonies and lyrics quoted in this book—are the ones who change male partners very often.

This last point brings us back to the issue of men's sexual performance and the threat to performance that a young woman with previous sexual experience

presents. It is possible for many young men to accept parity in their girlfriends' sexual experience in principle, but such parity constitutes an actual source of insecurity. As one of the professionals interviewed by Margulis and his colleagues (2003b, 56) pointed out, "Men feel under greater pressure with regard to their sexuality because there are elements for comparison; . . . they are comparing themselves all the time with these girls' earlier boyfriends, and this causes problems." Thus, it seems that, despite the transformations that Argentine sex and gender culture have experienced since the 1960s, many men are still attached to imaginaries in which they feel they should be the "sex experts" and women should passively accompany them as "good pupils."

All of the changes mentioned so far have been documented among middle-class young people. Nevertheless, many of them are occurring among young people in the popular sectors, as well—that is, the young people who constitute the public for cumbia villera and those who have been most affected by dramatic structural changes such as economic insecurity and uncertainty, precariousness of employment, social exclusion, and increased levels of poverty and unemployment. For obvious reasons, these changes also impinge on how people relate to one another, and gender relations are no exception. For instance, there is a well-documented trend toward fewer marriages because "unemployment and the precariousness of employment have, by necessity, a big impact on the possibility of family planning" (Leschziner and Kuasñosky 2003, 91; our translation). The traditional trajectory from education to employment, marriage, the establishment of an independent household, and the birth of children has been broken for many people. Although men and women are not marrying, however, many are still having children; moving back and forth from their own households to their parents' households; finding precarious way to insert themselves into the labor force; and attempting to return to formal education later in their lives. In this sense, it is not only the meaning of being a man or a woman that is being altered but also the meaning of being an adult.

"Unlike what occurs in the middle class where adolescence constitutes a kind of moratorium," writes Sofia Cecconi (2003, 189), "a short sequence takes place among the popular sectors where adolescence is short and early insertion into the working world—or the world of the street, given the high unemployment that characterizes the current crisis—is the rule; motherhood also frequently comes early to girls." Among the young Argentines who follow cumbia villera, this transformation of the historical trajectory from education to family formation has coined a very interesting pair of terms: "*pibes*" [kids] and "*pibes grandes*" [grown-up kids][13] (Martín 2004; Vila and Semán 2008). The terms themselves mark the strangeness of the new trajectories within these social groups' traditions; after all, historically, a grownup was precisely someone who was no longer a kid. The *pibes grandes* category describes subjects who are between twenty-five and thirty-five and in the past would have been parents, husbands, wives with autonomous households but who, although they have procreated, are not responsible for their households.

The complex compression and expansion of age stages that is under way among the popular sectors in contemporary Argentina has another characteristic. According to Cecconi (2003, 196), members of the popular sectors have less-elaborated relationships with their own bodies, which shortens the period of biological youth and opens the way for young people's self-destruction. Extreme impoverishment conditions possibilities for action that are oriented toward immediacy. In this sense, in Cecconi's (2003, 196) view, there is no "utopia" of the body. There is only a relation of immediacy that translates into practices that leave no room for midterm or long-term perspectives.

Therefore, at the level of embodied practice, according to the literature available on the topic, young people who follow cumbia villera would have a different experience from that of their middle-class counterparts. If this is so, it has very important consequences for our research, considering how centered on the body listening, dancing, and other activities that accompany cumbia villera are. In this regard, not only are the "bodies" that go to bailes different from the bodies that go to middle-class dance halls, but what those bodies do within the bailes is both similar and different. In this sense, we can claim that among popular-sector youth, the experience of the "fleeting moment" described by Bauman (1999) as one of the characteristics of postmodern life acquires an extreme expression.

Not only their bodies but also, according to research, the sexual experiences of these youngsters are different from those of their middle-class counterparts. Sexual relations come early and are imposed by men, often at the risk of HIV transmission and pregnancy (Cecconi 2003, 193). Thus, Argentina's popular-sector youth are living in an ever-changing gender and sexual terrain that is rife with ambiguity and uncharted territory and turn to popular culture to try to make sense of what is going on. Within popular culture, the lyrics, music, and performances of cumbia villera occupy center stage, considering their importance in the lives of many young people of the popular sectors.

However, these positions are noteworthy more for the questions they raise than for their veracity. First, the research provides a description that, following Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1987), is restricted to depicting the limits, elements of mimicry, and shortcomings of popular experience. As is the case with its matrix, this position is open to the same criticism Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1992) leveled at Bourdieu's work. A position like the one we are describing identifies the analyst with the group to which he or she belongs (i.e., middle class, with values that include prolonged adolescence, autonomy, reflexivity, and long-term projects), detecting in social groups with whom he or she cohabits conflictively and at a distance defective substitutes (or just plain defects) instead of concentrating on the positivity (ontological, not axiological) of the experience analyzed. Put simply, neither popular experience nor, by extension, popular gender experience can be analyzed in terms of what prevents it from being *the* gender experience (i.e., that of the middle class) rather than on the basis of what makes

it peculiar. This means that the analyst must comprehend popular gender experience in itself, not as the place it occupies in our scale of values (which, however, should not be renounced). This is the epistemological premise elaborated in more detail in Semán 2010, which holds that, when analyzing "popular difference," it is necessary to apply interpretive procedures that question the illusion that perspectives among social groups are continuous and undifferentiated, which leads to positions that appear to sustain the idea that all social groups ultimately want the same thing and that what really differentiates them is the resources they possess. This involves stressing both what is different in popular-sector experience and the heterogeneities that, except at a very abstract level, prevent the affirmation of cultural unity among subaltern groups.[14]

At the same time, it is necessary to retain a premise that is at the basis of both certain arguments wielded by critical feminism and some relativist considerations of popular culture: the agency and productivity of subalterns, which is at the heart of the analyses of scholars such as Sherry Ortner and Lila Abu-Lughod. On the plane we are concerned with here, in line with the premises deployed by Pablo Alabarces and José Garriga Zucal (2008), the perspective of the popular sectors on the body, highlighting the values of strength, resistance, the capacity to take or impose a stand, and the capacity to resist another's stand, has been documented. Within this context, and contradicting our values, a perspective appears that differentiates genders through notions of complementarity and hierarchy. What we end up with is a framework for androcentric action that is not simply a limit on modernity. Rather, it is an expression of a positive cultural matrix that enters into contact with an interpellation that is simultaneously sexualized and equalizing. Cumbia villera both leads to and results from this conflictive encounter.

I

The History

Trajectory and Consolidation of the Cumbia in the Field of Argentine Music

ELOÍSA MARTÍN
(Translated by Pablo Vila)

"Cumbia is Argentine because Los Wawancó was born here," said Mario Castellón with a smile, making the group's jus soli, and not where its individual members or even the genre originated, the rationale for considering cumbia Argentine. Castellón's quasi-joke is in line with what popular lore (and some cumbia researchers) claim was the origin of the popularity of cumbia in Argentina—that is, the tremendous success of Los Wawancó in the early 1960s.

The form of cumbia that reached Argentina had already been modified when it entered the commercial music circuit in Colombia, its country of origin. In fact, the genre, which mixes African, indigenous, and (to a lesser degree) Hispanic influences (Wade 2000), and which originated on the Colombian coast during the late nineteenth century, had been raised from the category of regional folk music to that of national icon, and had been "modernized," before it reached Argentina (Wade 2000, 236).

According to Peter Wade, cumbia originated on Colombia's Atlantic shoreline. Within its characteristic sound (and dance), a convergence of Amerindian cultural elements, African cultural elements, and European cultural elements can be found.[1] Over the years, cumbia established itself as a national symbol of Colombia, and it became very popular in the second half of the twentieth century in other Latin American countries, such as Mexico, Peru, and Argentina. Traditional cumbia is played using two groups of musical instruments: a percussion section of membranophones (drums) and shaken idiophones from the African tradition and a wind section of aerophones from the Amerindian tradition.[2] Cumbia's Spanish heritage is evident in the language in which it is sung (Spanish), in how it is danced, and in the outfits the *bailadores* [dancers] wear. For vocal performance, cumbia groups always have a lead singer, and the other

band members sing the chorus, generally in unison, with occasional harmonization in parallel thirds.

Cumbia is a binary rhythm (two beats per measure), like almost all rhythms of Colombia's Caribbean coast. It is written in 2/4 when played at slow tempos and in 2/2 (or cut time) when played at faster tempos. One of its main characteristics is the accent on the weak part (offbeat) of the second beat—that is, the fourth (i.e., the last) eighth note of the measure when it is written in 2/4 or the fourth (i.e., the last) quarter note of the measure when it is written in 2/2. This accent can be clearly heard every two measures in the lower register of the tambora.

Harmonically, cumbia is generally written in minor key and mostly moves between the tonic chord (I-) and a cadential chord that can be either the dominant chord (V), of the harmonic minor scale, or the bVII chord, of the natural minor scale. Cumbia is written in minor key because the gaitas and flauta de millo are tuned in a somewhat "minor" key, even though their tuning is not completely tempered.

Cumbia moved from the countryside to Colombia's big cities in the 1940s, where it was adapted by street bands and groups that played vallenato, another form of Colombian folk music. Street bands tended to substitute European wind instruments such as clarinets for the gaitas, the snare drum for the alegre, and the bass drum for the tambora. In vallenato groups, the melodies are carried by the accordion, and the rhythm section is handled by the guacharaca (a scraped idiophone similar to the güiro) and the caja vallenata [vallenato box], a small drum held between the knees and played with the bare hands.

When the cumbia style entered Argentina, bands often used an instrumental lineup similar to that of the Colombian vallenato groups, with the accordion taking the principal melodic role. The güiro carried the one-eighth-/two-sixteenth-note ostinato pattern of the maracón, and a suspended cymbal played the constant offbeat of the llamador. Other percussion instruments that are often used are the cencerro or campana [cowbell] and the timbales. The harmonic foundation of the groove is provided by a piano and electric bass. This is the typical instrumentation of what is commonly known as cumbia romántica in Argentina.

From the 1990s on, cumbia villera has incorporated several distinctive features into its format. Although the groove has remained basically the same as that of Colombian cumbia, it is often played at a slower, more relaxed pace that is mildly reminiscent of Jamaican reggae. Also, drum machines and electronic or sampled percussion are used in combination with traditional acoustic percussion instruments. (For more musicological details of cumbia villera, see Massone and De Filippis 2006.) Perhaps the single most important change, however, is the use of a synthesizer in the lead melodic role once handled by the accordion. In performing cumbia villera using a synthesizer, extensive use is made of the pitch bend control, which allows the keyboard player to expressively "bend" notes pretty much the way rock guitarists and gypsy violinists do.[3]

Most of the time, the keyboard player in cumbia villera is also the lead singer and front man; he most often uses a portable MIDI keyboard controller, or "keytar," that hangs from his shoulder on a guitar strap. The most popular keytar is the red Roland AX-1.

In this way, cumbia villera operates with a limited number of resources unified by a dual goal: to provide sonic support for the clear transmission of a song's message and to serve as a rhythmic impulse for the dance. "In strictly musical terms," Manuel Massone and Mariano De Filippis (2006, 40–41) write, "cumbia villera did not arise out of the development of a genre, but rather was constructed on the basis of the most radical simplification possible of its constituent parts: rhythm, harmony and melody. This is the main feature that gives the subgenre the bare-bones musical style that . . . corresponds to the crudeness of its lyrics."

One can understand the musical changes from cumbia to cumbia villera as mere musical simplification, as some scholars do, leaving aside a series of social facts that marked its appearance as a product. Technological change, the broadening of the temporal space for entertainment, and the emergence of new areas of profitability provide incentives for growth in the demand for and consumption of music; this, in turn, alters the scale of investment, the profits (which are reduced), and the parameters that determine hit songs. In brief, what appears as musicological simplification in ethnocentrically constructed readings is in fact a multilevel phenomenon of social updating. In addition, the reduced cost of technology has enabled an increasing number of performers to emerge whose needs, running from electronic instruments to recording studios and sound equipment, have had to be met (Benzecry and Semán 2010; Semán 2006). Today, cumbia villera groups are not filling as many stadiums as La Nueva Luna or Leo Mattioli, the big cumbia artists of the 1990s, did. But they never had audiences numbering hundreds of thousands of youngsters living in the hinterlands of Greater Buenos Aires, with no expectations to return to the provinces from which their families came. Cumbia villera is played not only in Constitución, near downtown Buenos Aires, but also in poor neighborhoods of Greater Buenos Aires, such as González Catán, Tigre, and Lomas de Zamora.

As a musical style, then, cumbia villera is much less a "simplification" than the child of the sociodemographic reconfiguration of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area; the availability of less expensive imported products; and the rise in the cost of transportation, as well as the influences beyond cumbia that are absorbed by young people who have been raised listening to cumbia and chamamé music.

Cumbia as the Music of Argentina's Popular Sectors

In the mid-1930s, Argentina embarked on an accelerated process of import substitution. The relocation of people (most of them mestizos) from the countryside to the country's most important cities, where new industries were located,

was a very important part of this process. Because urban space was scarce and expensive in Buenos Aires itself, many of the new arrivals ended up settling in the surrounding suburbs. In the process, Buenos Aires, once a mostly European-looking city, underwent significant demographic changes.

Due to the social policies of Peronism (1945–1955), most of the mestizo immigrants, who came from all the corners of the country and brought their native rhythms with them, were able to buy homes in the suburbs of what is now called the first industrial corridor—the suburbs adjacent to the capital to the south, west, and (to a lesser degree) north. This situation changed when a coup d'état threw the Peronists out of power in 1955 and less-progressive policies were enacted.

This is also the period in which *villas miserias* [shantytowns] started to appear in Buenos Aires and in the first industrial corridor. Because new arrivals from the countryside were no longer able to buy houses in those areas, many eventually left the shantytowns and started to populate what is now called the second industrial corridor, or the more distant suburbs to the south, west, and now north of Buenos Aires.

Many of the new arrivals, unable to leave the villas miserias, ended up settling there permanently. In addition, many native Buenos Aires workers were unable to continue living in the city and moved either to the villas miserias or to the first or second industrial corridor. In time, increasing migration from Paraguay and Bolivia (and to a lesser degree from Peru) brought about a very similar process of geographical relocation.

The end product of this complex process is that native *porteños*, internal mestizo migrants, and mestizo immigrants from Paraguay and Bolivia are constantly on the move in and out of the villas miserias, some of them remaining there for a very long time, but others moving from shantytowns to the working-class neighborhoods when their fortunes improve. After the economic disaster that followed President Carlos Menem's neoliberal policies of the 1990s, the reverse process also became very common: people lost their homes in the working-class neighborhoods and moved either to the villas miserias or to *casas tomadas*, abandoned houses that they occupy illegally.

This extended geographical mobility brought about interesting social interactions, as well, whose result was the mixing, usually via matrimony, of different populations—including the Paraguayans and Bolivians, though to a much smaller degree. In terms of music, some genres that the mestizo migrants brought with them from the countryside became widely popular. Chamamé, for instance, which originated in eastern Argentina, was the most popular genre among most immigrant groups for many years, partly because it was one of the few whose choreography allowed couples to dance to it together.

It is very difficult to make clear distinctions between the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods of Greater Buenos Aires and those of the villas miserias. Shantytowns often consist of densely packed houses, separated only by narrow alleys instead of streets. However, houses built with poor materials, such

as cardboard and pallets, also exist outside the shantytowns, and a few well-constructed edifices exist within. At the same time, shantytown dwellers usually do not pay rent for the lots they occupy, whereas the residents of poor neighborhoods usually do, which can leave shantytown residents with more surplus cash to buy expensive consumer goods—most prominently, sneakers and fashionable clothing. Finally, similar social problems, including substance abuse and high unemployment, mark the villas miserias and the poor neighborhoods. Thus, socioeconomic differences between residents of shantytowns and of poor neighborhoods are not clear-cut or easy to define. That is the main reason we address the participants of the cumbia villera scene, as well as the youth we interviewed for this book, as belonging to the popular sectors or as being part of the suburban working class, in order to encompass what is factually very difficult to differentiate—that is, villeros versus the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods.

Finally, once again calling attention to the murky territory in question, not all of those who live in the shantytowns feel that they "belong to" the shantytowns. Thus, it is not uncommon for a shantytown resident to speak disparagingly about "villeros," a term that can be used derogatorily for inhabitants of the villas miserias. If the speaker's actual circumstances were not known, one might assume that he or she stood outside that marginalized social context. But that assumption would be wrong.

That said, however, in the imaginary of many people in Buenos Aires, the villeros are completely different from the inhabitants of poor neighborhoods. Shantytown residents themselves often make a distinction between living in the villas miserias because they temporarily have no choice and "belonging to" the shantytown as "villeros de alma" [villeros to their very souls].

Cumbia and the Bailanta Complex as "Música de Negros"

Despite the success of cumbia villera in the 2000s, a broad spectrum of regional and stylistic variations of Argentine cumbia persists.[4] These variations include northern and Peruvian cumbia and cumbias from the provinces of Santa Fe and Santiago del Estero; cuartetera, or happy or festive and group cumbia; and Mexican and romantic cumbia (Cragnolini 1998, 299). Other varieties are show and traditional cumbia (Pérez 2004, 11).

Following Alejandra Cragnolini (1998), we can say that cumbia norteña [northern cumbia] is characterized by the use of syncopated rhythms that come from Andean huaynos and carnavalitos. The genre shows a preference for lyrics on romantic topics. The most important instruments are keyboards, electric guitar, electric bass, drums, cencerro, and tumbadora. Cumbia Peruana [Peruvian cumbia] is very similar to northern cumbia in its rhythms, instrumentation, and romantic topics but differs in its much more pronounced approach

to the percussion parts of songs. Cumbia Santafesina [Santa Fe–style cumbia] is a little bit different in its instrumentation in that the accordion replaces the keyboard, and trumpets and trombones are incorporated. This style also favors romantic lyrics. Cumbia Santiagueña [Santiago del Estero–style cumbia] adds keyboards to the accordion and keeps the other basic instruments (e.g., guitar, bass, and cencerros). Rhythmically, it tends to mix cumbia with guarachas and merengues. The lyrics are also romantic in nature. Cumbia grupera or mexicana [group or Mexican cumbia] maintains the basic instrumentation of keyboards, accordion, electric guitar, electric bass, and drums but mixes cumbia rhythms with Mexican corridos and rancheras. Its lyrics mix romantic themes with witty topics and testimonial kinds of themes. Romantic cumbia comprises a mixed bag of instrumentation but performs a romantic repertoire closely related to the international melodic genre that is so prominent in Latin America.

Cumbia has been regrouped in Argentina into an even larger generic set known as the "bailanta." For the mass media, certain analysts, and the public, "bailanta" refers not only to the genre but also to the place where the music is performed and danced and to the aesthetic, the people, and the products identified with it. From this mainstream perspective, cumbia is viewed as grotesque, humorous, and suggestive (Elbaum 1994, 194) or as vulgar, crude, and uncreative (Cragnolini 1998, 295). Most cumbia lyrics deal with love, happiness, and dancing, referring to sex obliquely through double entendre (except in cumbia villera, whose sexual references are straightforward and are analyzed in depth in the next chapter). Social issues also have recently made an appearance in cumbia lyrics in the form of jailhouse jargon and topics (Míguez 2006). Cumbia insiders tend to refer to what the mainstream calls "bailanta" as "tropical music," a generic set that heterogeneously mixes tropical and non-tropical rhythms, such as Cordoban cuarteto and chamamé folk music from Corrientes Province.

Cumbieros, or the people who dance to cumbia music and consume the products within this market sector, use the terms "*bailanta*" and "tropical music" only to make themselves understood by outsiders. To them, cumbia, salsa, merengue, chamamé, and cuarteto each have distinctive rhythmic patterns, melodies, lyrics, and dance steps. The cumbieros also have individual preferences, favoring one subgenre over another, even when a mix is played at the dance hall, on the radio, or from a compact disc at home.

As Jorge Elbaum (1994, 194) has noted, mainstream mass-media discourse has homogenized and stigmatized tropical music by calling it "bailanta" since the 1980s. Within that discourse, cumbia is viewed as being of poor quality—as "greaser" or "black" music—by Argentine society's dominant sectors (Elbaum 1994, 203). Without denying the importance of the phenotypic prop in blackness, which would be equivalent to the kind of racist "achromatization" described by Alejandro Frigerio (2002, 2006), we agree with Hugo Ratier (1971) and Rosana Guber (1999). In their view, the term "*negro*" [black] in Argentina

refers not only to skin color or facial features but also to a broader construction that incorporates geographic and class definitions, as well as moral implications. For Argentines, blackness—and whiteness, for that matter—is carried in the soul; it may be invisible at first glance, but it can be verified in a person's acts. Thus, the abbreviated version of a popular adage holds that some people have black skin, and others have black souls. This dichotomy becomes tripartite in its full-blown version, which poses the existence of three types of "*negros*": those who are black skinned, those who are black souled, and "shitty blacks," a derogatory reference almost always used as a synonym for those who possess black souls.

However, in Argentina "*negro*," which can mean many things, is seldom used to refer to people of African descent living there, a purportedly nonexistent population—a national myth whose discussion lies outside the scope of this book. Rather, "*negro*" is used to refer to the mestizos—that is, those with the traditional mix of indigenous and European blood that characterizes most Latin Americans—who were "discovered" by white inhabitants of Argentina in the 1930s. As noted earlier, that was the era of import substitution that brought people from rural areas to urban centers and especially to the queen of Argentina's white cities, Buenos Aires. Peronism transformed those people into significant political actors in the 1940s. The political establishment in the national capital, who were almost entirely of European descent, referred to them as a "zoological avalanche," making their relationship with poverty, the working class, and Peronism commonplace and thus turning the saying that all *negros* are Peronists into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although there is an ongoing academic discussion about why the label "*negro*" is applied mostly to mestizos instead of Afro-Argentines in Argentina, the key problem in this area is to find a good explanation for why the term was applied to mestizo people in the 1940s instead of some new derogatory name. Frigerio's explanation that an existing derogatory term (i.e., "*negro*" for Afro-Argentine) was simply transferred onto a newly debased population (i.e., "*negro*" as mestizo) is a good starting point, but it does not explain why "*cabecita negra*" (both the name of a bird and a racial slur that was very popular in the 1940s and 1950s) was used alongside "*negro*" from the start or, perhaps, even before "*negro*" became the most popular racial slur (Frigerio 2006).

Except among cumbia villera initiates—who, as demonstrated below, proclaim black pride by adopting and then reversing stigmatizing definitions (Martín 2006a)—"*negro*" [black] is always applied to someone else, usually pejoratively. Thus, the stigmas are multiplied. If being called "black" is derogatory, being called "*bailantero*" is even worse. Following this line of reasoning, a parallel practice among the dominant sectors is to see cumbia in a positive light but from an ethnocentric perspective that places bailanteros in an inferior position and then, reversing the ethnocentrism, reifies them in the Argentine version of "black."[5]

Dancing Cumbia: Performers and Public

We add to the two different ways to dance to cumbia described in the Introduction—romantic cumbia and meneaito—a couple of other performances that usually occur at bailes. Part of the audience, mostly but not exclusively male, clusters together at the foot of the stage, moving back and forth, and begins to jump, pushing from back to front and from side to side (this is known as *pogo*). Bouncers keep the phenomenon in check. It is the culminating moment, termed "*descontrol*" [out of control], when musical enjoyment is expressed and communicated to the musicians. The band reciprocates by mentioning by name the most energetic enthusiasts or those carrying banners or signs identifying themselves as fans of one musical group or another or of a particular soccer team. People who do not participate in the *pogo*, especially women, dance alone, sit on the sidelines, or dance in couples at the back of the room. Finally, cumbia villera dancing involves the syncopated moving of arms and legs much like what one sees in Carnival *murgas* [dancing groups] and at soccer games.

Nobody just sits and listens to cumbia. Other activities and practices are always involved. People are either dancing or carrying on their daily activities while listening to cumbia on the radio or home music center.

The genre's inherent musicality, its rhythm, and its individual songs become favorites because they are "*alegre*" [happy]. People learn the lyrics not because they listen attentively to them but, rather, because they hear them daily or encounter them in unexpected contexts. Just as rhythms and melodies differ among cumbias, the choreography also varies according to musical factors (a particular cumbia's style), geographical factors (changing from one province to another), and gender and contextual factors, among others.

What do the musicians, dancers, and bailantas look like? Musicians from cumbia genres apart from cumbia villera favor a kind of elegance codified in the dress pants and shirts they wear, the size of their coats' lapels, and the use of colorful and luxurious fabric such as velveteen. They equate this with the look of top melodic music stars, and through it they create distance from the ethnic look of their origins. Cumbia villera musicians, for their part, tend to adopt visual styles that place them closer to rock or local versions of rap and hip-hop. Instead of dress pants and jackets, they wear everyday pants (mostly jeans) and large T-shirts or soccer jerseys.[6] They also sport short or shaved hair or, alternatively, long, straight hairstyles (differentiating themselves from the fulsome hairstyles of romantic singers), and their shoes of choice are the ostentatious, expensive sneakers now associated with U.S. outlaw figures.

The look of cumbia musicians is not insignificant. It breaks from the association with elegance, and within the cumbia space, cumbia villera expresses a social process that is similar to the role played by rock chabón (a popular-sector variant of rock nacional). We are talking about the arrival in the musical space of voices, ears, and legs that no longer expect to be socially integrated via their

laboring effort. What traditional rock combated and rock chabón lamented, cumbia villera transforms into chronicle and celebration. At the level of appearance, the style of dress of cumbieros, more appropriate for the soccer stadium than for a wedding, expresses their social assumptions.

In terms of the young people who go to the bailes, most come from the popular sectors and can be included in the category that Javier Auyero (1993) terms the "structural poor." The attire of young men at bailes resembles that of the musicians (i.e., the rapper look mentioned above). The attire of young cumbieras is quite simple: jeans and plain T-shirts that can be more or less provocative, depending on the wearer.

In the past, cumbia's lyrics were devoted to romantic themes. Cumbia villera, however, introduced a sudden change in which social grievances, violence, drugs, and sexualized and obscene topics replaced traditional love-related lyrics. In its entirety, the cumbia villera genre is characterized by topics related to urban violence in general, illegal practices, drug and alcohol use, police violence, and the daily social situation the poorest populations endure in metropolitan Buenos Aires. References to urban violence are found in not only the cumbia villera lyrics but also the names of its bands—Los Pibes Chorros [The Thieving Kids], Yerba Brava [Strong Herb (i.e., marijuana)], El Punga [The Pickpocket], Supermerka2 (in which "merka" refers to cocaine)—as well as on their CD covers and in their performances on television shows.[7] At the same time, the lyrics to many cumbia villera songs, at first glance, appear to be misogynist, sexist, and even obscene depictions of women and sexual relationships, as we show below.

Cumbia villera not only depicts the lifeworld of popular sectors of Buenos Aires. It is also largely performed by and heard by members of that social sector. This is not to say that cumbia villera is not played in middle-class settings. But the middle classes' appropriation of cumbia villera has a different kind of implication. As Maristella Svampa (2005, 179; our translation) points out, the appropriation "implies a recognition (of the ludic character of the music, linked—supposedly—to its plebeian origin) and, at the same time, some sort of distancing, where it takes on a stigmatizing stance (its character as 'villera music'—that is, music proper of the shantytowns)."

For analysis, we have divided the trajectory of Argentine cumbia into three distinct periods, each with its own style and media profile, and each catering to a specific audience.[8] When Argentine cumbia became very popular in the 1960s, it was performed in spaces frequented by the middle class and was musically and aesthetically different from what it would become twenty-five years later. The second period—the bailanta boom from the mid-1980s into the 1990s—is analyzed at greater length because it was during this period that cumbia fully came into its own as a genre and consolidated a specific market sector in Argentina. Finally, we briefly discuss a third period, in the early years of the twenty-first century, when the cumbia villera form that appeals to a younger audience emerged.

Debut in Buenos Aires Dance Clubs

Scholars disagree about when cumbia first appeared in Argentina. According to José Gobello and Marcelo Oliveri (2003, 20–27), it arrived in the 1940s with Efraín Orozco, who came to Argentina with his jazz band orchestra and played cumbia with the stylistic variations in fashion at the time. Orozco influenced the music scene and recorded in Buenos Aires for fifteen years. Fermín Cerdán (2003) places the origin of the tropical scene in general in the same period, coinciding with the official debut of Cordoban cuarteto: on June 4, 1943, a performance by the Cuarteto Leo was transmitted live by LV 3, a radio station in the city of Córdoba (Blázquez 2004, n.p.). Marta Flores (1993) concurs with this time frame, but for a different reason: she notes that in the 1940s, the first bailanta appeared in the city of Buenos Aires. By "bailanta," she means both the chamamé style of dancing by immigrants from the provinces bordering the Paraná River and the establishment of dance halls for it.[9] According to Héctor Fernandez L'Hoeste (2007, 347), it was only "after the 1960s, with the arrival of the Colombian band El Cuarteto Imperial, [that] cumbia gained a firm presence" in Argentina. Considering that cumbia records and radio play have greatly contributed to the spread of the genre in all of the Latin American regions in which cumbia has taken root, we cannot ignore these avenues either.

However, scholars such as Alejandra Cragnolini (2006, n.p.), Hugo Lewin (1994, 222), Rubén Pérez Bugallo (1996, 138), and Sergio Pujol (1999, 332), as well as Castellón himself, regard the late 1950s and early 1960s as the point at which tropical music became popular in Argentina. Pujol (1999) points out that mambo, bolero, and cha-cha reigned in the Argentine tropical scene in the early and mid-1950s, with cumbia occupying a secondary role. That changed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when native groups such as Los Wawancó and Los Cinco del Ritmo became very popular.

It is important to point out here that cumbia's rise to popularity was framed by the decline of tango as the most important dance genre in Buenos Aires. Starting in the early 1950s, and linked in complex ways to the arrival of the migrants mentioned earlier,[10] tango, the epitome of Buenos Aires, initially shared its popularity with the folk rhythms those migrants brought with them (above all, chamamé) and with American and Caribbean rhythms. Later, it was almost totally replaced by them. By the early 1960s, chamamé and cumbia had become the favored dance genres among the popular sectors of Buenos Aires, partly because the accordion served as their most important melodic instrument and both could be danced to by embracing couples.

Interestingly enough, Los Wawancó was formed almost by accident. A restaurant owner saw six medical students from different countries on a platform at the Constitución train station. They were packing up their instruments after playing at a friend's bachelor party, and the restaurant owner hired them. Los Wawancó then triumphed not only in Argentina but in all of Latin Amer-

ica and reigned supreme in the 1960s and 1970s.[11] From the very beginning, and for the next thirty years, Los Wawancó functioned as a cooperative, sharing tasks among the musicians. Some wrote lyrics and music for the songs, while others handled public relations and advertising or negotiated contracts. They personally supervised the work of assistants and press agents and even of their manager.

In the early 1980s, Mario Castellón bought both the name Los Wawancó and the group.[12] He held recording and composing rights jointly with Miguel Loubet and Taco Morales, members of the group. In the 1990s, Castellón decided to retire temporarily ("The lion went to sleep," he would say jokingly, leaving no doubt about his artistic importance), and Los Wawancó disappeared from the tropical music scene.

Although tropical music recording companies tried to tempt Castellón to come out of retirement, he did not feel that the group was suited to the bailanta boom; the audience and the nightspots they frequented had changed too much. Mistrustful of a tradition that was not his own, he remained aloof from the tropical scene and did not perform in public again until 2000. In 2006, at the Grand Rex Theater with a group made up of both old and new musicians and directed by Castellón, Los Wawancó celebrated fifty years in show business—and the more than 5 million copies sold of the eighty-seven albums the group recorded in the course of its career.

Although the dominant sectors of Argentina's society viewed cumbia as reflecting popular bad taste, the genre was first heard in Buenos Aires in middle-class *confiterías* such as the Garden and Saint George, in the rich northern suburbs of Greater Buenos Aires, and at La Perla and Bamboche in the city,[13] as well as at exclusive nightspots such as the Casa Gold, Tropicana, Sayonara, Adlon, and Reviens (Pujol 1999, 277, 285). In the beginning, the cumbia was accepted by Buenos Aires high society. In the mid-1960s, Los Wawancó was joined by Los Cartageneros, La Charanga del Caribe, and Fuego Cubano as the main exponents of the genre.

Through the late 1960s and the 1970s, cumbia remained popular and blended itself with native Argentine rhythms, most prominently with chamamé, the most danceable among them. From this blending, "chamamé tropical" was born, a rhythm that reigned in the 1970s and early 1980s. One of the most important combos of this genre was Los Caú [The Drunk Ones], who, mimicking the American rock band Kiss, painted their faces black and white. Humor was their distinctive characteristic, and they made fun of everything, including rock nacional, the most important musical genre of the period. For instance, Los Caú facetiously titled one of its albums "Los Caú en Obras." The height of success for Argentine rock bands at the time was to be invited to perform at Obras Stadium. Los Caú never performed on its stage, let alone recorded a live album there. The photos on the album cover poked fun at the rockers' aspirations while showing the class differences that separate cumbia's musicians and audience from those of rock nacional. The photos show the members of

Los Caú attired and equipped as working-class masons literally "in obras"—that is, building a house.

The Bailanta Boom

The opening of the Tropitango dance hall in 1981 appears to have inaugurated a new period in tropical music. In addition, the first program dedicated to tropical music, "Fantástico" (later renamed "Ritmo Fantástico") aired on the Splendid radio station in 1986 (Cerdán 2003). The program would lend its name to the first middle-class discotheque-type dance club devoted exclusively to tropical music when the Kiroski brothers, owners of the Magenta record label, opened the Fantástico Bailable, with a capacity of thirty-five hundred, in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Once.[14] The club, which is still operating, is on Rivadavia Avenue, with its many bus lines, and close to the Once train station, making it easily accessible not only from all parts of the city but also from all over Greater Buenos Aires. It has been customary in Buenos Aires to locate musical venues that target working-class audiences near train terminals on the routes that reach into the first and second industrial corridors. (Once is the terminal for the westbound route, Constitución is the terminal for the southbound route, and Retiro is the terminal of the northbound route.) The Kiroskis then opened Metrópolis in the Palermo neighborhood and Killer Disco in Quilmes in Greater Buenos Aires, establishing the foundation of a tropical music circuit where artists could play every weekend.

Many researchers on the topic point out that the boom in Argentina, which reached its peak in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, came about because of the greater visibility of tropical music in the mass media. Once the market sector was formed, a broad network was generated to produce the genre and transmit it over the airwaves.[15] The record labels Leader and Magenta and their related undertakings were especially important. The recording companies owned a number of radio stations and dance clubs in Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires; they also produced TV programs and published magazines dedicated to tropical music. The circuit included neighborhood FM stations (many of them *pirate* [illegal]) and various Internet sites, as well.[16]

For Esteban De Gori (2005), the bailanta boom of the 1990s appears to be linked to the fantasy of infinite consumption and well-being that was called "*la fiesta Menemista*" [the Menemist party], referring to the neoliberal policies of President Carlos Menem. What De Gori and other scholars emphasize is the new class alliance proposed by Menemism in which both the dominant and popular sectors would benefit from pegging the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar, selling state-owned enterprises at bargain-basement prices, and establishing a strong strategic alliance (baptized "*relaciones carnales*" [carnal relationships]) with the United States. Supposedly, such neoliberal policies would benefit Argentine society as a whole and would finally transform Argentina into a "First World" country.

The model worked for a few years. It was effective in modernizing services such as energy, water, telecommunications, and transportation, which previously had been provided by the state, and in increasing the consumption of consumer goods. The *fiesta Menemista* was celebrated by the popular sectors and ensured President Menem's reelection in 1994. According to De Gori (2005, 356), "Such festivity, deprived of social and political belligerence, was expressed and spread by cumbia." Menem's sociopolitical experiment ended in the worst economic disaster in Argentine history and the first default of a country in the modern era. That is a story that cumbia villera narrates.

The Artists

Singers such as Alcides, Antonio Ríos, Miguel "Conejito" Alejandro, Pocho la Pantera, and Ricki Maravilla, along with groups such as Adrián and the Black Dice, Malagata, Karicias, Chévere, and Green, were the major proponents of the cumbia genre until the early 1990s, with their success confirmed by ratings on network television.[17] For example, TV appearances by Ricki Maravilla increased exponentially in 1990, and his song "¿Qué Tendrá el Petiso?" [What's Shorty Got?] was played both at bailantas in poor neighborhoods and at upscale discotheques. In 1991, it was even heard at jet-set parties in Punta del Este, the posh beach in Uruguay where many rich Argentines take their annual vacations. Also in 1991, tropical music debuted in theaters on Avenida Corrientes, Argentina's Broadway, which meant it had arrived both geographically and artistically at the center of Argentine cultural life. Avenida Corrientes is lined with theaters for movies, serious plays, and musical reviews, along with shows by popular artists who represent diverse genres. The first so-called tropical music comedy, starring Pocho La Pantera, Sandra Smith, and Badi, debuted at the Metropolitan Theater (Gobello and Oliveri 2003, 72). Although it had a brief run, the show paved the way for many tropical music artists to appear in Corrientes theaters.[18]

The artists of this period came from the popular sectors and reproduced their aesthetic. In addition, before they became famous, they had earned little, working as waiters, photographers, small-shop owners in outlying neighborhoods, and clerks. Some even made a living doing odd jobs.[19] In many cases, even successful artists had to keep those part-time jobs, because it was the owner of the group who made the money. The musicians were little more than his employees.

The increased visibility of cumbia in the mass media coincided with an aesthetic innovation that broadened its spectrum of consumers. After the group Sombras appeared on the tropical music scene in 1993 (Cerdán 2003), bands made up of good-looking and stylish young men became increasingly common. They replaced the grown men with indigenous features and provincial tastes (i.e., mestizos, in this particular case) who had initiated the boom. Some of the new musicians were imported from less commercially popular genres (the

guitarists in the group Peluche, for example, originally played in heavy metal bands), while others, selected by casting directors strictly for their looks, limited themselves to dancing to instrumental playback and voiceovers.

"I got four long-haired pretty boys together who couldn't sing and sold 500,000 records," said Roberto Ricci, director of Magenta (quoted in Almi 1999), referring to Commanche, a group of long-haired juveniles who could neither sing nor play musical instruments. The young men who were selected and the way they dressed and danced followed a formula that quickly caught on. At an audition held in 1994, the Leader record label chose eight young men to form the group Ráfaga. (Three years would pass, however, before they recorded their first CD.) Later, Volcán, Luz Mala, Peluche, and Los Chakales were formed the same way. Once selected for their physical appearance, the group members would take dancing lessons to learn how to move on-stage and even how to act like they were playing instruments. Some were not even present at the recordings; in fact, occasionally recordings were made before the group was launched, as was the case with Luz Mala, another band created by Ricci (Dandan 2000).

In the world of tropical music, power was in men's hands from the start. The owners of recording companies and musical groups, entrepreneurs, and song and lyric writers were usually men. Women were seldom seen except on-stage as dancers or singers, and they almost never achieved the fame of the men in the group. During this period, however, three women—Lía Crucet (nicknamed "La Tetamanti" for her bustline), Gladys "la Bomba Tucumana," and Gilda—became exceptions to the rule in cumbia. With bleached blond hair and tight, shiny, low-cut dresses, Lía Crucet and Gladys set the style for women at the time and were copied by less-successful cumbia singers. In contrast, Gilda, who was less well known and died in an automobile accident in 1996, did not dye her dark hair and dressed like the women on the dance floor where she performed.[20] Despite her short career, Gilda became the object of much media attention after her death. Numerous articles appeared in mass-circulation newspapers and magazines; her life story and the miracles she performed were told and retold on radio and TV; a documentary on her "sanctification" is being discussed; a feature film on her life is in the planning stages; and special editions of her CDs, along with books and posters featuring Gilda, are readily available. Gilda's posthumous *Entre el Cielo y la Tierra* [Between Heaven and Earth] was one of the top-selling CDs in Argentina in 1998.[21]

The Cumbia "Business"

Just as the bailanta boom appeared to be waning—as the "pretty boy" period came to an end and the media lost interest in the genre's stars—record sales indicated that the tropical music market had consolidated and taken on a life of its own. In 1997, half of the best-selling CDs in Argentina fell into the cumbia category; sales of the top ten totaled almost 3 million copies (Hoyle

1998). Total income from record sales and dance club tickets was estimated at $130 million for 1998.[22] The forty tropical music groups recording on the Leader label sold 3.5 million CDs, including more than two hundred thousand by the group Red. Magenta accounted for 2.5 million in record sales.[23] In 1999, Leader was third in sales among all recording companies in Argentina, including multinationals such as EMI.

Led by recording companies that created, launched, and dissolved groups according to their interpretation of market demand, the circuit for producing tropical music—recording companies, producers, music group owners and members—created a system dedicated to squeezing the last drop of revenue out of each passing fad. This led to the most popular groups' and solo artists' going from bailanta to bailanta in Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires, playing up to six twenty- to thirty-minute shows each weekend night (Flores 1993, 61; Pérez 2004, 125). New or trendy groups could average up to fifteen shows a night.

Contracts signed with recording studios are extremely unfavorable to the artists. Record companies do not pay royalties, and they "deduct" from earnings what musicians receive for live performances on TV shows owned by the companies themselves. According to key informants on the tropical music scene, members of Ráfaga, one of the most famous and prestigious cumbia groups,[24] were paid only 50 Argentine pesos (less than $17) per performance on one European tour, a figure that contrasts sharply with the 3,000–5,000 euros the group's owner collected for each show.[25]

Cumbia in the Mass Media

Founded in 1994 by two bailantas—El Reventón and Popularísimo—RTL 107.3 was the first radio station dedicated to tropical music, which had previously been considered unworthy of airtime. Although the owners of the radio station also had a record label (Record Music), they did not sign exclusivity agreements, which meant unprecedented freedom when choosing which artists to play on the air. A year later, Radio Tropicalísima began transmitting under very different conditions: priority was given to artists recording on the Magenta label, which had links with the radio station; other artists' CDs were played only as background music, and shows at Magenta dance clubs were publicized on the air.

The genre's first network TV program, "A Pleno Sábado," debuted on Channel 2 in 1996. It was three hours long and presented a variety of artists. The trend spread quickly, and by the end of 1997, seven network and cable TV programs—twenty-seven hours of airtime per week—were dedicated to tropical music. "Tropicalísima," which had the highest rating on the state-owned channel, and "Tropihit" were both owned by Magenta; "Fantástico TV" and "Fantástico TV de la Tarde" were broadcast on TVA; and "La Máquina," "Todo Ritmo," and "Hoy Sábado" were broadcast on the América channel. "Pasión

Tropicalísima," with the same length and format, aired on Saturday and Sunday afternoons on Channel 9 the following year.

Cumbia Villera

Cumbia villera became popular in Argentina during the second half of the 1990s in a historical context in which remnants of an Argentina once considered the most highly developed country in Latin America persisted amid unprecedented structural and social change.[26] The genre opens a window onto the world of young people growing up poor in Buenos Aires and in the Greater Buenos Aires neighborhoods. As De Gori (2005, 355; our translation) points out, cumbia villera "intends to be a reading and a language of the profound devastation and de-collectivization of the social bonds." He continues:

> The neoliberal project was able to dissolve the institutional net that the state re-created with its public intervention, producing not only an economic change but also a profound cultural change, expressed in diverse dimensions of subjectivity. In Argentina, this project meant the destruction of the industrial infrastructure, widespread unemployment [about 20 percent], political disciplining of the trade unions, and the beginning of unheard-of impoverishment. But it also started to produce a subjectivity marked by both instability and insecurity. This was so because the social bonds based on not only labor relationships but also all of the state, religious, and trade-union social nets (which historically provided social references and the place to solve social problems) were dissolved. (De Gori 2005, 362–363; our translation)

Interestingly, as constructed musically, being poor implies neither impoverishment nor suffering. Instead, characteristics that the mainstream stigmatizes are viewed in a positive light. In an operation similar to Helena Wendel Abramo's analysis of punk behavior, cumbieros "crudely take up the negative perception of poor young people crystallized in the society at large and use it to describe themselves, seeking to make explicit their condition and the character of the prejudice at one and the same time: 'Yes, we're poor, ugly, have no future and are dangerous'" (Abramo 1994, 100).

In cumbia villera, the adjective "villero," used disparagingly to refer to those living in shantytowns, is elevated and invested with pride. This, in fact, is the distinguishing feature of the genre. In the eyes of others, being a villero is worse than being poor: it means liking and deserving poverty. In practice, using the term stigmatizes something or someone as, by definition, ontologically inferior. Cumbia villera does not hide the characteristics associated with poverty; rather, it transforms them into lyrics that constitute an aesthetic ideal. If performers of so-called romantic cumbia were chosen by professional producers because they were thin and good-looking and had European features, cumbia

villera producers by the same token prefer "*negros*." Pablo Lescano selected Daniel Lescano to lead the group Flor de Piedra, for instance, because he had "the face of an Indian" and had just gotten out of jail (Dillon 2001, 3).[27]

After being rejected by tropical music recording companies, the man who is generally considered the "creator" of cumbia villera, Pablo Lescano, saved up enough money to pay studio costs and in August 1999 recorded a "pirate" edition of Flor de Piedra's first CD. Other groups, such as Yerba Brava and Guachín, appeared around the same time. A short time later, Lescano himself created and led a new group, Damas Gratis.[28] In 2000, Los Pibes Chorros, Meta Güacha, El Indio, and Mala Fama appeared, and the following year, Bajo Palabra, Dany y la Roka, and Sipaganboy were born, as was La Piba, one of the very few female performers of the genre. In a matter of months, cumbia villera had become an unexpected commercial success, selling about three hundred thousand CDs (Iglesias 2001a) and representing 25 percent of all records sold in Argentina, according to recording companies' figures. This percentage does not take into account pirated editions, which make up 50 percent of total record sales (Colonna 2001).[29] Cumbia villera groups also performed dozens of shows each week at popular bailantas and on TV.

In mid-2001, Yerba Brava was invited to appear on the popular prime-time variety show "Sábado Bus."[30] After a brief performance by the group, the emcee walked over to its members and asked the audience, with a wink, "These guys aren't going to steal my watch, are they?"

This combination of acceptance and rejection, of glamorization and criminalization, exemplifies the treatment received by cumbia villera in the mass media. It was mentioned and analyzed as a curiosity and as a show business news item on programs with ties to the recording industry. However, in the same media, cumbia villera was also viewed as a risk to society, which led to the media's becoming an auxiliary to and precedent for government policy on security.

The media played an active role in shaping the content of cumbia villera—on the one hand, by giving it airtime and press coverage, and on other hand, by exercising control by labeling it a product of marginal or marginalized young people whom the state was called on to supervise, feed, or punish. A media campaign was launched, primarily by journalists, demanding that the state act in this regard, but at the same time, the same journalists were collaborating with the government by defining which young people and behavior were marginal, which were marginalized, and what should be done in both cases. Up to this time, the state had been indifferent to cumbia villera;[31] from this point on, however, it played an active role in policing the genre's content. The Federal Committee for Radio Transmissions [Comité Federal de Radiodifusión], the government organization responsible for regulating the mass media, drew up "Guidelines for Evaluating the Content of Cumbia Villera" in response to an investigation based on the press campaign. Thus, the same media that had made cumbia villera popular were cited as the source of the calls for government

control of its content (see Serpa 2006a for a comprehensive analysis of this state intervention).

Final Reflections

During the cumbia boom, it was not difficult for groups to gain access to the mass media and recording studios: there was room for almost anyone with an original, or simply an interesting, product. Also, the miniaturization and subsequent cost reduction of sound equipment enabled many groups to produce and record their own CDs at home or to do as Reynaldo Valverde, the guitarist and owner of Malagata, did when he set up a professional-quality recording studio in his house in the Bajo Flores shantytown. For those who did not have contracts with major recording studios, and thus access to TV shows, though, whether the product reached the public depended on the financial resources of the artist himself. In 2005, three five-minute appearances on the TV show "Siempre Sábado" cost $10,000 pesos (about $3,000), and artists who were not backed by major record labels or agents with deep pockets were excluded.

Beyond its traditional market sector, cumbia villera appears in a variety of mass-media products, including prime-time variety shows, investigative reports, and video clips. In addition, 2002 marked the opening of two Argentine movies—*El Bonaerense*, directed by Pablo Trapero, and *Un Oso Rojo* [A Red Bear], directed by Adrián Caetano—in which both Colombian and villera versions of cumbia were played. Cumbia also served as background music in *Tumberos*, a TV series portraying life in prison; the genre and its artists now provide background music to illustrate many popular-sector "customs" and aesthetic in TV soap operas and drama series as well. Thus, although airtime for programs dedicated to tropical music dropped from twenty-seven hours in 1996–1997 to twelve in 2000,[32] the genre has gained greater exposure than ever before in diverse mainstream formats.

This should not be taken to mean, however, that cumbia as a genre has been accepted by the Argentine middle and upper classes or that it has become massively popular. The following example is illustrative: in 2005, Ráfaga performed in a show sponsored by the telecommunications company Telefónica before twenty thousand people in Chile and was awarded the Gaviota de Plata at the prestigious music festival at Viña del Mar. Both would be unthinkable in Argentina, where the genre has received almost no official recognition and where cultural events sponsored by multinational corporations never include tropical music.

2

The Lyrics

At first glance, the lyrics of cumbia villera seem to fully fit within the discourse of "symbolic terrorism," the expression proposed by Latin American scholars influenced by second wave feminism when they analyzed the lyrics of bolero and bachata. Pioneers of this type of analysis of Latin American music include Frances Aparicio, particularly in the cases of bolero and salsa; Deborah Pacini Hernandez, on Dominican bachata; and Peter Manuel, on Caribbean dance music.[1] All three outstanding scholars pay close attention to how their interviewees interpreted the lyrics and show clearly that analysts and those who follow a genre do not necessarily interpret them the same way. We follow a similar strategy but add a dimension that is not always explicit in these scholars' work: the complex web of discourses that surrounds the emission and reception of cumbia villera lyrics.[2] (We understand "discourse" à la Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe [1987]—that is, as the linguistic and non-linguistic practices that carry and confer meaning in a field of forces characterized by the play of power relationships.) Alongside the reception of cumbia songs, the topic of the chapters that follow, this chapter emphasizes content analysis of the emission of the lyrics.

By emission, we mean all of the social performances (here understood as linguistic and non-linguistic discourses) that accompany the artistic presentation of a particular song. As Richard Middleton (1990, 242) aptly reminds us, musical "meanings result from the social context of performance and reception; but the performance itself has metamusical aspects . . . [such as] bodily movement and social interaction." Thus, some dimensions of the emission of the songs—the way the song is sung, the corporeal movements and facial expressions of the singers, the movements and expressions of the dancers who

almost always accompany the performance of cumbia villera songs, the comments of the announcers before and after the song is performed, the expressions of the public who attend the shows in which those songs are performed, and so on—are close to the musical performances themselves. Other dimensions of emission are more distant from the actual performance, acting as a general cultural background against which the songs are performed. In the case of the highly sexualized songs that characterize cumbia villera as a genre, we consider, among other things, how sex is discussed not only publicly in media outlets such as television, radio, and magazines that cumbia villera fans usually consume but also in the everyday conversations of these youths.

We believe that it is impossible to understand how cumbia villera's lyrics connote sexuality in the way they do without taking into account all of the other linguistic and non-linguistic (performative) discourses that are linked to the emission of the songs. When one does take those discourses into account, the lyrics acquire very different meanings and, in many cases, clearly contradict what a literal textual analysis of the lyrics stress about them.[3]

Thus, if one reads cumbia villera lyrics without watching the performances, they appear to be a clear manifestation of the masculine symbolic violence posited by second wave feminists. That is why one of Argentina's most important sociologists, Maristella Svampa (2005, 180), is only partly correct when she points out that

> women are constantly ridiculed and denigrated [in cumbia villera lyrics], especially on the sexual plane. These attacks are far from accidental, and their virulence arises from complex social processes: we are referring, on the one hand, to the marked warping of the masculine universe in which a man's identity is anchored in work and his role as breadwinner, and on the other, to the emergence and affirmation of women's protagonism, as witnessed in present-day social movements not only in Argentina but in the globalized periphery in general.

Only by exploring the thorough meaning of those lyrics, in their enunciation and reception, is it possible to get a complex and revealing image of the culture of the social group in which cumbia villera circulates.[4] This image does not negate gender conflict, but it perceives it with greater complexity and allows tensions and subversion points to appear in relation to the initial image of masculine domination that can be perceived as complete and absolute.[5] This is so because only one of the possible readings of cumbia villera lyrics comes into view when those lyrics are analyzed using what has become the hegemonic academic view (in both descriptive and normative terms) regarding gender. At least in the field of cultural studies, this new canon has adopted the critical perspective and values of the literature influenced by second wave feminism (in its different incarnations), which placed a well-deserved emphasis on how different

social practices are continuously crossed by a dimension that is always present in any kind of social interaction. We refer here to gender power relations that, in the vast majority of the cases, historically have meant the domination of one gender (feminine) by the other (masculine). This literature has been instrumental in revealing that, behind the apparent neutrality of any system of categories (including those used by popular music), a set of power relations exists that, if left unquestioned, the social scientist always contributes to reproducing.

It is necessary and possible to read the lyrics in this way, but at the same time, it is necessary to challenge and problematize that reading, as we do in the pages that follow. Our position is that the analysis of gender power relations does not have to assume the existence of gender positions that precede the social configurations that frame them. "Man" and "woman" are neither essential subject positions nor universal ones. At the same time, we believe that power relations are never relationships of absolute and eternal domination, even though, by definition, they always reveal social asymmetries.

In this vein, we want to add to the textual analysis proposed by the literature influenced by second wave feminism à la Aparicio all of the considerations that make such scrutiny more complex. Influenced by some developments of the so-called third wave of feminism, but especially by current research on popular culture, we use types of analysis that first illuminate the relative power of all subordinate people, not just women, and second denounce the fact that, behind their good intentions, the analysts often identify with the type of power that they are questioning. In popular culture studies, that kind of research tends sophistically to equate the culture of poor people with a poor culture. We refer here to the approach advanced by Grignon and Passeron (1992) about the kind of analysis that, in attempting to bring back the social and historical character—that is, the political nature of aesthetic categories—relies on the dominant categories that it reveals.[6]

Thus, what we have learned from third wave feminism is the importance of trying to recast femininity as a transgressive opportunity for women to claim sexual power and to create feminine subject positions through their sexuality (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Henry 2004; Karp and Stoller 1999). Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp, the founders of *BUST* magazine, have most vocally supported the idea of "girlie," defining it as "Girl Culture—that shared set of female experiences that includes Barbies and blow jobs, sexism and shoplifting, *Vogue* and vaginas" (Karp and Stoller 1999, xv; see also Keenan 2008, 379–380). And as Melanie Waters (2007, 258) reminds us, "The girlie brand of feminism that *BUST* promotes is seen to constitute an important rebellion against the false impression that since women don't want to be sexually exploited, they don't want to be sexual; against the necessity of brass-buttoned, red-suited seriousness to infiltrate a man's world; against the anachronistic belief that because women could be dehumanized by porn . . . they must be; and the idea that girls and power don't mix."

For Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000, 80), this kind of pro-sexuality feminism also implies "staking out space in areas identified with men, such as . . . porn, and judgment-free pleasure and sex." Therefore, this theoretical approach, on the one hand, proposes a celebration of sexuality in itself, and on the other, claims that women deserve rights *as women*, including those things that specifically make them women. Thus, Baumgardner and Richards (2000) claim that those "women things" can actually give women power. That is, if women are stuck living in a "man's world," then they might as well take advantage of the things that give them power in that world, even if those things are signifiers of traditional femininity—a claim that implies a complete redefining of what domination and empowerment may mean in the context of sex. "'These days putting out one's pretty power, one's pussy power, one's sexual energy for popular consumption no longer makes you a bimbo,' wrote Elizabeth Wurtzel in her 1998 [1999] glory rant *Bitch*. 'It makes you smarter'" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 306).

For third wavers, feminism is an empowering drive to affirm women's sexuality and to claim their own sexual appetite—that is, a movement that claims a particular women's sexuality based on a belief that desire is not exclusively a male prerogative (Kimmel 2005). In other words, they believe that there is power to be found in embracing not only femininity but also sex (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). In brief, third wave feminism embraces femininity in the guise of some of the traditional feminine signifiers, yet it is linked with empowerment and a desire for independence and to sexuality *for women* rather than engaging in sex only for the pleasure of men. Accordingly, many third wave feminists are sensitive to the fluid notion of gender, the performative character of sex, and the potential oppression (and, of course, empowerment) inherent in all sexual and gender relations.[7]

Their agenda therefore overlaps with what is called "sex-positive" feminism (also known as pro-sex feminism [Willis 1992b] or sex-radical feminism), a movement originally linked to second wave feminism. Some of the most important scholars working in this tradition are Susie Bright (2000), Pat Califia (2003), Avedon Carol (1994), Betty Dodson (2001), Gayle Rubin (1984), Tristan Taormino (2006), and Ellen Willis (1983, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c). Many sex-positive and third wave feminists have reacted against one of the most important representatives of second wave feminism, Catharine MacKinnon, who maintained that there is no possibility for women's power due to the overarching male gaze, leaving women with no agency-related powers. We have to remember here that MacKinnon's famous analogy, "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism," leaves no room to imagine non-alienated sexuality. As Mariana Valverde (1989, 241) writes:

> The only desire theorized by MacKinnon is the desire of men to objectify and conquer women. Female desires (or any male desire, such as

> homosexuality, that is not linked to the domination of women) are conspicuous by their absence in MacKinnon's discourse. During the lecture entitled "Desire and Power," a member of the audience asked: "What about female power?" MacKinnon replied: "That is a contradiction in terms" and explained that "in the society we currently live in, the content I want to claim for sexuality is the gaze that constructs women as objects for male pleasure." This once more illustrates the undialectical character of MacKinnon's critique of patriarchy. Because the "male gaze" is largely constitutive of sexual relations in our society, she assumes that this objectifying gaze is the only possible meaning of the term "sexuality," thus denying women any position, however precarious, from which to reclaim or invent nonpatriarchal sexual desires.

Therefore, the most basic tenet of sex-positive feminism is that sexual freedom is an essential component of women's freedom. In this regard, many of the scholars who embraced this school of thought wrote against the kind of "legislative" power many second wave feminists (MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and the like) arrogate to themselves by prescribing what the "real sexual experience of women should be," where sexual pleasure itself seems to be problematic. They also reject the vilification of men's sexuality that they see in the writings of many second wave feminists, because they believe that women's bodies are not simply sites for the reproduction of patriarchy via sexual objectification:

> Refusing to conceptualize sexual relations only in terms of social regulation, pro-sex feminists such as [Alice] Echols, [Gayle] Rubin, and [Carole] Vance reject sexual repression, favor freedom of sexual expression, and claim that dominant configurations of power do not prevent women from exercising agency. Indeed, pro-sex feminism's endeavor to cultivate sexuality as a site of political resistance is perhaps its most influential contribution to contemporary queer theory and politics.[8] (Glick 2000, 22)

Taking advantage of all of these new developments in feminist theory, we show in our analysis of the cumbia villera lyrics and the narratives of our young female interviewees that sexuality is represented and lived in much more complex ways than the authors influenced by second wave feminism proclaim, above all because of the class differences that separate those scholars from the participants in the cumbia villera scene. We take seriously what Valverde (1989, 252) points out: that in a post–second wave feminism, "sexual freedom would also involve a recognition of class and race as well as gender differences in sexual identity and sexual experience."

At the same time, we fully agree with some third wave feminist scholars that it is important for feminism to engage in the struggle for the meaning of the labels (many of them pejorative) that have been used to connote femininity in common-sense language in Western cultures. Inga Muscio (2002, 9) writes, "I posit that we're free to seize a word that was kidnapped and co-opted in a pain-filled, distant, past, with a ransom that cost our grandmothers' freedom, children, traditions, pride, and land." In this regard, some third wave feminists believe it is better to change the meaning of a sexist word than to censor it from speech or even to propose a different, non-sexist word to replace it.[9] When we analyze La Piba's lyrics in this chapter, we see how this works for one of cumbia villera's very few female performers.

When we analyze the lyrics and their multiple interpretations, we apply many of the insights obtained from reading Aparicio's, Pacini Hernandez's, and Manuel's pioneering work on gender relations in Latin American popular music. But we also add complexity by entertaining some of the ideas brought forth by third wave feminists—complexity that accounts for the contradictions for which this pioneering work cannot account due to the idiosyncrasy of our subject of study. At the same time, for the kind of analysis we do in this chapter, it is crucial to consider the complex web of discourses that surrounds the enunciation of those lyrics, a consideration that opens up new analytical venues that a less thorough analysis could not traverse.

All of these perspectives can and must be combined with what emerges from contemporary Latin American anthropology such as that of Brazil. In such anthropology, the contextualization of individualism to the Latin American milieu leads one to observe some First World feminisms in their double aspect of interpretive tool and carriers of a sort of naturalized cultural standpoint. If feminism as a tool allows us to properly see gender relations as conflictive in very different and complex ways, feminism as a naturalized cultural understanding inadequately generalizes a particular characteristic of developed societies as a universal and an abstract element (but obviously not only as a characteristic that is unique to them): individualism as a value system that privileges and allows equality eventually to be constructed. The observations that come from Latin American research do not force us to naturalize the hierarchical component that feminism rightly finds in many gender relationships in the First World or elsewhere, but they oblige us to understand that, because individualism is understood differently in many Latin American countries, the interpretive frameworks of our subjects of study offer specific particularities. At the same time, a different understanding of what individualism means is related in complex ways (and in ways not foreseen by any of the First World feminist schools of thought) to what we call the sexual activation of young women in Argentina.

In the chapters that follow, we show how these sets of interpretations are related to how cumbia villera actors themselves understand the lyrics we analyze.

Cumbia Villera's Conditions of Emission

What do you do, as an analyst, when you encounter popular songs that describe subjects as the following songs do?

- Que peteás, que peteás/que pete que te mandas/que peteás, que peteás/que bien que la cogoteás [How you suck, how you suck/what good head you give/how you suck, how you suck/what good head you give]
- Dejate de joder y no te hagás la loca/Andá a enjuagarte bien la boca/Me diste un beso y casi me matás/De la baranda a leche que largás [Stop messing around, and don't act crazy/Go and wash your mouth out/You gave me a kiss and you almost killed me/from the bad odor of milk that you have]
- Hay que locura que tengo, el vino me pegó./Y te veo con mi amigo, entregándole el marrón [How crazy I am; the wine hit me hard./And I see you with my friend, handing over your ass]
- No me vas a dejar así,/yo sé que sos alta gata./De amor no te cabe nada,/por guita [dinero] abrís las patas [You're not going to leave me like this (without having sex)./I know you're a highly prized prostitute./You don't understand anything about love,/but for money you open your legs]
- Ella es una chica así de fácil/es de bombachita [panty] floja./Si al hotel no la llevás/no sabés cómo se enoja [She is a very easy girl./Her panties are very loose./If you don't take her to your bed,/she gets very angry]
- Laura, siempre cuando bailas a ti se te ve la tanga,/y de lo rápida que sos, vos te sacás tu tanga./Vos te sacas la bombachita, y le das para abajo, para abajo y pa' bajo./Y le das para atrás, pa' adelante y pa' tras [Laura, when you dance, we can always see your thong,/and because you are so fast, you take off your thong./You take off your little panties and go down, down, down, down/and you go back and forward, back and forward]
- A mover ese culito mamita,/que a los pibes vos se las dejas bien durita./A mover el culito mamita,/que los pibes mueren por darte una apoyadita [Shake that little ass, mommy,/so the kids' dicks get very hard seeing you./Shake that little ass, mommy,/so the kids die to touch it with their dicks]

One's first impulse is to call on everything one has learned from second wave feminists' critique of patriarchal society and analyze those lyrics in terms of their symbolic terrorism and their phallocentric, objectifying, and fragmenting undertones, treating women as if their only role in society is to please men. We follow this impulse in subsequent pages, but first we show that the use of

overtly sexual language is a characteristic of not only cumbia villera but also contemporary Argentine culture in general. Second, we show that what initially sounds like very aggressive language changes its character when one considers the linguistic and non-linguistic discourses that surround the performances that make up the media culture that cumbia villera fans consume daily.

Therefore, the meaning of these lyrics that initially sound so sexist cannot be understood fully if we do not relate them to a certain change in the cultural platform of the popular lifeworld. That change implies that sex has become autonomous in relation to love and reproduction, and interest in different forms of pleasure and in pleasure for its own sake has contributed to a preoccupation with anal and oral sex not only among men, and not necessarily in terms that mere content analysis of the lyrics would presuppose. Thus, what is perhaps new in the social scenario that frames the advent of cumbia villera is the sexualization of women in public forums rather than their sexualization mainly in environments restricted to men (i.e., the way women were mostly sexualized in the past). In other words, explicit sexual discourse constitutes a common and extended cultural platform in the language of men and women in contemporary Argentina. This kind of sexually overt public discourse makes up the external layer of the emission of cumbia villera we mentioned above. That is, it is not directly related to the performance of cumbia villera singers, but it is the background against which those performances acquire particular meaning. It is beyond the scope of this book to fully analyze this phenomenon; therefore, we mention only some of its major manifestations and how they are connected to cumbia villera's own discourse.

Argentine radio and television register the presence of multiple interventions by female counselors who advise women, young and mature alike, on how to "*ser perras*" [act like bitches] in bed, "*sacar la perra de adentro*" [pull out your inner bitch], and be a "real whore" to give and get pleasure. (The sexologist Alessandra Rampolla is perhaps the best known, but there are others.) TV programs also joke about the opportunities women now have to attend erotic male shows; in such programs, sexuality and genitalia appear under the logic of a generalized autonomization. For instance, one of Argentina's most popular open (free) TV programs, anchored by the former actress Susana Giménez, devoted an entire show to how to use dildos, which she and other female "experts" described in playful ways. In these and other such programs, it is legitimate to talk about not only the different ways to perform sex, its relationship to pleasure, and its central role in a romantic relationship but also the autonomy of sex as a fantasy dimension in which, for instance, the state of subjection that is often attributed to women who offer oral sex is connoted as acting as a partner, as being able to play a game, as "*ser gauchita*,"[10] as Nazarena Vélez, an actress closely linked to the cumbia world, stated when asked during a radio interview whether she practiced oral sex with her male partner. Magazines that target girls are full of advice that not only addresses practices that please men but also embraces those whose purpose is women's pleasure, highlighting a range

of sexual activities. These magazines also include articles in which such topics are separated from love, marriage, and commitment—that is, in which the authors advocate an autonomous space of sexual enjoyment. One example among many is that of Rampolla who, in a very popular program on daytime TV, recommended to her female audience the kinds of massages they should perform on their jaws to alleviate the fatigue produced by a long session of oral sex.

The kind of television programs that cumbia villera fans watch are full of explicit sexualized and genitalized images. One of the programs with the highest ratings in the country, anchored by Marcelo Tinelli, offers a continuous cast of almost naked young women "dancing" choreographies that resemble sexual acts. In addition, in those open TV programs, sex appears in all of its varieties: group sex with a majority of men or women, anal sex, oral sex with receptive or provocative women, and so on. Although not always in a direct way, sex very often appears in choreographies, verbal references, and jokes in which women assume their own voice and claim for themselves sexual liberties that historically have been restricted to men. To ignore all of the hedonistic dimensions that these images project and dilute the complexity of this sexual imaginary by claiming that we are dealing with "the old and always present machismo" is not only epistemologically erroneous. Also, and more importantly, it redirects power away from the subalterns whose defense this stance supposedly assumes.

We think it is a mistake to claim that in these collective and public scenes women are only sexual objects, because the depictions of oral sex in the mass media show women as active agents, able to give pleasure to themselves and others. Further, they do not necessarily appear illegitimate in doing so. Only a few decades ago, a moral sanction spread over the sexual liberalism of some actresses and singers; it is clear that higher levels of the same liberality that in the past mobilized moral sanctions nowadays are presented as compatible with the "traditional" roles of mother, partner, or fiancée. This is quite clear in the following example, which itself questions the interpretive arguments that analyze song lyrics without taking into account the complex web of discourses that surrounds their emission and reception. During an appearance on Tinelli's show, Nina Pelozo, the wife of a radical *piquetero* leader,[11] participated in *"el baile del caño"* [pole dancing]—a dance that evokes striptease—and received many votes for her performance.[12] Her very traditional husband did not take a recriminatory stance in relation to her performance. In addition, showing how widespread (and complex) sexualized discourse is in Argentine popular culture, Pelozo, while talking on another television program about her willingness to have breast-augmentation surgery, commented that the poor women in the neighborhood in which she was an activist considered such surgery a civil right—that is, alongside their rights to decent wages, education, and health they placed the right to look voluptuous and sensual.[13]

This generalized sexual discourse is the outer layer of the emission of cumbia villera's lyrics. What occurs in cumbia villera performances themselves constitutes the inner layer. Cumbia villera is not made, even in its production and

enunciation, without the active participation of women, who are highly influential in the interpretation of the situations they participate in through their dancing, facial expressions, or commentary about what is occurring in those performances. Thus, following the theme of the activation of women we stress in this book, it is necessary to point out that in all of the television programs in which cumbia villera is performed, the female dancers actually play with the (usually sexually charged) expectations of the men in the scene. At the same time, they disavow those same expectations in scenarios that follow their dancing and in interviews they grant in the same television programs. Thus, dancers may execute movements in direct response to the lyrics (e.g., laughing at the insults they receive or acting ironically surprised, as if to say, "See the horrible things they say about us!"), but then, in scenes that follow the dancing, they portray themselves as "normal" or as exhibiting "proper" behavior. The clear message such portrayals send is not "We are the sluts the lyrics talk about," but "We choose when and where we want to play at being sluts."

The interpretation of cumbia villera songs on TV often shows singers (who are almost always male) combining aggression with admiration and joking about the dancers' capacity to "interpret" the "sluts" the lyrics talk about. The ways in which the singers use their facial expressions and joke around in response to the dancers is not characteristic of only cumbia villera performances; facial expressions are used to convey jokes in many cultural settings. The ordinary consequence of forbidden words is "suspended by meta-linguistic gestures (tones of voice, facial expressions, catch phrases) that send the message 'this is a joke,'" Peter Lyman (1988, 173) explains in his case study on sexist jokes, "and emotions that would ordinarily endanger a social relationship can be spoken safely within the micro-world created by the 'joke form.'" The singers also use facial expressions to lighten the mood, making language that normally would be considered insulting more acceptable. As Lyman (1998, 173) points out, when women are invited to watch, the jokes become sexual rather than sexist and part of the normal erotic relationship between men and women. To work this way, the jokes must have established cues that frame their latent hostility as safe content: "If the cue is given properly and accepted, the everyday rules of social order are suspended and the rule 'this is fun' is imposed on the expression of hostility" (Lyman 1998, 174).

Of course, we do not accept that a power relationship is not being constructed in these types of performative acts. However, it is also necessary to point out that all of this is done in a non-repressive framework, with the complicity of women themselves, and, more crucial to our argument, with women making a very important contribution to defining a specific interest that afterward is hegemonically elaborated (and therefore somehow contained). However, as Lyman points out (and as was already advanced by Grignon and Passeron [1992] and Dias Duarte [1986]), not everything that occurs among classes or groups takes place on the front lines of domination. What these authors say about "classes" can easily be proposed for gender relations as well.

This obviously correlates with what occurs in the popular TV offerings we have described, such as "Bailando por un Sueño," in which women who are recognized for their professional or family roles do not "lose face" when they publicly perform erotic scenes. In such programs, it is implicitly understood that different areas of conduct are evaluated differently. A woman—or, for that matter, a man—must be good or proper in the familial role but also in the sexual role, and such "good" performances can draw on a conflicting set of values.

Thus, the parodic intention and (self-consciously) overacted astonishment that cumbia villera singers demonstrate in searching for a dancer's smile is a good example of the complex web of discourses that surrounds the emission of cumbia villera lyrics that modifies an initial reading of those lyrics in simple terms of the objectification of and disrespect for women. We have to remember, following Judith Butler (1997), that speech acts are not "merely linguistic" but also bodily and that the possibility of discordance exists between what is spoken and what the body says.

The other example we want to cite is that, after the songs have been sung, the dancers usually show they can perform other (more prudish and familiar) roles and sometimes even comment on their performances with critical distance, which configures a set of discursive actions that give other meanings to the lyrics. That is, their use of irony can make relative or moderate the objectifying character of the songs, and their agency can transform into a dialogue what at first glance appears only to be a male monologue. As Lovell (2003, 4) reminds us, following Butler, "It is in the margins, between what is said in words and the eloquence of the body, that resistance, even subversion, may be nourished."

Internal Tension in Cumbia Villera Lyrics

If, on the one hand, the condition of emission of the songs makes the intended meaning of the lyrics much more complex, on the other hand, the lyrics themselves are not as straightforwardly sexist as they look at first glance. On the contrary, many (although not all) of them are plagued by internal tensions that clearly show how contested gender relations are in contemporary Argentina. Or to say this differently, it is not that the lyrics are not sexist at all; instead, they show in their sexism that many young men have lost much of their unchallenged power of the past.

Woman as Man's Object of Pleasure

In many lyrics of the genre, at first glance, women are notably objectified and put into what looks like a very passive position, confirming what many cultural studies writers in general, and Aparicio specifically in the case of Latin American popular music, have written about. This is what happens, for instance, when one reads the lyrics of "A Mover el Culo" [Shake Your Ass] and "El Bombón Asesino" [The Killer Bonbon].

A Mover el Culo

Los pibes relocos te quieren ver,
los pibes relocos te quieren ver;
quieren que muestres como movés.
Ellos quieren que arranques y te pongas a mover.
A mover ese culito mamita,
que a los pibes vos se las dejas bien durita.
A mover el culito mamita,
que los pibes mueren por darte una apoyadita.

• • •

The kids, overexcited, want to see you;
the kids, overexcited, want to see you;
they want you to show them how you shake your ass.
They want you to start moving.
Shake that little ass, mommy,
so the kids' dicks get very hard seeing you.
Shake that little ass, mommy,
so the kids die to touch it with their dicks.

El Bombón Asesino

Ella se agita, toda la noche mueve la cinturita
y pa' colmo usa pollera cortita
el meneo la levanta todita.
Ella bonita, baila, mueve se menea, se excita
y cuando se le va parando solita
ella sigue porque sabe que irrita
Es que ella tiene un bombón asesino
se sabe un bombón bien latino
Es que es un bombón suculento
con ese bombón casamiento
Sabe del bombón y lo mueve
menea el bombón cuando quiere
Parece un bombón insaciable
seguro un bombón masticable
me como el bombón

• • •

She gets agitated; all night long, she moves her waist
and if that is not enough, she wears a very short skirt,
and her shaking raises the skirt to the top.

She, pretty one, dances, moves, shakes, gets excited,
and when her butt rises by itself,
she continues because she knows she excites.
It is because she has a killer bonbon
she knows she has a very Latin bonbon.
And that is a juicy bonbon
with that bonbon, marriage.
She knows about the bonbon and moves it;
she shakes the bonbon when she likes it.
It looks like an insatiable bonbon
for sure, a chewable bonbon.
I eat the bonbon.

Here, a strict textual analysis of the lyrics indicates that a woman's only function is to serve as an object of pleasure for men. In such an analysis, women considered in all of their wholeness as human beings, and as the real entities that are the objects of the masculine gaze and desire, are not the central characters of the story. Only their butts are the protagonists.

This fixation with hips and butts is not unique to cumbia villera. It is prominent in other musical genres, including rap, salsa, and, especially, reggaeton. These are precisely the kind of lyrics that Aparicio (1998, 148–149) criticizes in relation to salsa. Reducing women's complexity as human and social beings to the image of a butt perpetuates an old history of economic and sexual exploitation. However, moving from mere textual analysis of the lyrics to a more comprehensive analysis introduces a degree of complexity that somehow modifies the possible meaning of those lyrics. Why? Because, as we showed above, women's complexity is restored by several dimensions of the genre's conditions of emission. The fragmentation of the female body into the sexualized parts that excite men is often accompanied by the fragmentation of the men into sexualized parts. When La Piba sings, "Que linda virra que tiene el negro Manuel" [What a beautiful penis Negro Manuel has], she is also reducing all of Manuel's complexity as a human being to the parts of the male body that excites women. What we want to convey with this comparison is the image of an entire culture fragmenting people's bodies (women's and men's alike) into sexualized parts. This is occurring as part of an unleashed sexual discourse that does not recognize gender barriers, shown, for instance, by new practices many cumbieras perform in bailes such as touching the butts of men they like (analyzed in the next chapter). To single out cumbia villera's male singers for doing this is to miss the point completely.

To move from the outer layer of the conditions of emission to the inner layer, we have to mention what occurs while the songs are being performed in the genre's usual outlets. Parody plays a very important role, as the singers actively search for dancers' smiles as if they are asking for reassurance that the dancers understand the songs' comic intentions. The dancers' over-performance of

outrage at what is being said about them serves to reassure the singers that they do, in fact, understand. In this way, the dancers are as important as the singers in conveying the message of the songs. They are not only passive objects of men's sexist discourse. The women also clearly show that they are neither simply "butts" nor sexy dancers when they talk about their multiple identities (e.g., as daughters, sisters, mothers, and workers) in comments or interviews after the performance ends. This restores their character as complete human beings, which the lyrics, on simplistic reading, seem to negate.

Thus, although it is necessary to apply everything we have learned from Aparicio's textual analyses of Latin American lyrics, we are also convinced that those lyrics cannot be understood fully outside the web of complex discursive practices in which they occur. Therefore, an analysis of the songs where they actually exist—that is, within the social conditions of their emission and reception—renders a much more complex image of what they mean to cumbia villera's fans. Such a connotation goes beyond the plain objectification and negation of women's complex humanity to recognition of women's newly acquired sexual agency that, by acknowledging their multiple identities, allows many women to exercise enough agency that they, too, can publicly objectify and fragment men as men do to them.

Some lyrics stress sexual practices that seem to address women merely as providers of pleasure to men. The theme of women providing oral sex to men seems to be recurrent in cumbia villera, and many songs deal with it in different ways—for example, "Que Peteás" [How You Suck], by La Base Musical, and "La Piba Lechera" [Cum Chick], by Los Pibes Chorros.

Que Peteás

Nena no fumés,
si vos no sabés,
estar de la nuca
pasame a mi esa tuca,
lo tuyo es la francesa
eso te sale bien,
no te hagas la coqueta
te vieron cabeceando
arriba de una camioneta.
Que peteás, que peteás
que pete que te mandás,
que peteás, que peteás
que bien que la cogoteás,
que peteás, que peteás
que pete que te mandás,
que peteás, que peteás

que bien que la cogoteás
cuando la manoteás.

. . .

Baby, don't smoke marijuana.
If you don't know how
to be crazy,
bring that joint to me.
Your specialty is oral sex;
you do it quite well,
Don't pretend to be classy
because they saw you sucking dick in a truck
How you suck, how you suck,
what good head you give;
how you suck, how you suck,
what good head you give
How you suck, how you suck,
what good head you give
when you grab it.

Again, if we analyzed the lyrics by drawing on all of the artillery provided by Aparicio, we would have to conclude that the song demands that the protagonist do what is best suited to her expertise: oral sex.

In this particular lyric, the songwriter plays with the noun "*pete*," derived from "*chupete*" [pacifier], and with the derivative verb "*petear*," a euphemism for "*chupar*" [to suck], to refer to fellatio. Thus, in this song the author warns the protagonist to avoid doing what she cannot do—in this case, smoke marijuana, which supposedly is a man's thing and which, from the point of view of the male writer, connotes a woman's silly desire to act like a man. She should concentrate her efforts on what seems to be her specialty, he says, in this song using the popular phrase "*hacer la francesa*" [lit., "do it the French way"] to suggest oral sex.[14] At the same time, the singer draws on the image of "*cabeceando en una camioneta*," which corresponds to "chicken head" in English (or a head that constantly goes up and down), graphically depicting oral sex being performed in the semipublic space of a truck. The song implies that, because the protagonist has performed this action so openly, she would not be justified in refusing to perform oral sex on the narrator (she should not "pretend to be classy"). The expression "*que bien que la cogoteás*" [what good head you give] alludes to the protagonist's enthusiasm for performing fellatio in its "deep throat" variant. Therefore, our first reading of the lyrics stressed the enforced passivity that the song seems to demand from the protagonist. In this sense, one could rightly say that "Que Peteás" reduces the protagonist to a mere provider of sexual pleasure to men (Aparicio 1998, 162).

However, as we mentioned earlier, oral sex is a concern for not only men but also women, at least in the mass-media outlets young cumbia villera fans consume. A finer analysis of the lyrics therefore can provide insight into another possible reading of the song. The enthusiasm (which connotes enjoyment) attributed to the protagonist also reveals women's activism in such a sexual figure; the lyrics actually insult the female protagonist not for being passive but, on the contrary, for "*ser una viciosa*" [having vices or being licentious]—that is, for being too active in the pursuit of her own desire. In other words, the female protagonist is not a passive object whose only role is to provide pleasure to the male narrator. She is a very active participant who is scorned for being so.

At the same time, "*pete*" refers both to a child's pacifier and, in sexual terms, to a penis as a pacifier for women. Thus, in "Que Peteás" sex is clearly placed in a position of amusement for both the man and the woman. This is confirmed when one looks closely at the dancers when the song is performed on television.

La Piba Lechera

Dejate de joder y no te hagás la loca
Andá a enjuagarte bien la boca
Me diste un beso y casi me matás
De la baranda a leche que largás.
No te hagas la nena de mamá
Porque ese olor a leche
Que sale de tu boca la vaca no lo da.
Me enteré lo astuta que sos
Que te gusta la fija
Y que sos más fácil
Que la tabla del dos.

• • •

Stop messing around, and don't act crazy
Go and wash your mouth out.
You gave me a kiss and you almost killed me
From the bad odor of milk that you have.
Don't play mama's girl,
because such milk odor
that comes out of your mouth is not coming from a cow.
I discovered how smart you are
That you like the fixed one
That you are easier
than multiples of two.

As we have mentioned, cumbia villera's language is plainly genital. The Comité Federal de Radiodifusión (COMFER), the federal agency in charge of communications media, enforces regulations about the use of sexual terms in television and radio. Thus, cumbia villera writers often use homophones and other signifiers in place of sexual terms that might be vetoed by the authorities—for instance, "*astuta*" [smart] in place of "*puta*" [slut in this context] and "*fija*" [the fixed one] in place of "*pija*" [penis].[15] At the same time, the metaphors show how interested the genre's songwriters are in referring to the universe of meaning in which the men of cumbia villera circulate. That is why "milk" is used to represent semen, and the last metaphor in the song refers to "being easier than multiples of two," which alludes to the protagonist's being a *puta* in the sense of a woman who is easy to take to bed, not in the sense of a woman who sells her sexual favors for money. (In Spanish, "*puta*" can be used to mean "slut" or "whore," depending on the context.)

The lyrics repeat the objectification of women (the protagonist is represented solely by her mouth) and transforms into a straightforward insult what in "Que Peteás" was a more ambiguous characteristic. In "Que Peteás," the woman's enthusiasm is celebrated—and thus her enjoyment while performing oral sex is praised. In "La Piba Lechera," by contrast, her enthusiasm brings criticism. She does what pleases men but in so doing is condemned as a "slut" (in the sense of being a promiscuous woman) and is excluded from receiving love from the narrator because she has performed fellatio on other men, and the bad odor it has left in her mouth makes her undesirable to the narrator. Therefore, what distinguishes the lyrics of "La Piba Lechera" from "Que Peteás" is the direct use of a kind of language that carries the possibility of aggression toward women, a kind of symbolic terrorism that cumbia villera shares with the musical expressions of popular sectors elsewhere, such as rap and salsa. Regarding salsa, Aparicio (1998, 161) points out that "a central form of violence against women in popular music is the very basic speech act of name-calling . . . insults and vituperative language . . . discursive terrorism or violence through words. . . . [This strategy] fixes negative perceptions of women as traitors, dishonest, pretentious, vain, gossipy, and liars, and as bandoleras, dishonest golddiggers who love men only as a means to economic survival. . . . [T]he destructive impact of this type of discursive terrorism on women's self-perceptions cannot be denied."

In "La Piba Lechera," the symbolic terrorism is expressed not only in the direct address of the protagonist as a "slut" but also in the narrative deployment of the basis for the accusation: *la piba lechera* is a licentious woman to the point of being "dirty," of permanently carrying the smell of (other) men's sex—in other words, of being filthy. Therefore, the song seems to qualify as a clear-cut example of the "symbolic annihilation" of women Aparicio (1998, 239) talks about. In this case, either the complex web of discourses that accompanies cumbia villera performances does not compensate for the level of aggression expressed by the lyrics, or our middle-class sensibilities do not allow us to see

how it can do so. According to middle-class aesthetic standards, this description of oral sex is plainly graphic and gross.

However, as usual, the situation is much more complex than it appears, especially if we take into account the complex net of discourses linked to the construction of middle-class narratives about sex and sexuality. The Argentine middle classes are attracted to explicit sexual discourse and often consume and practice them through interpretive communities that differ from those of the popular sectors not in theme but in style—or, to be more precise, in topic, because those discourses are usually performed in less-public spaces. We can cite countless examples to illustrate this: best-selling erotic literature and self-help books that provide advice on sexual etiquette and techniques; movies that offer plenty of sex scenes; the women's section of *Página 12*, the preferred journal of the progressive sectors of the middle class, which contains sexual-genital discourse delinked from love and morality. It is not uncommon to find in the women's section all of the so-called gross and crude expressions that are attributed to the popular classes, although with two major differences: first, a greater degree of discretion and second (and more important), a deployment of feminocentric logic in which the political values attributed to sexual playing are inverted to a point at which women appear to be the dominant partners in sexual encounters.

Obviously, this does not happen in the discourse advanced in "La Piba Lechera," and until further notice this song will stand as the representative of plain objectification, fragmentation, and symbolic terrorism in our corpus of lyrics. It is a song that our female interviewees claimed "*las bardea*" [treats them badly].

Anal sex is another recurring topic in cumbia villera lyrics. Two examples of this are "Embarrada y Sucia" [Soiled and Dirty], by Los Pibes Chorros, and "Entregadora del Marrón" [The One Who Surrenders Her Ass], by Flor de Piedra:

Embarrada y Sucia

La otra noche la saqué embarrada y sucia
siempre el mismo problema.
Yo la peino despacio
para que no le duela,
pero llega la noche
y embarrada me queda
No puedo con ella todo el día igual
mi perra a la noche en el barro se revuelca.

• • •

The other night I took her out soiled and dirty
I always have the same problem.

I comb her hair slowly
so it doesn't hurt her,
but when night arrives
soiled she becomes.
I cannot deal with her; it is always the same
my doggy rolls over and over at night in the mud.

In this song, the narrator makes an analogy between a female dog and his penis. The image of the "soiled and dirty" penis alludes (quite unmetaphorically) to secondary effects that can occur while practicing anal sex. At the same time, the lyrics refer to how relentless the practice of anal sex is for the protagonist, who proclaims that, for him, such a practice is a quotidian event, revealing with this assertion the degree to which his female partner "offers herself" to the practice. ("*Se regala*" is the expression used in Argentina, which means something like she "presents herself as a gift.") The prestige that men's symbolism confers on someone whose sexual partner "surrenders" or "hands over" her ass (an expression that is behind the title of the song we analyze next) makes the assertion that this event is habitual a clear assertion of manliness by the narrator.

Entregadora del Marrón

Hay que locura que tengo, el vino me pegó.
Y te veo con mi amigo, entregándole el marrón.
Así es como me amás, y a mi amigo te lo transás.
Así es como me querés, y a mi amigo te lo movés.
Andate, a la casa de tu madre.
Andate a la c . . . de tu madre.
Te puedes ir a la casa de tu madre.
Ahora, soy feliz, andá a la c . . . de tu madre.

. . .

Ay, how crazy I am; the wine hit me hard.
And I see you with my friend, handing over your ass.
Is this the way you love me? Fucking my friend.
Is this the way you love me? Fucking my friend.
Fuck you! Fuck you!
Now I am happy, Fuck you!

Again, we see the presence of metaphors widely used in Argentina's urban popular sectors, such as "*el marrón*" [lit., "the brown one"] to refer to the anus, which also demonstrates conceptual continuity with "Embarrada y Sucia." The song narrates a very special case of cheating: the protagonist is a direct witness

to his partner's infidelity, but he cannot do anything about it because he is so intoxicated. In the lyrics, the cheating acquires even greater significance because the female protagonist "*cuernea*" [cheats] with one of the narrator's closest friends and because Argentine men regard anal sex as a very special "gift" that is reserved for intense relationships. At the same time, the narrator has no doubt that his partner, not his friend, is the real guilty party in the hideous infidelity, because she is the one who supposedly has taken the initiative in the cheating. The use of the pronoun "*te*" in the Spanish "*A mi amigo* te *lo transás . . . a mi amigo* te *lo movés*" implies much more agency and purpose than the English expression "Fucking my friend." Thus, the narrator insults his partner by saying, "*Andate a la casa de tu madre*" [Go to your mother's house], a euphemism for "*Andate a la concha de tu madre*" [lit., "Go back to your mother's vagina"], a complicated but common colloquial expression that can take on profoundly aggressive connotations (and that would likely be entirely unacceptable to COMFER).[16]

As may now be obvious, "Entregadora del Marrón" carries many internal tensions that preclude a simple reading that excises agency from the female protagonist and transforms her into a mere puppet whose only role is to satisfy men's (low) desires. Although the lyrics can be read as a condemnation of the woman's actions, they never advance the idea that she is a passive actor or the mere object of men's desire. She actively searches for a lover and "*se* lo mueve," which literally means "moves him" or "shakes him" but whose real meaning is "fucks him." Therefore, the insult, the wound, is inflicted because the narrator has lost control over the protagonist's sexuality, not because the protagonist is passive.

Thus, returning to our point about the importance of the complex net of discourses that surround the emission of cumbia villera songs, we must point out that "*a mi amigo* te *lo transás*" and "*a mi amigo* te *lo movés*" (i.e., the active, agentic nature of a protagonist who gives her new lover one of the most important sexual prizes in Argentina's social imaginary) coincide, not coincidentally, with a crucial change in the contemporary discourse of Argentine women (of all classes), in which it is not uncommon to hear agentic expressions such as, "*A ese* me *lo voy a coger*" [I'm going to fuck that one] and "*A aquel* me *lo volteé*" [I already fucked that one]. Again, although cumbia villera is one of the first musical genres to make these kinds of expressions public, it is not alone in constructing a female character who is far more sexually proactive than the female actor an orthodox second wave feminist reading of the lyrics of these songs could bring to the fore.

Masculine logic has always taken accusatory stances toward this kind of behavior among women (i.e., women as piranhas, vampires, and so on). This, however, does not contradict the fact that, in "La Piba Lechera," the matrix in which the accusation operates and, above all, the evaluation or construction of the woman's action have undergone a change. The classic criticism of "devour-

ing" women plays on a dichotomy that validates men's agency (i.e., a man who is a womanizer is smart and should be praised) and reviles women's agency (i.e., a woman who has several male sexual partners is a slut). What is not accepted by the masculine gaze is a woman who has the same degrees of freedom that a man has. What "La Piba Lechera" and songs like it introduce is something quite new in the gender relations scenario at play in cumbia villera. Interestingly, what is really new is not the insult itself but the quality of the insult and what it connotes in terms of what the male narrator can do when his partner cheats. Here "*Andate a la concha de tu madre*" [Fuck you!] sounds like an acquiescing "I hate you, but I can't do anything about it," which is far removed from the typically boastful "I'll go and kill them both" found in many lyrics in other musical genres, such as tango and bolero, that address the issue of women's cheating. In other words, although the song's use of the term "slut" in relation to the female protagonist's performance is not new, the shift in which the narrator shows resignation—a pitiful guy who cannot do anything about it—is.

Women as "Easy"

Another popular topic in cumbia villera lyrics is the portrayal of women as "easy"—that is, the assumption that it is very easy for men to take them to bed. In Argentina, women who engage in such behavior are usually labeled "*puta*," which, as noted earlier, can also refer to a woman who sells sexual favors. Thus, it is only the context of emission that indexes the label's meaning.[17] An example of the idea of the *puta* as "easy" is found in the song "María Rosa."

María Rosa

Ay cómo se mueve María Rosa
Con su baile te provoca
Está esperando que le pagues una copa.
Ella es una chica así de fácil
es de bombachita [panty] floja.
Si al hotel no la llevás
no sabés cómo se enoja.
Bombacha floja es María Rosa
Bombacha floja, cómo se goza
Ella te entrega y no le importa.
Así de fácil es María Rosa.

. . .

Oh, how María Rosa moves
She provokes you with her dancing

She's waiting for you to buy her a drink
She's a very easy girl;
her panties are very loose.
If you don't take her to your bed,
she gets very angry.
María Rosa is a "loose panties"
Loose panties, how that pleases
She gives you sex, and she doesn't care
Very easy is María Rosa.

In this song, the reference to buying the woman a drink leads one to believe that the female protagonist is seeking payment for showing off. María Rosa thus seems interested only in material reward, which, from the point of view of the male protagonist, facilitates his sexual access to her. Buying a drink, to the male protagonist, is a very cheap price to pay for the sexual services provided by María Rosa, and this, in turn, accounts for his calling her "easy." The use of the phrase "loose panties" reveals a reconstruction of the standards of metaphorization in current Argentine music: cumbia villera, more so than past musical genres, relies on sexually *explicit* expressions used by contemporary Argentine men.[18] The lyrics also clearly state the protagonist's preference for casual sex and the fact that her dancing is related neither to the pleasure of dancing per se nor to the search for a lasting romantic relationship.[19]

At the end of the song, the negative value ascribed to the protagonist is insinuated and finally asserted. María Rosa "doesn't care" about "giving herself" to a man who is not her partner, even knowing that she will be an easy target of "what people may say," that her "value" in some segments of the marriage market will be lowered, and that she will lose the respect of other women who know her, her comadres.[20] She does not even care what the action of "*entregar*" [giving] also suggests in Argentina—that is, anal sex, which can be considered an autonomous key to pure sexual pleasure because it is not related to reproduction or, perhaps, simple consent to men's (usually insistent) will.

The "ass"—the object desired by men as a trophy and generally given only gradually by women through different forms of negotiation—receives another value in this particular case. In this signifying context, being the first to have anal sex with a woman clearly identifies the male protagonist as a good lover (see especially the lyrics of "Embarrada y Sucia"). In a cultural context in which it is believed that "all girls surrender" [their vaginal virginity] and "all girls are sluts," being the first to engage in anal sex with a particular woman has become the new trophy. However, the claim of exclusivity over a non-"legitimate" practice such as anal sex is not working alone in this signifying context; rather, it intersects with two other elements that complete the meaning the song wants to convey. On the one hand, anal sex in the popular imaginary implies both domination of the female partner and mastery of sexual technique (i.e., good lovers obtain that "prize" because they excite their partners sexually). On the

other, "surrendering her ass" directly implicates the female protagonist as a subject engaging in pleasure for its own sake. If it is true that, in the case of the song being analyzed here, the female protagonist's enjoyment of anal sex signals her "licentious" character, it is also true that in popular discourse, many women are praised precisely for having this "vice." What we want to address here is the constant tension between what is criticized and what is recognized and praised in language that, though still critical, portrays women as real agents in the sexual encounter, which often is highly admired by men.

But in "María Rosa," the female protagonist does not care about "giving it," even if doing so reduces her "value" and adds to her negative characterization. Because she is not interested in love, she is revealed as a voracious and "licentious" woman and thus is characterized as "easy."[21]

These lyrics, which are quite typical of this musical genre, contain another very interesting element: the use of synecdoches in which a piece of clothing related to women's sexuality represents a woman as a whole being. This kind of operation can be considered in terms of what Aparicio (1998) understands as compartmentation and objectification.[22] Thus, if the heart, according to Aparicio, functions as the totalizing metaphor that connotes the possession of the affective and emotional life of women, we could say that in songs such as "María Rosa," the thong or panty works as a totalizing metaphor that implies men's possession of women's sexuality. In this kind of reading of the song, the only thing that seems to have value for cumbia villera's men is the sexual possession of women, without any further interest in the affective or emotional dimensions of such a possession. Thus, what we get from an analysis à la Aparicio of cumbia villera lyrics is that, in some kind of (de)gradation in terms of objectification, we could go from the heart to the panty, passing through the ass, a passing that leaves on the roadmap a female organ and ends up equating women with only a piece of attire with clear sexual connotations. Therefore, in the type of synecdoche using body parts (the heart in bolero, for instance), according to Aparicio (1998, 135), those parts are transformed into a representation of a whole or are "reduced to a status of instruments of the masculine desire and fantasies." In the specific case of "María Rosa," those parts are the orifices—both the vagina (allowed) and the anus (forbidden)—and are represented metaphorically by an intimate garment.

In addition, from the point of view of the narrator (who, like the majority of cumbia villera singers, implicitly is a heterosexual man), María Rosa's dance movements clearly are directed at heterosexual men and aim to excite them sexually. Here the way sexuality is treated clearly shows a man's point of view, without any consideration of a woman's perspective. In this sense, the woman's desire in these lyrics is far from being hers. This is a sexuality imposed from the outside, as Aparicio (1998, 209) points out, "from the man's sense of power over her [a woman's] body, identity, and life. While female desire is alluded to . . . it is never self-defined but rather marked precisely by the absence of any female voice. Masculine desire, in contrast, is overdetermined."[23] No other

possibility, such as that María Rosa dances to enjoy herself, to express herself, or even to arouse other women, is considered in the song. In most of the genre's lyrics, desire and sexuality as women live them are invisible, repressed, and, above all, constructed by this specific masculine perspective.

However, "María Rosa" also offers another possible reading of its content. For example, in the line "Loose panties, how that pleases," who is being pleased? What if María Rosa is the one feeling pleasure? If the line that follows states that she does not care, perhaps it is because she is not concerned with what people say about her attitude. Maybe she actually likes what she is doing.

Our theoretical point, once again, is that a critical reading of the lyrics à la Aparicio is correct but only partial, because the idea of objectification presupposes that the "others" are always the ones who objectify and that objectification by the "others" is always a bad practice. This idea can be criticized from different perspectives. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, which states that there are no natural sexual objects for human beings, the assertion implies that totalizing is impossible and that love and sexual discourse, by definition (i.e., by the mere fact of referring to the other), always fragment. Therefore, the psychoanalyst's own culture fragments, as well, although she may be unaware of its doing so. This claim is related to what many feminists who are not white, Western, or heterosexual criticize about feminists of the second wave—that is, they confuse the experience of white, Western, heterosexual women with the experience of women in general, making invisible the differences of women of color, Third World women, and lesbians in relation to the "norm," or themselves.

It is here, we think, that the topic of the fragmentation of the other and its criticism becomes ethnocentric and loses a great deal of its analytical capacity. That is why we believe that any discourse in fact objectifies and fragments and that difference can be found in the logic behind the fragmentation, but not in the fragmentation itself.

What an analysis of cumbia villera lyrics influenced by second wave feminism really does is propose that one kind of objectification and fragmentation of women is wrong but another is acceptable. If this is so, the only admissible objectification and fragmentation (and obviously one that is not recognized as such) would be that proposed by a discourse on sexuality stressing the discussion of sex within the limits of the heterosexual couple, a discussion about sex as a problematic and recurrent dimension of the marital lives of those middle-class social actors who are usually the ones who analyze cumbia villera lyrics. Egalitarian ideals are the norm in those social sectors, which implies the construction and design of relationships as integral dialogues in which sexual chilling or lack of correspondence frequently causes legitimate separations.

If what we are saying so far has some kind of verisimilitude, we can see that fragmentation is not only a cumbia villera practice. However, from the standpoint of those who observe only how the "others" objectify, those practices are neither fragmenting nor objectifying. The contrast that we have just made

does not tell us a lot about what is going on in the realm of cumbia villera, but it does tell us something about the extreme care we must take with the presumptive neutral and universal patterns of interpretation we apply to understanding cultural artifacts and behaviors—something that, in relation to gender and sexuality, we have learned from feminist approaches that have reacted against the "gynocentrism" of the second wave.

We believe that analyzing lyrics in cumbia villera can reveal something more than men's reduction of women to a simple anus. On the one hand, we believe that what is performed in the scenario and the dance hall in a comedic key, as a humorous representation, speaks at the same time of an acceptance and ironic distancing in relation to the sexist discourse deployed by the lyrics. This is so, above all, if we take into account the complex web of discourses that accompanies the emission of the songs we are analyzing, in which women always provide comments that distance them from what the lyrics seem to denote. At the same time, the assumption that women's self-definition is not taken into account comes from the presupposition that such self-definition always has to come from the singer's voice. In this sense, a straightforward textual analysis demands that the male singer give women the role of autonomous subjects through his allocutory actions, not portray them just as passive objects of his sexual activity. Of course, we are in complete agreement with this requirement, knowing that representational practices have real effects on the people they address. However, such interpretations often conclude more rapidly than they should that women are only passive subjects. This is not the case for Aparicio, who also analyzes how her interviewees interpret and reappropriate lyrics that objectify them. However, we want to take Aparicio's analysis a step further and point out that it is not absolutely necessary to think that the voice is the only mechanism that confers identity. If self-definition seems to come from the body as well, it is necessary to point out that passivity is neither pure nor total. If we take into account—as was obvious throughout our entire investigation—that women accompany their sexualized presentation in the lyrics with their bodies, their presence, and their interpretations, it is possible to speculate that the interpretation of passivity is more a factor of the interpretation than a property of the phenomenon being analyzed. This is so because the phenomenon (in this particular case, a cumbia villera song) implies much more than the lyrics, since it also consists of the web of discourses in which the song is expressed, including the social choreography in which such songs flourish.

Interpretation of the lyrics that does not take into account the complex web of discourses that surrounds their emission deprives the scene of its ambiguity, tension, and productive activity of usually subordinated actors (women) who have few opportunities to articulate their own visions. (The songs by La Piba, in a very complex way, constitute one such opportunity.) The lack of a prominent "voice" of their own does not mean that women are totally dominated in the cumbia villera scenario, because many of them exercise their agency in other ways, which are opened in the complex relationship between

the emission and the reception of the genre's lyrics. Thus, many of our interviewees embody the narrated character of the lyrics (for reasons that become clearer in the chapters that follow); in this way, the analytical interpretation that emphasizes women's passivity finally ignores the degree of agency that, paradoxically, it longs for in its interviewees.

Another example of the "easy woman" character in cumbia villera is found in "Se Te Ve la Tanga" [Your Thong Is Showing], by Damas Gratis, in which men, mixing astonishment and insult, describe the sexual activation of women.

Se Te Ve la Tanga

Tú bailas en minifalda, que risa que me da.
Por que se te ve la tanga y no puedes esperar,
Que te lleven de la mano y te inviten a un hotel.
No lo haces por dinero, sólo lo haces por placer.
Laura, siempre cuando bailas a ti se te ve la tanga,
y de lo rápida que sos, vos te sacás tu tanga.
Vos te sacás la bombachita, y le das para abajo, para abajo y pa' bajo.
Y le das para atrás, pa' adelante y pa' tras;
Pa' adelante y pa' tras; para adelante y para atrás.

• • •

You dance in a miniskirt; it makes me laugh
because we can see your thong, and you can't wait
to be taken by the hand and invited to a motel
You don't do it for money; you just do it for pleasure
Laura, when you dance, we can always see your thong
And because you are so fast, you take off your thong;
you take off your little panties and go down, down, down, down
and you go back and forward, back and forward
and go back and forward.

Once again, the image of the "easy" woman is represented by the metaphor of "being fast." At the same time, it is quite clear that the one who cannot wait here is the woman, who plays an active role in not only lacking patience but, more important, engaging in a carefree search for pleasure. It is possible that she dances just to arouse some men so she will be taken to a motel for sex, but she does so, according to the narrator, because she "desires it." The act of making love is described graphically ("Le das para abajo, para abajo y pa' bajo/Y le das para atrás, pa' adelante y pa' tras" [You . . . go down, down, down, down/and you go back and forward, back and forward]). Women's sexual activity is deployed and privileged in this image in the same way that, some years later, the image of women pole dancing is deployed and privileged (but this time in

the context of mainstream television), performing a social imaginary with polyandric and amazonic connotations.

All of the complex, extra-lyrical dimensions that we discussed in the analysis of "María Rosa" also apply to, and qualify, a mere content analysis of "Se Te Ve la Tanga." We firmly believe that any analysis done from a gender perspective has a great deal to gain from moving from simply criticizing men who supposedly reify women to a perspective that tries to decipher the infantile attitude with which these men, dominant but besieged, contemplate the lively sexual activity of some women and fantasize that most of them exhibit such behavior. Naked kings, but oblivious, they only vaguely intuit the fragility of their kingdom. Maybe their qualified laughter rather than crying out of fear signals their tenuous grip on reality. Lyrics like those to "María Rosa" and "Se Te Ve la Tanga" provide a fantastic world for young cumbieros of sexual plenty and absolute sexual freedom, in which desirable women are always eager to have sex with them.[24] If what we hear in the songs is united with what we see on television and in live performances, it is easy to understand that women play as if such scenarios are possible, deploying a series of nuances that combine faked outrage, selective acceptance of what is being said, and the insinuation that, at the end of the day, they are the ones who really decide whether those things can happen or not.

We think the fact that the narrator laughs at Laura's acts is very symptomatic ("You dance in a miniskirt; it makes me laugh"), because the masculine voice is no longer describing a passive object. Instead, it is describing power, a force. The laughter shows either a difficult complacency or, perhaps, a masculine attempt to assimilate the blow or to try to maintain control (or, at least, the appearance of having control) that in some way has been inexorably lost.[25] The woman addressed by the laugh appears different now from the way she appeared in the previous interpretation of the song. A woman can be addressed as a "possession," subordinated and diligent, or as a complementary companion, but it is a completely different situation when these women do not fit perfectly into the place men have designed for them and do not seem motivated to activate themselves, not even in men's stories, by simple masculine solicitation.[26] In this regard, the fantasized "voracious chicks" of many cumbia villera songs perform the role of providing the fantasy that structures men's fears to gain control over them (Kimmel 2005)—that is, the imaginary scenario that attempts to address the anxious question these young men do not know how to answer: "what do these young women really want from us?" (Žižek 1989, 114). As such, it also provides the coordinates of these young men's desires, constructing the frame that enables them to desire something.

When Women Cannot Say "No"

Another group of cumbia villera songs portrays women as "prostitutes." A very good example of this different connotation of the word "*puta*" is "Alta Gata" [lit., "High Cat" (in which "cat" means "prostitute")], by Meta Guacha.

Alta Gata

No me vas a dejar así,
yo sé que sos alta gata.
De amor no te cabe nada,
por guita [dinero] abrís las patas.
De amor no te cabe nada, hasta por crédito abrís las patas.
Alta gata yo te ví que te cabe el tiroteo.
Boquita bien cotizada de tanto tirar fideo.
Boquita bien cotizada de tanto tirar el fideo.

• • •

You're not going to leave me like this (without having sex)
I know you're a highly prized prostitute.
You don't understand anything about love
But for money you open your legs.[27]
You don't understand anything about love
But even for credit you open your legs.
Highly prized prostitute, I know that you like having sex.
Highly prized little mouth for so many blow jobs
Highly prized little mouth for so many blow jobs.

The song appeals to several popular significations in men's world in general, not only among popular-sector men: "*gata*" for prostitute, "*abrir las patas*" [open the legs] for having sex, "*tirar el fideo*" [lit., "pull the spaghetti"] for fellatio, and so on, all indicating the presence of a direct sexual topic. The objectification of the female protagonist reaches an extreme point considering the character of "sexual object" that, in popular discourse, assumes the condition of being a prostitute. In this particular case, such an objectification and degradation is clearly illustrated in the lyric "even for credit you open your legs," which unmistakably alludes to how easy it is to obtain sexual favors from the protagonist, who requires only the promise of payment (a promise that, taking into account the context of the enunciation, may never be fulfilled). In this song, and in similar ones in which women are equated with prostitutes, a skewed power relationship clearly exists: neither cumbia villera nor any other genre of popular music in Argentina features songs about men who sell sex for money.

The song also shows that, from the point of view of the male protagonist, the so-called prostitute does not even have the right to refuse him sex. "You're not going to leave me like this" is a clear statement in that regard, implying that as long as he has the money to pay, she cannot deny performance of the services. Taken further, the protagonist is also claiming that a common feature of other types of economic exchange does not apply here—that is, that "the house reserves the right to deny service." The reason for this, of course, is that the client-prostitute relationship is not a regular business transaction within

the highly charged sexualized atmosphere in which cumbia villera develops and flourishes. In such an environment, this "traditional" sexual relationship is mixed in complex ways with the newly developed active sexual stance of many women that compels men to equivocate or, at least, to make the signifier "*puta*" slide from one signification toward the other.

In this case, we did not find performative stances or other elements of the discourses that circulate around the emission of cumbia villera that could soften the song's objectifying and degrading message. No tensions are visible in the lyrics themselves either. "Alta Gata" (along with "La Piba Lechera") is one of the more extreme examples of the gender conflict that we identify in cumbia villera's lyrics.

What we want to point out here is that, in the repertoire of cumbia villera, some lyrics appear to represent an escalation of violence in which the nascent sexual activation of women in cumbia's scene and in everyday life unravels the masculine ire in the lyrics. One can detect in the lyrics of "Alta Gata" an extreme degree of symbolic violence that appeals to men's supposedly legitimate ability to counteract women's veto power in relation to their sexual desire. "Alta Gata" provides a good example of how men can use that power in relation to those they frame as "prostitutes" and to justify imposing non-consensual sexual relationships based on the fact that, in the past, the protagonist was the one who sought sex with men. This is echoed in "El Bombazo" [The Super Bomb], by the group El Bombazo.

El Bombazo

Toda la noche yo te voy a dar
y sí que te va a gustar.
Todos los pibes te vamos a dar cumbia
y no te me hagas la gata
que te arranco la bombacha.
Y no te me hagas la estrecha
usurpadora de braguetas.
Porque con todos los pibes
te vamos a dar . . . Bomba.
Toda la noche yo te doy bomba
todos los pibes te damos bomba.

• • •

All night long I'm going to give you [sex]
And I know you're going to like it.
All the kids are going to give you cumbia
And don't pretend to be a cat with me
Because I will take away your panties

And don't play coy with me,
Zipper snatcher,
Because with all the kids
We are going to give you . . . bomb.
All night long, I'll give you bomb
All the kids will give you bomb.

The song describes a collective sex scenario that involves many boys with one girl. The lyrics show that, even though the singer promises some kind of pleasure to the girl, he simultaneously does not allow her to refuse sex with the group ("And don't pretend to be a cat with me/Because I will take away your panties"). The male protagonist also props up his behavior by stating that the girl has looked for boys to have sex with ("And don't play coy with me,/Zipper snatcher") and, because of her past behavior, has no right to refuse now. As we can see, in this case it is not money to pay for a sexual service but knowledge that a girl has had sex with several boys in the past that supposedly gives the male protagonist the right to force sex on the female character in the story.

These lyrics describe a familiar situation in which a female victim is blamed for allowing men to think they can—and, ultimately, for allowing them to—have sex with her against her wishes. It is not quite clear here that the male protagonists actually rape the female protagonist, but it is apparent that, in principle, they will not accept no for an answer. Regardless, it is obvious that, from the narrator's point of view, the female protagonist's history has involved "asking for it [sex]," echoing the "She asked for it" that rapists often use to justify their crime. When this excuse is used, the women's appearance and behavior are regarded as a form of speech. As Tim Beneke (1998, 440) notes, "A logical extension of 'she asked for it' is the idea that she wanted what happened to happen; if she wanted it to happen, she deserved for it to happen. Therefore, the man is not to be blamed." If the male protagonist sees the woman in the lyrics as a "slut" who constantly wants sex, then forcing her to have sex becomes something she wants and ultimately deserves.

When Cumbieras Sing

So far, we have argued that in the social environment that surrounds cumbia villera and in the context of a finer analysis of the genre's lyrics, what appears is an image of women who have much more agency than is usually assumed, which we refer to as the sexual activation of women. We find a similar image of women who are proud of their non-masculine-activated autonomy and sexuality when we look at the musical performances of the genre's female representatives.

At first glance, and when placed in dialogic relationship with the lyrics we have been analyzing, "La Sandra," by La Piba, appears to take a critical stance toward men's practices.

La Sandra

La Sandra es una piba de la banda
Nació en la villa y se la banca
Pero nos tuvo que dejar;
Se enamoró de un gil que no la supo valorar
La hizo reír, después la hizo llorar
La embarazó y se borró
(Para vos Sandrita y para tu viejo que es un ortiva ["batidor," policía])
Y el viejo la echó de su casa
No la supo entender
Nadie supo más de ella,
¿Dónde está? ¿Dónde se fue?
Sandra te queremos ver
Te extrañamos de verdad
Si venís ya vas a ver
Te vamos a ayudar.
(Y esto va también para todos los giles [tontos] que dejan tiradas a las pibas)
La Sandra enamorada de su panza
Durmiendo en alguna plaza
Quién sabe si tendrá para comer,
Dios quiera que vuelva alguna primavera
La gente acá siempre te espera
La vida te va a dar otra oportunidad.

• • •

La Sandra is one of the gang's girls.
She was born in the shantytown and is proud of it.[28]
But she had to leave us
She fell in love with an idiotic boy who did not know her real value
He first made her laugh, but later made her cry
He got her pregnant and disappeared
(For you, little Sandra, and for your dad, as well, because he's a rat)
And her dad barred her from his house
He could not understand her
Nobody knew anything about her
Where are you? Where did you go?
Sandra, we want to see you
We miss you very much, for real
If you come, you will see
We're going to help you
(And this song goes out to those idiots who abandon girls)
La Sandra, in love with her big tummy
Sleeping in some square

Who knows if she has something to eat.
God willing, she will return some spring
People here will always await you
Life is going to give you another opportunity.

This song is very interesting for several reasons. First, it addresses the fact that girls, as well as boys, belong to gangs—in this case, an all-female gang. Even though the word "gang" does not carry the same connotation of illegality in Argentina as it does in other Latin American countries, such as Mexico and El Salvador, and in the United States, it still refers to a very close-knit group of friends who eventually in some circumstances commit illegal acts, such as underage drinking and selling and using drugs. Second, the song displays a disparaging type of language to refer to the two masculine characters of the story: Sandra's boyfriend and Sandra's father. "*Gil*" and "*ortiva*" are very negative terms in Argentina and, interestingly, "*ortiva*," the slur used to address Sandra's father, is even more negative than "*gil*." As usual, a slang term such as "*ortiva*" is very difficult to translate; "rat" is only an approximation. What it really connotes is a snitch, a whistleblower, a person who denounces his own people to the police. In the context of the song, the term is used as a metaphor to convey that the father has penalized his daughter for becoming pregnant. At the same time, the song refers to the common situation in which pregnant young girls are abandoned by their boyfriends and left alone to raise the babies. The term "*borrarse*" [lit., "to erase oneself"] in Argentina refers to leaving a very important or risky scene or situation without looking after those whom one has left behind. What La Piba also states in the lyrics is that she is as angry at Sandra's boyfriend as she is at her father, who also abandoned Sandra and evicted her from his house.

However, one also can ask the following question: are the lyrics denouncing the devaluation women feel when, in asymmetrical power relationships, they lose their value by "surrendering" and can thus be abandoned? A situation like this can occur, but we have to be cautious about falling into the temptation to see in these lyrics a direct response to the objectifying sexual treatment imposed by men. Other lyrics sung by La Piba can be interpreted only partially this way. Thus, it is very difficult to view the symbolic terrorism hypothesis as the only explanation of what cumbia villera lyrics sung by men really express, and, at the same time, it is wrong to think that female cumbia villera singers are reacting directly (and in completely oppositional ways) to such symbolic terrorism.

Other songs performed by La Piba demonstrate how cumbieras express domination by men to a certain degree but also address the insecurity of the form and prevalence of such domination. For instance, singers such as La Piba do not reveal any conflict when they affirm the value of choosing a casual sexual relationship (a *transa*), something that, historically, has been deemed the sole province of men.[29] This is expressed well in the song "La Transa."

La Transa

(Y esto va para todas las pibas que no les cabe el compromiso y les cabe la transa ¿No te vas a casar no?)
Mi vieja me pregunta
Quién es ese chabón [muchacho]
Que anda siempre conmigo,
Que me pasa a buscar
Para ir a bailar
No se come [no me cree] que es mi amigo
Quiere saber si hay onda
Quiere que le responda
Que lo haga ahora mismo
Y le voy a contestar
Para ver si de una vez
Ya nos deja tranquilos
Es una transa, nomás
No pasa nada, mamá
Es una transa, está todo bien
Es una transa nomás
No pasa nada, mamá
Es una transa está todo bien.
(Esta todo güe, güe vieja es una transa nomás./No te vas a comer el papel de novio, ¿eh?)

. . .

(This is for all the girls who are not fond of commitment and prefer *transa* [casual relationships or casual sex]; you're not going to get married, are you?)[30]
My mother asks me
Who is that boy
Who's always with me
Who picks me up
To go dancing
She doesn't believe that he is my friend
She wants to know if "*hay onda*" [there are positive feelings]
She wants my answer
She wants my answer right away
And I'm going to answer her
To see if finally
She will leave us alone
It's a *transa*, nothing else

Nothing is going on, Mom
It's a *transa*; everything's OK
It's only a *transa*
Nothing is going on, Mom
It's a *transa*; everything is all right.
(Everything is OK, OK; it's just a *transa*. You're not going to believe the boyfriend role, are you?)[31]

The polarity between the boyfriend and the *transa*, between the mother's generation, which does not accept this kind of relationship, and the daughter, who claims it, once again reveals the active women who so frighten young men. Here again is an example of the emergence of "hooking up" as a replacement for dating and serious long-term relationships. However, we see clear differences between what we have found among poor women in Argentina and what A. Ayres Boswell and Joan Z. Spade have found in American fraternities. In the United States, men view hooking up as getting as much sexually from a woman as they can (Boswell and Spade 1998, 187), while women do not associate "hooking up" with sexual intercourse. In La Piba's lyrics, the association of sexual intercourse and gratification with a casual relationship is clear.

These active women not only freely express their desires but also produce signifying categories (such as *transa*) that legitimize the kinds of relationships that are born out of such desires in an attempt to impose a new order of things that can accommodate such a desire. In this sense, within the social scenario in which *transa* is becoming increasingly common (which we develop more fully in the next chapters), newly sexually activated women are "look[ing] for leisure in relationships without much commitment, something that leaves them in a very confusing place between the traditional social imaginary and the new significations that a different reality is asking for" (Giumelli Courtade and Callegaro 2004, 62–63).[32] In other words, it is not that these women reject serious relationships with men to avoid men's supposed lack of responsibility; nor are they taking men as role models for their own behavior. What we see in these lyrics is the construction of a female subject position that values her sexual freedom and does not want to cut short her leisure time as a *piba grande*—that is, a woman in her twenties (or even early thirties) who lives not on her own but with her family and who does not want a stable sexual partner.

Thus, "La Transa" demonstrates how discursive topics employed by masculine cumbia villera bands are resignified by a feminine voice, showing that behind a supposedly common discourse one can actually see the activation of women. Another good example is provided by "Se Hacen los Piolas" [They Think They're Smart], by La Piba, in which the female narrator claims many of the excesses (e.g., getting drunk, stealing, and selling drugs) that are usually attributed to men.

Se Hacen los Piolas

(Y esta es la cumbia de las pibas para todos los giles que se hacen los piolas [listos])
Con mis amigas, vamos al baile y nos queremos tomar
Toda la birra [cerveza], bailando cumbia, toda la noche sin parar.
Por que nos gustan todos los grupos
Cumbia villera en especial.
Y la locura se hace más grande
Cuando empiezan a tocar.
Y en la villa ya se comenta que hay una banda sensacional
Somos las pibas que todas juntas
A la gente le venimos a cantar
Y los pibes se hacen los piolas
Porque son los únicos que toman
Y los pibes se hacen los pillos, y no saben que les robamos el ladrillo [bloque de marihuana comprimida para armar varios cigarrillos]
Ojo que en la villa también nos cabe la nueva fiera.

• • •

(This is the cumbia of the girls dedicated to all those assholes who like to act clever.)
With my friends we go to the dance hall and we want to drink
All the beer, dancing cumbia all night without stopping
Because we like all the cumbia bands
Cumbia villera especially
And the craziness becomes bigger
When they start to play
And in the shantytown people say that there's a great band
We are the girls who, all together,
To the people we will sing
Because they are the only ones who drink
The boys think they are clever
And the boys think they're smart, and they don't know that we have stolen from them the *ladrillo* [a package of compressed marijuana used to make joints]
Watch out, because in the shantytown we are fond of the new "*fiera*" model.[33]

These lyrics appear to stress that girls can be as masculine as boys, that they can compete equally in the criminal world and have the same kind of fun as men.[34] This is confirmed by Malvina Silba, who wrote the following entry, dated June 15, 2006, in her fieldwork notebook:

> The condition of possibility for a woman to be accepted and allowed to remain within the group (in this particular case myself) is to masculinize her practices as far as she can—in other words, for her to try to emulate men as far as she can. An example: the last two weeks I went to the barrio I participated in all-male meetings. I realized that "the test" I had to pass if I wanted to stay at those meetings was not to be shocked by any of the things the boys were saying in front of me, no matter how obscene, nasty, sexist, misogynist, or degrading the expressions were. It was as if I were another boy in the group, but with the aggravation that, in some opportunities, the woman who was being objectified was either somebody very close to me or even myself. My answer to those situations was to reaffirm my belonging to the culture and my ability to answer them in their own language. In this sense, what I did was answer them with a similar level of nastiness to the conversation they were having; however, at no time did they lower either the overcharged level of their dialogue or the nasty adjectives they were using in that dialogue.

However, if women claim they can enjoy the same kind of fun as men, it is because these women are claiming a power they did not have in the past. This does not mean we do not have to discuss what the real possibilities of autonomy and agency are for these young women. We have to consider that the kind of deviant activity they vindicate, which proposes the masculine as the dominant model to follow, does not seem to allow them paths of their own. Beyond this valid discussion, it is now clear that men's fear of losing their historically dominant position, as we discussed earlier, has some undeniable causes.

A compelling example of the complexity we are trying to illustrate here can be found in another song performed by La Piba. In "Pamela Chu," La Piba is clearly assuming the insignias of sexual activation so negatively portrayed by men's lyrics—that is, the "licentious" identity that supposedly she should reject because of her subject position and because of how the so-called licentious sexually active woman is interpellated by men. In this way, the sexual activation of women is not only (negatively) reflected by men but also (positively) sung by women who celebrate themselves using men's signifiers. Therefore, what we end up with is autonomy in terms of sexual activation but heteronomy in terms of the codes used to convey that autonomy, heteronomy that is shown in the important traces of male domination that those codes carry. In this regard, cumbia villera is a tense, complex, and contradictory cultural product, and the worst thing one can do when analyzing it is reduce its complexity to simplistic and determinate portrayals.

Pamela Chu

No puede ser, no puede ser
¡¡no puede ser que te gusten todos!!

¡¡No puede ser!! ¡¡Vamos las pibas!!
¡¡¡Y esta para vos, que te gusta chupar
viciosa!!!
¡¡No puede ser que te gusten todos!!
No puede ser, sos mi mejor amiga,
te llamas Pamela y toda la noche
soplas la vela, no puede ser
que te gusten todos, no puede ser
cuando toman virra van a buscarte
y todos te gritan, Pamela chu,
Pamela chu, Pamela chu.
¿¿Y como dice Pamela??
Me chupo una, me chupo dos,
me chupo tres. . . . Que linda virra que
tiene el negro Manuel
me chupo una, me chupo dos,
me chupo tres, que linda virra que
tiene el negro Manuel

¡¡¡y todas las que chupan arriba!!!
¡¡¡Yo soy la piba!!!
¡¡Viciosa!!

• • •

It's not possible, it's not possible,
it's not possible that you like everyone!!
It's not possible!! Come on, girls!!
And this one is for you, you who like sucking [penises]
Licentious chick!!!
It's not possible that you like everyone!!
It's not possible; you are my best friend,
Your name is Pamela, and all night long
you blow the candle; it's not possible
that you like everyone; it's not possible
When [the kids] drink beer, they look for you
and everyone shouts at you, Pamela suck [my penis]
Pamela suck, Pamela suck
And what does Pamela say??
I suck one, I suck two,
I suck three. . . . What a wonderful beer
Negro Manuel has.[35]
I suck one, I suck two,
I suck three; what a wonderful beer
Negro Manuel has.

All those girls who suck, raise your hands!![36]
I am La Piba!!!
The licentious one!!

These lyrics show how important some of the propositions advanced by third wave feminism are to understanding what young cumbieras are doing.[37] Pamela is an uncommon first name in Argentina, and Chu is very unusual, almost nonexistent, as a surname in the country. The name itself, a joke about fellatio, can be read two ways: on the one hand, it can be read as "Pamela *chupa*," which translates as "Pamela sucks." Thus, La Piba appears to be referring, in the third person singular, to a woman who likes to perform oral sex on many men. But the name can also be read as "Pam *me la chupa*"—that is, "Pam sucks my penis." In this reading, La Piba appears to be taking a male role and speaking from the point of view of the boys whose penises Pamela sucks. This possible dual interpretation of the song works quite well with the ambiguity we have discussed, because the song interpellates both a female and a male audience, and both can accept the positioning offered by the lyrics.

However, in the context of Argentine Spanish, it is the second meaning that most people would get. Why? Because La Piba specifically chose "Pamela," an uncommon first name in Argentina, instead of, say, Julia or Marta, because Pamela (*Pa mela*) allows the reflexive mode of the verb "*chupar*" to be employed. Thus, what La Piba is doing, once again, is using a highly charged male vocabulary and an implicitly vicarious male identity to advance a celebration of the sexual activation of cumbieras—singers and fans alike.

At the same time, as the narrator of the story, La Piba seems to admonish Pamela for liking all of the boys ("*¡no puede ser que te gusten todos!*") as if it is inappropriate for girls to like all of the boys who happen to be around them. However, La Piba immediately recognizes that Pamela's attitude is not an isolated case, because she dedicates her song to all of the girls in the audience who, like Pamela, like to perform oral sex on many guys.

As we mentioned in the context of other songs, "Pamela Chu" uses many popular metaphors to avoid censorship by COMFER and, at the same time, to add humor to the way the story is told. Thus the expression "*soplar la vela*" [lit., "blow out the candle"] is used to refer to fellatio, "*virra*" [beer] refers to the penis, and so on. All of them, not by chance, are expressions that are commonly used by men. In the final part of the song, La Piba recognizes that she, like Pamela, enjoys performing oral sex and qualifies herself as a "*Viciosa*," transforming a stigma into a badge of honor.

Therefore, what "Pamela Chu" demonstrates is an exhibition of pride by La Piba in the sexual activation of cumbieras like her who can now publicly proclaim that they like to perform oral sex. Once again, this illustrates how complex the messages conveyed in cumbia villera lyrics can be. At the same time, however, the lyrics show heteronomy in terms of not only the coded language La Piba uses to convey pride but also (and perhaps more important) her need

to vicariously occupy a male position (through the more common interpretation of the title of the song) to be heard and to express happiness about her newly acquired sexual autonomy.

Conclusion

The general picture we get after analyzing the internal tensions of these lyrics and the complex web of discourses that surrounds the emission of the songs is that, in their attempt to put everyday experience into words, men are talking about a femininity they can no longer understand. They insult, humiliate, and joke about what they see as both new and threatening. In this way, the jokes in cumbia villera lyrics function to "indirectly express the emotions and tensions that may disrupt everyday life by 'negotiating' them . . . reconstructing group solidarity by shared aggression and cathartic laughter" (Lyman 1998, 172). That is, men are coping with anxiety about and fear of active women by making them the butt of jokes in their lyrics.[38] The fantasized construction of active women whose only purpose seems to be to please men occupies a prominent role in the genre's lyrics because it is within the frame of the fantasy that these young men can relate to these newly active women (Žižek 1989, 119).

Some women in Argentina's popular sectors, as portrayed by cumbia villera, do not advance their new identities using a well-defined and complete voice. Instead, they subvert masculine-centered symbolism. This does not mean, however, that they are not advancing a new identity. When women such as La Piba textualize such symbolism, they do not yield the initiative, showing in the process (and with practices that accompany those texts) a potential reason for the exacerbated aggression of men. What initially looks like a battle won by abusive men contains some subtleties that, even if are not always wanted or well defined, are still clearly expressed.

The evolving relationship between men's fantasized construction of sexually active women and the actual activation of women that we have described so far acquires more visibility and richness in the series of interviews and observations that we conducted in cumbia villera venues, where we gained access to the practices of appropriating both the lyrics and the music of the genre. Thus far, we have shown how replete these lyrics are with tensions related to masculine and feminine perspectives and how each is confronted. The situation becomes even more complex, however, when the plurality of possible feminine and masculine identifications is taken into account.

3

What Boys Have to Say

As does any musical genre, cumbia villera mediates causes and effects in the process of identity construction. If what we have said until now addresses mostly some social situations that are present in the lyrics, it is essential to notice that those lyrics are present in social situations as well—at least in those situations that implicate listening to music. We believe, following Vila (2001), that the effects of cumbia villera in the process of identity construction can be evaluated only in relation to the forms in which the followers of the genre actually incorporate the music and lyrics into their own diverse narrative plots.[1] The account we advance here posits that behind the sexism of the lyrics lurks the conflict that accompanies women's activation. These processes are not exclusive to the social sector to which cumbia villera fans belong, and the general sexualization of contemporary Argentina is related to both the language of the lyrics and the activation of women. These statements will acquire certain signs of validation in the words of the male cumbia villera followers we interviewed for this project.

We talk about "conflict" because issues of power are always part of gender relationships. In this regard, we follow what most pioneering scholars working within what is called masculinity studies have pointed out: that masculinity is not a "trait" inherent in men but, instead, a form of practice that often has as its effects the subordination of women (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1983, 1995; Lorber 1995; Martin 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987). At the same time, we agree with Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe (2009, 280), who write, "The qualities seen as constituting a masculine self can vary historically and culturally. . . . In Western cultures . . . the essential element is a capacity to exert control or to resist being controlled (Johnson 2005). To elicit

the attribution of possessing a masculine self thus requires signifying—with or without conscious awareness—that one possesses the capacities to make things happen and to resist being dominated by others."

We believe that it is precisely because young men in Buenos Aires feel they are losing the capacity to exercise control over their sexuality that many react as they do when they write cumbia villera lyrics. The anxieties expressed in those lyrics are similar to the opinions expressed by those who discussed the lyrics with us. If we were doing a study on middle-class rock nacional, we bet that we would find similar anxieties, because the activation of women in Argentina is not a class-related state of affairs. As Michael Kimmel (2005, 11) points out, "Despite the persistence of gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors, the sexual gender gap has been closing in recent years, as women's and men's sexual experiences come to more closely resemble one another's. Or rather, women's experiences have come to resemble men's. . . . While men's sexual behavior has hardly changed, women's sexuality has changed dramatically, moving increasingly closer to the behavior of men. (This probably both thrills and terrifies men.)" If this is true, then both the sexuality and the masculinity of young men, which are closely connected, become the locus of anxiety. As Kimmel (2005, 72) notes, "One of the reasons masculinity and sexuality are often so entangled is that they become salient issues simultaneously. During adolescence, young boys struggle to master the rules of masculinity at the same time that they become aware of their emergent sexualities."

In addition, according to Schrock and Schwalbe (2009, 286), a hegemonic ideal of masculinity "pervades the culture and sets a standard against which all manhood acts are measured. . . . [I]t is impossible for all men to meet the hegemonic ideal . . . [which means] that adjustments must be made, not only individually, but also subculturally" (see also Anderson 1999; Eastman and Schrock 2008; Messerschmidt 2000; Tilki 2006). At the same time, the existence of not one but many forms of masculinity (i.e., the ability to construct and present themselves as men in various ways [Connell 1987, 1995, 2000; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009], even within a subculture or a particular social sector) is the reason we have the variety of narrative identities deployed in this chapter. Thus, we avoid falling into the trap of "the implicit claim . . . that all members of the category [in our case, young men of the popular sectors] practice an identifiably unique form of masculinity" (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280–281).

The ways that young men appropriate cumbia villera lyrics reveals, first, the existence of a code in the reading of the songs and of the feminine condition that the songs describe that permits a specific form of sexism to be identified. If, as the proverb says, the devil is in the details, the specificity of the sexism that we encounter is something to take seriously. Today it is a common occurrence in many locations around the world for young men to react in very sexist ways to the sexual activation of women. As Gary Barker (2005, 120) points out:

> Young men distinguish between girls who are seen as suitable for longer-term relationships, including marriage ("girls of faith," as young men in Rio de Janeiro called them, referring to girls they would have as their girlfriends), and "girls of the street," referring to girls with whom they have short-term and often purely sexual relationships. In Chicago, those girls who were sexually available were called "hood rats" and "whores," as opposed to the "ladies" and "women," who were seen as marriageable. In Nigeria, those young women who had sex before marriage . . . were classified as "harlots." In much of the world, "girls of faith" are becoming scarcer, reflecting the fact that the sexual behaviour of young women is beginning to resemble that of young men. One young man in Brazil, commenting on this trend, said: "Young women are just giving us the other side of the same coin."

Therefore, to move beyond this generic understanding of a common situation, we need to specify the idiosyncrasies and complexities of how such a situation works in a particular locale: Buenos Aires at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Only if interpretive social science is willing to risk negating its own existence can it be content with ascertaining generic asymmetries without revealing the context in which those asymmetries are constituted. We address this code from young men's most superficial expressions to the most complex, from what boys say in everyday conversations to the principles that, present in the narrative plots of the group and the narrative identities of distinct members of the same group, sustain these expressions. At the same time, we illustrate with observations made at the bailes—the places where these young men dance to cumbia villera—how the particular code works in the practice of the actors involved. Thus, we address the "extreme" masculine position, its nuances, and the common conditions among them, trying to elucidate which specific types of sexism (if any) they carry away.

Cumbia Villera Portrays All Cumbieras as They Really Are

Many of our interviewees pointed out that they believe the only thing cumbia villera does is portray women as they really are: quick to go to bed.[2] We interviewed Rafa while he was waiting in a line to enter the TV program "Pasión de Sábado."[3] He stated that even though some of the lyrics "*medio van a la violencia*" [are kind of violent], he liked cumbia villera. Talking specifically about how the lyrics describe women, Rafa claimed that they mirror reality: "*algunas [chicas] están pasadas y otras se hacen las duras*" [some girls are wasted or out of control, and others pretend to be difficult].[4] Distinguishing between "*duras*" [strong, difficult] and "*pasadas*" [well beyond the point at which they can control themselves] creates distance in relation to any unqualified interpretation that identifies the enunciation of the lyrics with the generalized and

absolute use of the qualifier "slut"; in other words, a very qualified interpretation is required to show all of the nuances of the term's use. The difference between girls who openly express their sexual desire ("*están pasadas*") and those who simulate resistance ("*se hacen las duras*") corresponds to, and fuses with, two different native signifying systems. "Sluts" within this system are simultaneously "*locas*" [crazy] and "*inconscientes*" [lacking real awareness of what they are doing]. That is why the term "*pasadas*" (which in the language of the group alludes to the consequences of alcohol and drug use) can impinge metaphorically on the term "slut." Those who simulate some kind of resistance possess attributes (generally considered masculine) that involve a capacity to control, if not the consumption itself, at least the worst effects of such consumption.

A possible reading of Rafa's comments establishes that the difference to be drawn is not between those who are sluts and those who are not, but between those who publicly act as sluts and those who attempt to disguise being sluts (even though they really are). In the end, all of them "end up in bed," he says, which points to a novelty in the discourse of certain interviewees. The change in the opposite pairs and the firmness of the distinction being made (i.e., from sluts versus ladies to cognizant sluts versus renegades) reveals an important change in the image that many men have of women.

Later, we show that the way women interpret the same lyrics within the context of the activation of women implies a very important change in women's behavior that could help to explain this change in men's perception. At the same time, we reveal the presence of a cultural code that inscribes the changes in women's behavior in terms of accusation. We see that the condition under which many women supposedly come to deserve the worst of the native slurs reveals a moral code in which dimensions of sexual behavior and self-control are mixed with elements of a broader morality. Under this moral code, equating open and uncontrolled expressions of sexual appetite by women with drug and alcohol addiction implicates the (always relative and contextual) positioning of women as sluts. Similarly, according to that code, the possibility of reversing the native stigmatization associated with such transgressions implicates, even to women themselves, the possession of virtues that the popular imaginary historically linked to men.

However, the common use of the accusatory "slut" reveals something that can be fully understood only if we take into account how women listen to cumbia villera. On the one hand, the accusation is part of a classic repertoire, which explains its aggravating recurrence and the consequent variations in its semantic content (i.e., the historical novelty that cumbia villera inaugurates). On the other hand, though, the code is contextual and mobile and exists only in its multiple variations, which is clearly demonstrated in the native necessity to modulate it. This particular code, idiosyncratically inscribed in the discursive practices of both our male and our female interviewees, helps them to construct a narrative identity that tries to make sense of the activation of women we talk about in this book. In this sense, Rafa uses the difference he sees be-

tween "*estar pasadas*" and "*hacerse las duras*" to buttress a narrative plot that constructs him as a man who has the right to conquer any woman because, in the final analysis, all women are sluts.[5]

Another interviewee, Marcos, also believed that cumbia villera lyrics describe the women who follow the genre.[6] He told us that he used to listen to rock nacional, but rock "*no da para ganar mujeres*" [is not good for conquering women], because the girls who like that genre go to the dance halls only to dance and thus are not good material for rapid sexual conquest. Marcos ended this part of the interview with an idea that he repeated later: that girls who dance to cumbia villera "*son más fáciles*" [are much easier]. The statement is interesting because it reproduces a comment that appeared prominently in many of our interviews with rockers and cumbieros: that rock nacional is "serious music" with content one must listen to and understand, whereas cumbia villera is non-serious music, music "*para la joda*" [to joke around], that is used for dancing and conquering women. Thus, to Marcos, girls who like rock are "serious" (and difficult to conquer), and cumbieras are easy to take to bed. Or to put it in other terms, female followers of rock nacional would be not "*pasadas o se hacen las duras*" but really "*duras*"—that is, young women who do not sleep with someone the first time they meet him. In this particular case, it is the separation between "rockers" and "cumbieras" that is brought about by Marcos's narrative to buttress a character that constructs only the latter as "fast girls."

When the interviewer asked Marcos specifically for his opinion about cumbia villera, he answered that the songs had improved because "*ahora no hablan tanto de droga*" [right now they don't talk as much about drugs] and were easier to dance to. With this new kind of cumbia villera, he explained, girls "*se copan más y se ponen a 'menear' [la cola], a mover el culo*" [are much more engaged and start moving their butts, moving their asses], and he repeated, one more time, that those lyrics were good for dancing. The interesting thing about this last commentary is that Marcos links the idea that girls like the new cumbia villera songs much more ("*se copan más*") with the fact that they supposedly show off that part of the female body that, as we saw when we analyzed the lyrics, seems most to enthrall men: "the ass." Thus, Marcos does not point out that because girls like the new songs more than the old ones, they "sing them more" or "dance more to them." He plainly links their enjoyment of the music with the sexually provocative game that such activity ("*mover el culo*") entails. In short, for Marcos, the fact that the girls engage with the new songs means that they are performing more publicly what they actually always were—that is, "fast" girls who are very easy to take to bed. The distance between this understanding and the use of the term "slut" to characterize cumbia villera's fans is small, but it is a line that Marcos's character, at least in this brief interview, did not cross.

At the same time, Marcos pointed out that when girls start moving their butts, some boys not only watch them but also applaud them, as if the display is a spectacle whose successful performance warrants approval from its intended

public. As we noted previously, these young men do not seem able to imagine that girls move their butts for any reason except to excite them sexually. Finally, when the interviewer asked Marcos what strategy he used to "*ganar*" [lit., "to win" (but also a metaphor for conquering)] women in the bailes, he answered that perhaps he could not "*levantarse*" [pick up] a girl at 1:00 or 2:00 A.M., when most people arrive at the dance halls, but that at 4:00 or 5:00 A.M., when the girls "*están más regaladas, siempre se gana*" [give themselves for free as a gift, you always win].[7] This comment is interesting for two reasons. First, it recalls Rafa's reference to young women who are "*pasadas*." Marcos clearly points out that, for him, it is difficult to "conquer" girls when they first arrive and are more or less sober,[8] but it is very easy when they are drunk, after a few hours of continuous alcohol consumption. Second, in his statement that he conquers girls when "*las chicas están más regaladas*," Marcos refers, literally, to the drunkenness that is characteristic of some girls by the end of the dance journey; at the same time, however, by using the word "*más*" [more], Marcos also calls attention to the idea that girls who go to the bailantas "*se regalan*" [give themselves for free as a gift] to men almost by definition, but once they are drunk, they do so more easily. Again, we return to Rafa's "*algunas [chicas] están pasadas y otras se hacen las duras*"—that is, to the characterization of cumbia villera followers as "sluts"—which makes Marcos's narrative identity only a slight variant of Rafa's.

In our participant observation in the bailes, we saw how an alternative strategy to this one actually works. Several people waited at the restroom doors for their partners while "fishermen" hung around making remarks to girls who looked "*pasadas*," or "*dadas vuelta*" [drunk]. This strategy intensified as the night wore on, especially on the part of fishermen who were still waiting for a bite. When one did get lucky, the conversation rarely consisted of more than a few sentences before the kissing began, and a "*tranzada*," or French kiss, never lasted for more than two minutes. It also did not appear to imply further contact or even a good-bye when it came to an end.[9]

Most of the girls who engaged in this behavior had had a lot to drink; we almost never saw young sober girls doing so. We did, however, see sober older women walking by the restroom with this strategy clearly in mind. Yet they were seldom chosen: for the young men who go to the bailes, only "*bargateros*," or those who have absolutely no scruples when it comes to necking, French kiss "old ladies."

The idea that cumbieras are easier to pick up than rock nacional followers was expressed very clearly in the interview we conducted with Sergio and Daniel and their friends:[10]

Interviewer: ¿Por qué estabas en un lugar de cumbia si sos rockero?

Daniel: Fui a parar ahí, loco, fui a parar. Yo voy al rocanrol, yo no voy a bailar. Yo voy a bares de rocanrol, Bernal, tengo un montón de bares por ahí, un par de . . . Me cabe más el rocanrol pero eso por ir a ver . . . a bailar, a bailar a boliches de cumbia, más o menos dos años que no voy.

Interviewer: ¿Y a cuál ibas?
Daniel: ¿A boliches de cumbia? A varios, a varios en Haedo . . .
Interviewer: ¿Y a Caldero?
Daniel: Era muy guacho, eso cuando tenía 14, 13 años.
Interviewer: Si sos rockero, ¿por qué ibas ahí?
Daniel: Porque pintaba con todos los muchachos, iba con los pibes.
Interviewer: Para ganar mujeres ¿qué onda? ¿Se gana más mujeres en la rockería . . . ?
Daniel: ¡En la rockería! ¡No!, las minitas son de acá (hace un gesto tocándose la cabeza), mucho más vivas. El rocanrol mueve gente, es una cultura, el rocanrol es otra cultura. No me vas a comparar la cultura del rocanrol con la cultura de . . . mirá cómo estoy vestido, vos me dirás vos nos sos rockero ni ahí. Nike con resortes, camisa de cuadros, pero no, no tiene nada que ver, el rocanrol es cultura. Cultura pura, la forma como persona en la cabeza, lo que quieren hacer de su vida; la cumbia también los forma: los forma a que vayan a robar ¿para qué? Para que los maten. Como Cypress Hill, como Tupac, Eminem. Como esa gente, ¿entendés? Gente que camina con maldad. Los forma para la guerra. Y acá la cumbia quiso intentar de hacer eso pero no funcionó porque acá la sociedad ya está muy violenta, vos sabés cómo es esto. Están todos con muchos problemas. Estalla, el primer lugar donde podía estallar, estalla. Uno va a bailar, se mama, se pelea. Estalla. Eso responde a muchas cosas: que te puede pasar en la vida, en la casa por ejemplo.

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Interviewer: Why you were in a cumbia spot if you're a rocker?
Daniel: I ended up there, man; I ended up there [by chance]. I like rock-and-roll. I don't go to dance. I go to rock-and-roll bars in Bernal. I have a lot of bars through there, a couple of . . . Rock-and-roll fits me better. . . . To dance, to dance in cumbia dance halls, more or less, it's been two years since I've gone.
Interviewer: And which ones did you go to?
Daniel: To the cumbia spots? To several of them, in Haedo. . . .
Interviewer: And to Caldero?
Daniel: I was very young. That happened when I was fourteen or thirteen years old.
Interviewer: If you're a rocker, why did you go there?
Daniel: Because I was in with all the guys. I went with all the kids.
Interviewer: To get women? What's up with that? Do you get more women in the rock clubs . . . ?
Daniel: In the rock clubs? No way! The little girls have brains there. (He gestures by touching his head.) They're much wittier there. Rock-and-roll moves people. It's a culture; rock-and-roll is another culture. You can't compare the culture of rock-and-roll with the culture of . . . Look how I'm

> dressed; you would say that I'm not quite a rocker: Nikes with springs, checkered shirt, but, no, rock culture doesn't have anything to do with how you dress. Rock-and-roll is culture—pure culture, the way people think in their heads, what they want to do with their lives. Cumbia also shapes them; it shapes them to go rob, for what? So they kill them. Like the American rappers Cypress Hill, like Tupac, Eminem. Like these people, do you understand? People who walk through life with evil. It shapes them for war. Here, cumbia wanted to do that, but it didn't work, because here society is already very violent, you know how this is. Everyone has a lot of problems. It explodes, the first place where it could explode, it explodes. You go to dance, get drunk, fight. It explodes. This is related to many things: the things that happen in your life, at home, for example.

This account is very important for different reasons. First, Daniel clearly differentiates rock from cumbia; for him, rock is a culture (and implicitly an ideology) of social change, whereas cumbia is a culture of delinquency. At the same time, Daniel stresses the profound ideological character of rock compared with the superficial character of cumbia when he points out that his "non-rocker" attire does not disqualify him as a rocker because rock culture goes beyond clothing and fashion. But Daniel's explanation is crucial to our argument because, once more, it portrays cumbieras as easier to pick up than female rock fans, who supposedly are more intelligent and more difficult to take to bed. Thus, Daniel, who constructs a solid narrative identity as a rocker, with all of the usual discursive elements (metaphors, categories, plots, and the like) that sustain such a character, ends up going to bailantas because that is there where he can "get girls."

When we found testimonies like those previously cited in our fieldwork, so distinct from those of the many girls who love to go to cumbia clubs only to dance, the sensation that struck us was that, if by some drastic change in popular culture the locations where one might "win more women" happened to be knitting and crocheting clubs, we have no doubt that many of our interviewees would now be learning to knit.

Another interviewee, Pedro, a fan of cumbia sonidera and the group Damas Gratis,[11] told us that he dances at cumbia spots in southern Buenos Aires but that he also goes to "*cheto*" [rich kid] clubs (thus implying that the spots in southern Buenos Aires are for the popular sectors).[12] When he said this, his tone was excited; however, he did not pronounce the letter "s," signaling his low level of education, and he used a lot of the slang used by "*fieritas*" [bad guys from the shantytowns]. Pedro commented to the interviewer that, at the rich kids' places, the girls were no different from the ones at all of the other clubs and that rich girls, like poor ones, "end up taking off their panties," although he finally admitted that one "gets" more women in the clubs that are not for rich kids. Pedro thus drew a distinction not between "rockers," who are almost impossible to take to bed, and "cumbieras," who are very easy to take to bed,

but between cumbieras and "*chetas*" [rich girls], who are a little difficult to take to bed—thus positioning *chetas* between rockers and cumbieras but closer to the latter than to the former.

Perhaps Pedro enjoyed the music played at the rich kids' clubs better. We really do not know. What we do know is that Pedro ended up at cumbia dance halls because of "*el levante*" [the possibility of picking up girls]. It is thus not surprising that he believed cumbia villera lyrics describe girls as they really are: as sluts. When asked what it means for girls to be "fast," Pedro laughingly answered, "That they take off their panties," supposedly confirming what the cumbia villera lyrics we analyzed in the previous chapter state. His narrative identity thus appealed once again to a discourse that establishes inherent differences between women (this time, between *chetas* and cumbieras) to buttress a particular character that sees it as legitimate to treat cumbieras as sluts and actively pursue them to accomplish his sexual goals.

A variant of this narrative suggests that the changes in girls' attitudes about sex is recent and that only "contemporary" girls, not those of the past, are "fast" and "easy." This came up in our interview with Mateo.[13] He stated that many of the things that cumbia villera lyrics say "are true, because the lyrics sing what really occurs." To give more weight to his assertion, Mateo pointed out that he played percussion in a cumbia villera band and that the songs told "the truth about things." The interviewer asked him the customary question about what the lyrics say about girls, and Mateo answered that "there are different types of women"—that is, he found it difficult to generalize, but that in his view *today's* girls "*van para adelante*" [lit., "go forward" (but, in this context, "are proactive in their pursuit of sex")]. Mateo's position on the issue, therefore, was that contemporary girls are more proactive in their attitudes and actions in pursuing the opposite sex for loving relationships, as well as for purely sexual relationships.

A very interesting twist in this type of narrative reverses the order of causation we have discussed so far. That is, the idea that cumbia villera *follows* with its lyrics what girls are actually doing turns into "cumbia villera *causes* girls to be more sexually proactive." Perhaps demonstrating an acute awareness of the complex relationship between music and identity, another interview subject, Nacho, noted that he believes girls became much more "provocative" (i.e., very assertive about their sexuality and comfortable with engaging in purely sexual relationships) *after* cumbia villera appeared.[14]

Interviewer: Digo, ¿para vos hay alguna relación entre lo que esas letras dicen de las chicas y lo que las chicas hacen?

Nacho: No sé, porque empezaron a salir todos esos temas y las pendejas son peores.

Interviewer: ¿Son peores por qué?

Nacho: Son más provocadoras, van peores a bailar, van con pollerita corta, ya van con un escote, ¿cómo se llama? Un top, te muestran las tetas, te tocan el culo.[15]

. . .

Interviewer: Do you see any relationship between what the lyrics say about girls and what girls do?

Nacho: I don't know, because all of these songs began coming out, and the girls are worse.

Interviewer: Worse how?

Nacho: They're more provocative; they go in worse shape [more provocatively dressed] to dance; they go with little short skirts and low necklines—what do you call it?—a top. They show their tits; they touch your ass.

Nacho's account runs against the well-entrenched idea that music reflects reality and introduces us to a much more interesting possibility: that music complexly "constructs reality." As Richard Middleton (1990, 254) points out, "Popular songs, no less than other cultural practices . . . produce 'orientations toward reality'—though these are linked to socially generated assumptions and conventions. . . . At the same time, music is—to use Wittgenstein's formulation—a 'language game' (one of many), governed by the particularities of its own rules of construction. The question, therefore, is less one of 'adequacy to' (a pre-existing reality) . . . than 'adequacy *as*' (a part of reality), productive of useful knowledge and effective practice." That is, music is one of the cultural artifacts that people use to understand who they are, giving them the metaphors, categories, and narrative plots they habitually use to make sense of their different identities. As Vila has stated elsewhere, "Music . . . is part of those privileged practical activities that condense basic significations, construct identities through the production of the imaginary effect of having an essential identity inscribed on the body (as an ethnic, national, gender, or age character)" (Vila 2001, 35; our translation). In this case, according to Nacho, cumbia villera lyrics offer girls new repertoires of sexual and gender behavior that, instead of being rejected because they are disrespectful toward women (as some of our interviewees pointed out, and a topic that is discussed at length in the next chapter), are eagerly embraced because they are attuned to a narrative identity that is open to experiencing (and enjoying) sexuality in a different and, some people would say, "liberating" way.

Nacho pointed out several things he believes girls started to do only after cumbia villera lyrics appeared on the music scene: "They're more provocative; they go in worse shape [more provocatively dressed] to dance; they go with little short skirts and low necklines—what do you call it?—a top. They show their tits; they touch your ass." Nacho thus states that, in general, women are provoking men more than they did before. To illustrate, he mentioned several dimensions of behavior that he regarded as part of this new provocative behavior: how women dance; how they dress; and how they have incorporated into their repertoire a behavior that one usually associates with sexist men who treat women as objects, such as touching butts. The first two examples Nacho cites—dancing

and dress—are not unfamiliar in the Argentine context (some women in every social sector danced and dressed provocatively in the past). The third example, however, is quite new, and it moves us a step closer to what we pointed out earlier—that is, how some young women appropriate behavior traditionally coded as male and use it to construct a much more proactive sexual character.

What many girls apparently are doing is objectifying males' body parts, which one also finds in lyrics performed by female cumbia villera singers such as La Piba. According to Silba and Vila (2010, 11), "What we have here is some kind of 'masculinization' of the female approach to the body of the 'other' that is performed without any kind of impediment in the playful context of the bailanta. In this way, the objectification of the body of the sexual other is no longer a degrading and disrespectful male attitude (nobody wants her or his butt touched without giving her or his permission), but a female one, as well." When the interviewer, who was very surprised, asked Nacho whether such behavior is very common, the following dialogue, in which Nacho's sister Karina also took part, occurred:

Interviewer: ¿Alguna mina te tocó el culo alguna vez?
Nacho: ¡Cuántas!
Interviewer: ¿Y qué hiciste?
Nacho: ¿Qué va' cer? (*Risas.*)
Karina: ¡Y, se quedó mirándola!
Nacho: No hacés nada.
Interviewer: ¿Pero vos no dijiste, "¡Esta es la mía! Puedo aprovechar"?
Nacho: ¡No, porque te das vuelta y son unos bagartos![16]
Interviewer: Pero pará, ¿para vos entonces las minas son peores de lo que las letras cuentan?
Nacho: No sé si peores, pero que son terribles, son terribles.
Interviewer: ¿Todas? ¿O alguna en especial?
Nacho: El 99 por ciento.

. . .

Interviewer: Did a chick ever touch your ass?
Nacho: So many!
Interviewer: And what did you do?
Nacho: What can you do? (*Laughter.*)
Karina: He stood there looking at her.
Nacho: You can't do anything . . .
Interviewer: But didn't you say, "This one is mine! I can take advantage of the situation"?
Nacho: No, because you turn around, and they're really ugly!
Interviewer: But wait a minute: are you telling me that chicks are even worse than the song lyrics say?
Nacho: I don't know if they're worse, but they're terrible, terrible.

Interviewer: All of them? Or just some in particular?
Nacho: Ninety-nine percent.

It is interesting that Nacho believes "99 percent" of the young women who dance to cumbia villera are as bad as, or worse than, the lyrics claim. He seems to be implying that the surprise expressed humorously in many lyrics about how much more open women are about expressing their sexual desire toward men (surprise that often deploys the insult "slut" as a shortcut to describe a much more complex relationship) is easily surpassed by his own surprise at being treated as a mere object of cumbieras' sexual desire, actively and publicly performed through the act of touching his butt—surprise that is even more pronounced considering that, to express such desire, some young women are using a well-entrenched male behavior that many considered the epitome of lack of respect for the female "other."[17]

It is also very interesting to note that Nacho thinks this type of sexually aggressive behavior is deployed by "*bagartos*" [ugly girls], but not by "nice" ones. This is something very important to consider, because if what Nacho is telling us is true, it seems that the aggressive (and sexist) behavior of the "*bagartos*" subverts and reinforces patriarchy at the same time. It subverts patriarchy because these young women dare to act in ways that previously were reserved for men. But it reinforces patriarchy because the "nice girls"—the ones who do not touch young men's butts to show their sexual interest—seem to continue performing the traditional feminine role as the object of desire but never initiating the sexual relationship. In this way, active (usually male) sexual behavior is restricted to those women who supposedly are not the objects of men's desire, and they, paradoxically, deploy their desire for men by using a traditionally male behavior. As Silba and Vila (2010, 12) point out:

> The supposedly "ugly" young women who dare to touch men's butts in the context of the bailanta (but not outside it) are, nevertheless, acquiring a particular "know-how" that allows them, at least, to dare to do things that were impossible to even imagine several years ago. In this regard, they do not see themselves as doing something (degrading themselves) that justifies the label that young men attach to them (i.e., "sluts"), but, on the contrary, they see themselves as challenging boys with their own weapons, showing that the open expression of sexual desire is not only a male attribute, but a female one, as well.

Nacho's belief that "99 percent" of the young women who dance at bailes are "more provocative than before" and "terrible," and that cumbia villera lyrics are the "cause" of this difference, was more than an occasional expression. He really meant it to the point of including his own sister and his former and current girlfriends in the statement, even in the presence of his sister, who was part of the interview in which Nacho advanced his accounts:

Interviewer: ¿Y tu hermana cuando iba a bailar con vos [también era terrible]?
Nacho: Y habrá sido terrible, porque santa no era.
Karina: ¿Qué?
Nacho: (*Risas.*) En esas vueltitas que te dabas, alguno te comías . . . ¿o no?
Karina *(con voz tímida):* Si ahí salía con Matías, cómo me voy a comer . . .
Nacho: Ayyyyyy . . . ¿qué tiene que ver?!
Karina: No, ni en pedo.

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Interviewer: And when your sister went to dances with you, was she terrible too?
Nacho: She must have been, because she's no saint.
Karina: What?
Nacho: (*Laughter.*) When you went here and there in the baile, you got some [French kissed someone], right?
Karina *(timidly):* If I was there with my boyfriend, Matías, how was I going to get some?
Nacho: What's that got to do with it?
Karina: No way, not even drunk.

Thus, Nacho counts even his own sister among the "terrible" new girls who supposedly have appeared since cumbia villera entered the tropical music scene. The use of the expression "*te comías*" [lit., "you eat up" (but, in this context, it refers to French kissing)] in his account is very interesting. He did not say that his sister had "allowed" men to kiss her but put the agency for the act squarely on her shoulders by stating, "It was you who went looking for those boys to kiss and hug just for the fun of doing it, even though you had an official boyfriend." At the same time, Nacho did not seem to imply that there was anything morally wrong with Karina's actions; thus, although this new proactive sexual behavior obviously surprised him, he did not necessarily condemn it, at least when a female interviewer and his sister were present. We really do not know what Nacho says when he is with his male friends.

Nacho's seeming openmindedness about the morality of this kind of behavior is buttressed by his recognition that his former girlfriend Paty may also have been kissing men at the baile while they were together:

Interviewer: Y la Paty, que era tu novia en esa época, ¿qué onda?
Nacho: Y algo habrá comido . . .
Karina: No, cuando no salía con él sí, pero no, cuando salía con él . . . ¡bah! aunque salieron muy poco.

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Interviewer: And Paty, who was your girlfriend at the time, what about her?
Nacho: Well she must have got some [French kissed someone] . . .

Karina: No. When she wasn't out with [Nacho], she did, but not when she was with him, . . . though they didn't go out very much.

Nacho uses the term "*algo*" [some] to establish a difference between girls like his sister and his former girlfriend and those he sees as much more sexually proactive and have had casual sexual relationships with many boys at the same time. He elaborated on this by mentioning Quela, his friend Tula's girlfriend, who, he claimed, had pursued him:

Interviewer: Y respecto de cómo se portaban las pibas, para vos, ¿era lo mismo Quela que la Paty?
Nacho: No.
Interviewer: ¿Qué diferencia había? Lío . . .
Nacho: Quela estaba mal vista, era más zarpada, era bocona, no le importaba. Ella si te podía transar, te transaba, sea quien sea.
Interviewer: ¿Pero vos sentiste eso? ¿Que ella te quería transar, siendo amigo de Tula?
Nacho: Sí, si se me tiró a mí.
Interviewer: ¿Y? ¿Qué hiciste?
Nacho: Nada, le corté la cara.

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Interviewer: And with regard to how girls behave, are Quela and Paty the same for you?
Nacho: No.
Interviewer: What was the difference? Troublemaking . . .
Nacho: Quela had a bad reputation. She was more reckless; she had a big mouth. She didn't care. She'd *transar* [French kiss but also, possibly, fuck] you. She'd *transar* anyone.
Interviewer: But you felt that she would *transar* you, a friend of Tula's?
Nacho: She threw herself at me once.
Interviewer: What did you do?
Nacho: Nothing. I put her down.

The words Nacho uses to describe Quela establish that he saw differences between her and his sister and former girlfriend. According to Nacho, Quela was "*mal vista, era zarpada, era bocona, no le importaba ir al frente*" [had a bad reputation, constantly transgressed moral limits, talked loudly and too much, and didn't care about being sexually proactive]. In calling attention to Quela's "bad reputation" in the neighborhood, he was referring to what was said about her, not necessarily to what she was doing or not doing. However, in describing Quela as "*zarpada*" (i.e., constantly transgressing accepted norms of proper gender behavior, in which the man is the active agent and the woman is passive) and "*bocona*" (i.e., speaking loudly about things she should not talk about)—

and, more important, in charging that she wanted to have sex even with her boyfriend's best friend—he was talking explicitly (and negatively) about Quela's behavior. In so doing, he put her in a category of sexually active young women completely different from that of Karina and Paty.

In the interview, Nacho also endorsed what Rafa told us: that there are no "saintly" women among young baile-goers, only different "ways" to express their newly acquired sexual agency:

Interviewer: Y por ejemplo, de la Fer y la Paty, ¿vos pensás que los pibes pensaban lo mismo de una y de otra?
Nacho: Qué sé yo . . .
Interviewer: Bueno, pero vos, por ejemplo, elegiste a una mina como la Paty, no a la Fer . . .
Nacho: Sí, pero a veces la apariencia es . . .
Interviewer: ¿Qué es la apariencia?
Nacho: La forma de ser, capaz que la Paty te la hacía pero era calladita, la otra no, ¡era zarpada! Si te la hacía no le importaba nada quién estaba, delante de quién . . . capaz que la otra te la hacía, pero te la hacía callada, sola, allá, ¿entendés?
Karina: Que no se entere nadie . . .
Nacho: Es diferente, qué sé yo . . .
Interviewer: ¿Era diferente la onda?
Nacho: Claro.
Interviewer: ¿Y a vos cuál te gustaba más? ¿Las que se hacían las boludas o las que iban de frente?
(*Risas de Karina.*)
Nacho: Las que eran más santas . . . que ninguna era santa. (*Risas.*)

. . .

Interviewer: Take Fer and Paty, for example. Do you think the kids thought the same things about both of them?
Nacho: How would I know?
Interviewer: Well, but you, for example, chose a girl like Paty and not Fer.
Nacho: Yes, but sometimes appearances are . . .
Interviewer: What are appearances?
Nacho: The way they are, maybe Paty did it, but she was quiet. The other one [Fer] wasn't. She's *zarpada* [gross]! If she did it to you [cheated on you], she didn't care who saw it, who was around; the other [Paty] might do it to you, but quietly, alone, over there, understand?
Karina: Nobody found out . . .
Nacho: It's different, you know . . .
Interviewer: Different vibes?
Nacho: Sure.

Interviewer: And which do you like best: girls who play dumb or those who are out front?
(*Karina laughs.*)
Nacho: The saintliest ones . . . but none is a saint. (*Laughter.*)

In constructing his narrative identity, Nacho called not on Rafa's discourse of "*algunas [chicas que] están pasadas y otras [que] se hacen las duras*" [some girls who are wasted or out of control and others who pretend to be difficult] but one that distinguished between girls who are "*calladitas*" and those who are "*zarpadas*."[18] Regardless of the fact that the boys' narrative plots require different sets of metaphors in their discursive construction of the "other" to buttress their respective characters ("*pasadas*" versus "*se hacen las duras*" for Rafa and "*calladitas*" versus "*zarpadas*" for Nacho), the final destination of all of these girls, regardless of their metaphorically constructed differences, is a sexual relationship with someone who is not her boyfriend, because the only thing the *calladitas* (and Rafa's *duras*) want is to retain the appearance of being "saints" (Nacho's word, not ours). That Nacho did not qualify either of these two variants as "slut" is very interesting, considering that his own girlfriend fell into the "soft" sexually proactive category, and Quela openly tried to conquer him, even though her boyfriend was his best friend. But for what we want to convey in this part of the chapter (i.e., that some boys believe that cumbia villera lyrics portray young baile-goers as they actually are), how Nacho used the examples of his sister and former girlfriend to illustrate his point is very important.

Nacho went a step further and claimed that even his current girlfriend, Wanda, probably kissed and cuddled (and eventually had sex) with several boys when she went to bailes as a teenager:

Interviewer: Che, ¿y con Wanda qué onda? ¿Vos sentís que es distinta a las minas con las que saliste antes?
Nacho: Distinta no, porque cada uno tuvo su pasado.
Interviewer: Ella también iba a bailar antes de estar con vos?
Nacho: Sí. Y, se habrá comido a todo el baile, qué sé yo.

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Interviewer: So. what's the deal with Wanda? Do you think she's different from the girls you went out with before?
Nacho: She isn't different because everybody has a past.
Interviewer: Did she go to bailes before going out with you?
Nacho: Yeah, and she probably got [French kissed] by everyone there. What do I know?

In the narrative identity Nacho deployed for us, the problematic girls are the "*zarpadas*," the ones who openly and steadily look for boys to have full

sexual encounters with, not girls like his sister and his former and current girlfriend, who had similar sexual relationships but within limits that Nacho believed a girl should not transgress. Those limits were based not on "being a saint" (e.g., retaining one's virginity until marriage, something Nacho could not imagine as possible or even desirable for a young woman nowadays),[19] but on having premarital sexual relations only with more or less stable partners and casual sexual encounters in the playful setting of the baile that did not continue beyond that context. This conception, of course, is very similar to that of the "good girl" a middle-class interviewee discussed with Margulis and his colleagues (2003b), showing one more time how many of the phenomena and situations that we are describing occur beyond the cumbia villera scene and the popular-sector youth who follow the genre.

Interestingly, although Nacho believed that most young baile-goers (including his sister and girlfriends) were very proactive regarding their sexuality, he did not like what cumbia villera lyrics say about women:

Interviewer: Che, y hablando de música y de bandas, me dio la impresión que hay muchas menos bandas de cumbia villera ahora. ¿Es así?
Nacho: Sí.
Interviewer: ¿Y por qué?
Nacho: Ahora no sé por . . . ¡bah! no sé si hay menos.
Interviewer: Pero se escuchan menos, o tienen menos difusión. Digo, en la radio, en la tele . . . cuando Damas Gratis salió era el *boom*, todos los pasaban.
Nacho: Sí.
Interviewer: Y de las nuevas, para mí, la más parecida a Damas Gratis es El Empuje, por las letras y por lo que dicen, por ejemplo, de las minas. ¿A las minas les gustan esas canciones? Que dicen que son todas trolas . . .
Nacho: Les gusta, ¡bah! Qué sé yo, les debe gustar.
Interviewer: Pero a vos, por ejemplo, ¿te gustaría que dijeran eso de tu novia?
Nacho: No, a nadie le va a gustar que digan eso de la novia.
Interviewer: Y tu novia ¿no forma parte de "las mujeres"?
Nacho: ¡Sí que forma parte!
Interviewer: ¿Y entonces?
Nacho: Qué sé yo, la cumbia villera ya es cualquier cosa. . . . No sé, está mal vista porque dicen "cumbia villera." Pasa que si no habla de la droga, habla del culo, de las tetas . . .

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Interviewer: Speaking of music and bands, I get the impression there are a lot fewer cumbia villera bands now. Is that true?
Nacho: Yeah.
Interviewer: Why?
Nacho: I don't know. . . . I don't know if there are fewer.

Interviewer: But you don't hear them as much, or they get less airtime. On TV and the radio, I mean. . . . When Damas Gratis came out, they were all the rage and everybody played them.
Nacho: Yeah.
Interviewer: For me, the closest of the new groups to them is El Empuje, because of the lyrics and what they say about girls. Do girls like the songs that say they're all *trolas* [sluts]?
Nacho: They like them, sure, how do I know? Perhaps they like them . . .
Interviewer: Would you like it if that was said about your girlfriend?
Nacho: No, nobody would like that to be said about his girlfriend.
Interviewer: And your girlfriend doesn't belong to the group "all women"?
Nacho: Yeah, she does!
Interviewer: And so?
Nacho: I don't know. Cumbia villera is awful right now. I don't know, it's looked down on, because they say "cumbia villera." If it doesn't talk about drugs, it talks about tits and asses.

Thus, although Nacho believed that most baile-goers are "*rápidas*" (while not condemning them for being so and, in fact, citing the introduction of cumbia villera as the cause), he objected to the picture of women being drawn in the genre's lyrics. This is another expression of the profound confusion young men feel about women's newly acquired sexual activation. In this particular case, while Nacho appeared to be very understanding of the young women's right to behave the way men often behaved in the past—that is, publicly and actively enjoying their sexuality—he also revealed that he would prefer for women to express their sexuality not only more "*calladitas*" but also, if possible, more "traditionally."

Nacho's answers to our questions may initially seem contradictory. What they really do, however, is give expression to his multiple identifications. In this way, while the "condescending" Nacho is Nacho the brother and ex-boyfriend, the not-so-condescending Nacho is the current boyfriend (even though he is condescending regarding his girlfriend's *past* sexual behavior). Therefore, navigating with Nacho through his construction of a narrative identity from different subject positions, we were able to see the underlying logic through which he could point out that girls have become more sexually proactive since the arrival of cumbia villera, regard that behavior as not inherently morally wrong, but still disagree with what cumbia villera says about women.

Other boys we interviewed viewed the situation through a completely different lens. In one of its more absolute and callous forms, our male subjects' masculine decoding of some cumbia villera lyrics implied an explanation for, and justification of, rape. This often occurred in highly paradoxical contexts, exemplified by our interviews with Sergio and Gustavo, who disagreed with the proposition that cumbia villera lyrics describe all women, yet at the same time staunchly defended what the lyrics say about women and

held that women were doing things that transformed them into "sluts" asking to be raped.[20]

Interviewer: ¿Qué pensás de que las letras son medio fuertes contra las mujeres?
Sergio: Está bien, está bien, porque hay minas y minas. Siempre hay que respetarlas porque son mujeres, pero por más que sean mujer no se rescatan ni ellas. Si las bardean por algo las están bardeando, ¿o no?
Interviewer: ¿Qué es "no rescatarse"?
Sergio: Y no se rescatan, por ahí, por más que tengan novio, están transando con el novio y abren los ojos y están [mirando a otro tipo].

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Interviewer: What do you think about the lyrics? Are they kind of harsh regarding women?
Sergio: That's OK, that's OK, because there are different kinds of women. You always have to respect them, because they are women, but even though they are women, they don't even rescue themselves [*no se rescatan*]. If people show lack of respect toward them [*las están bardeando*], there is a reason they are not showing respect toward them. Am I right?
Interviewer: What do you mean by "they don't rescue themselves"?
Sergio: Well, . . . let's say, if they do have a boyfriend, they're getting with their boyfriend and they're also looking at [some other guy].

Thus, although Sergio stated that not all the girls who go to bailes are "fast" or "easy" or "sluts," he also thought that the way women behave within the cumbia villera scene authorized men to act out something that the native logic of women really does not authorize. As we show in the next chapter, some girls do play at "being sluts" in the baile environment, but they play with whom and how they want to be so (and they reject as violence, and many times with violence, when such choices are not recognized). However, some men (even those who are able to contextualize what cumbia villera says about women) seem to understand this game as open to all and to any kind of access they consider valid. This is why we believe that the native meaning of what constitutes a violation should be analyzed in this specific context.

In addition, Sergio argued that some cumbia villera lyrics describe "objective" situations in which men are authorized to violate women, understanding violation in both senses of the word (i.e., as rape and as interpreting women's sexual game in a way that they do not authorize). His narrative sustains that, if those lyrics exist, "there is a reason." His statement, "If people show lack of respect toward them [*las están bardeando*], there is a reason they are not showing respect toward them. Am I right?" advances his idea that cumbia villera does nothing more than reflect reality. The female "slut" character emerges in his narrative plot "as acting irresponsibly, bringing her fate upon herself, as a

result of something that is 'natural' and 'normal' for anyone who acts like she did. At the same time, her actions and her responsibility are characterized as 'unnatural': normal (good) girls are not like her—drawing up a position of fitness from where 'good' and 'bad' girls are clearly distinguishable" (Bamberg 2004, 343). As we can see, Sergio's narrative lacked many of the nuances of Nacho's narrative.

However, Sergio holds girls responsible for a meaning that they really do not give to their own interpretation of what they do, because they actually only play at being sluts to whom they want, not to just anyone who unilaterally regards himself as a chosen one. It is here that we find the violation of the symbolic contract that the feminine interpretation presupposes, which often is accompanied by the real possibility of sexual violence, which some interviewees try to legitimate with "there is a reason." Sergio's justificatory "there is a reason" thus can have ominous perspectives:

Sergio: Mirá, te digo una loco, que nadie la piensa, vos todas las violaciones que pasan por la tele, no es por nada pero vos todas las pibas, vos les llegás a ver la cara, son todas las calienta vergas [penes] del barrio, todas las violadas. Todas, casi todas. Casi todas. El otro día pasaron en la tele una que venía de bailar no sé qué, en donde, pollera por acá, re calienta vergas. Hay algunas minitas que se quejan, y las minitas, y las minitas, arranco por arriba, tienen la carita, flequillito, carita de puta, las tetas afuera, el culo al aire, y después se quejan. ¡Después se quejan boludo!

Gustavo: Las de Caldero llevan la pollera por acá . . .

Sergio: Claro, sí, por los sobacos la pollera, y se le ven todas las nalgas, qué vienen a reclamar, ¿entendés? Si vos salís por algo es. Después están las pibitas que salen con el pantaloncito de jean, una remerita más o menos, ¿o no? Eso está bien, tenés el derecho a hacerte la otra. Pero las minitas que van así, y revolean el culo, te miran y te menean, no, ¿cuál estás haciendo?, después te hacés la loca. Todos van a pensar lo mismo porque no tienen derecho a hacerse la loca. Con un berretín por ahí sí, que está zarpado de faso, está zarpado en drogas, *eh, loca, eh, vení, vamos a coger.* Yo la voy a chamuyar piola a la mina si me cabe la onda, ¿por qué no te . . . ?

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Sergio: Look, I'm going to tell you something, man, that nobody thinks about. [A]ll of the rapes that you watch on TV, they are not by chance. [A]ll of those girls, if you get a chance to see their faces, are the neighborhood's *calienta vergas* [cock hounds]. I'm talking about all those girls who are raped. All of them, most of them. Most of them. The other day, the TV showed a girl who came back from dancing, I don't know what or where, wearing a very, very short skirt—super cock hound. There are some girls who complain, and the girls, the girls. . . . I'll go from top to bottom. They

have their little faces, the bangs, their little slut faces, the boobs falling outside their bras, their butts naked, and still they complain. And still they complain, man!

Gustavo: Those who go to Caldero wear their skirts right here (*gestures*). . . .

Sergio: That's right; the skirt by their armpit, and you can see all of their butts, what [can they complain about]? Do you understand? If you go out like this, there is a reason.[21] And then you have the girls who go out with their jeans, a decent T-shirt, do you follow me? That's right, you have the right to complain if you go out like that, but the girls who dress provocatively, those who shake their butts, they look at you and they shake their butts, what are they doing? And afterward they reject you. And everybody will think the same, because they don't have the right to reject you. With a druggy, perhaps they have such a right, someone who is lost on drugs, and says to her, "Hey, you girl, come here; let's go fuck." But I'm going to go after her if I like her. Why not? [And if she rejects me, I will tell her], "Why don't you go and fuck your mother?"

"There is a reason" refers to an alleged female attitude that, in the way they comb their hair, dress up, and behave, Sergio sees as a call for men to rape them, because for him, "they are all the neighborhood's *calienta vergas*" [cock hounds]. Sergio's statement implies that girls who do not show their buttocks, who do not move their asses, and who go out in normal jeans and T-shirts "have the right" to reject the sexual advances of boys. The others, those "*atrevidas*" [insolent, daring girls], would not have any right to resist such advances, because supposedly these advances are precisely what they are looking for. What it seems impossible for Sergio and Gustavo to perceive (from their "that's just the way it is" point of view) is that these girls who "resist," who "play at being 'the other' [the non-slut]," who "play crazy," and so on are doing anything other than looking to be raped.[22]

At the same time, the dialogue with Sergio and Gustavo allows for a more complex understanding of the issue of rape. It is possible to imagine that our interviewees are trying to underline and sanction what they see as an inadmissible provocation. Both the "proposed punishment" and the way to enact it reveal the terms of a particular narrative that raises the machismo prominent among some Argentine men to a new level. This interpretation is important in terms of our general argument, because we are talking about the exacerbation of men's traditional moral code in relation to the reconfiguration of women's sexual practices. Thus, if constantly seeking sex is the traditional and normative definition of masculinity, and sexual pleasure is only one of the goals in a sexual encounter (the other being the testing of manhood), "it makes men furious at women for doing what women are taught to do in our society: saying no. In our society, men being what men 'are supposed to be' lead[s] inevitably to conflict with women, who are being what they are 'supposed to be'" (Kimmel

2005, 85). In this traditional scenario, men in general are in power, according to Kimmel (2005, 86), "yet individual men do not feel powerful—far from it. Most men feel powerless and are often angry at women, who they perceive as having sexual power over them: the power to arouse them and to give or withhold sex. This fuels both sexual fantasies and the desire for revenge." That is why "men can see women's beauty and sexuality as so injurious that they can fantasize about rape as a retaliation for harm already committed by women" (Kimmel 2005, 87).[23]

That, in any case, is the "traditional" scenario in which rape is fantasized and justified. In narratives we encountered among some of our interviewees, however, something else was at play in which rape was justified as a particular form of "justice" that corresponds to the level of "*bardeo*" [craziness] acted out by women—to their being "*pasadas*" [out of control], the term many men used to inscribe the sexual activation of women. From their point of view, "*pasadas*" women have the right to resist sexual advances only by men of inferior moral quality (such as Sergio's "druggy"), who do not have the same rights as "normal" men. And one of the "rights" that "normal" men have apparently includes raping a "knocked-out" woman.

Qualifications and Nuances

The interviews with Rafa, Marcos, Nacho, Pedro, and many others revealed a perception that almost every girl is "easy" and "fast." Other interviewees, however, qualified that idea, claiming that it applies only to "some" girls.

Interviewer: Che, con el tema de la música, ¿qué opinás de las letras de cumbia villera lo que dicen de las minas y todo eso?
Gustavo: Todo lo mismo: que muevan la cola, que tocan la pija y todo, al final ya te aburre, aburre, aburre.
Interviewer: ¿Y eso no te gusta de la cumbia?
Gustavo: No, eso ya me aburre: que muevan la cola, que son todas peteras.
Sergio: Eso es verdad.
Interviewer: ¿Son todas peteras?
Gustavo: Hay y hay . . . todas no son iguales, tampoco somos todos iguales. Pero las hay, como hay pibes, como hay pibas.
Sergio: Nosotros los pibes estamos clasificados. ¿Entendés?
Gustavo: Todos traidores, supuestamente.

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Interviewer: Hey, man, and talking about music: what do you think about cumbia villera lyrics, what they say about girls and all that?
Gustavo: It's all the same: that they shake their butts, that they hold your dick and everything. In the end, it's very boring; it bores you to death.
Interviewer: And that's what you don't like about cumbia?

Gustavo: Yeah, that it's very boring: that they shake their butts, that all of them are chicken heads.
Sergio: That's true.
Interviewer: That all of them are chicken heads?
Gustavo: There are different kinds of girls. . . . Not all of them are the same. We are not the same ourselves. But yes, there are girls who give blow jobs all the time. Like there are different kinds of boys, there are different kinds of girls.
Sergio: We, the *pibes*, are already classified; do you understand what I'm saying?
Gustavo: We're all traitors, supposedly.

Two key new issues appear in this dialogue alongside what we have already analyzed (i.e., the enumeration of what cumbia villera lyrics say women do): first, the fatigue brought on by continuous repetition of the same messages in the songs, which illustrates how identification with a musical genre is never complete, and, second, the qualification of girls that we anticipated above. Both Sergio and Gustavo note that cumbia villera does not depict the behavior of *all* girls; it depicts the actions of only *some* of them. (Recall Daniel, who differentiated tout court between cumbieras and rockers.) In addition, relating their own experience of being stereotyped as boys with the typecasting of girls in the lyrics placed them in a particular ethical position to criticize those lyrics ("Not all of them are the same. We are not the same ourselves. But yes, there are girls . . . , like there are different kinds of boys, there are different kinds of girls. . . . We, the *pibes*, are already classified. . . . We are all traitors, supposedly"). Although the criticism of the lyrics and qualification of the moral status of baile-goers did not prevent these subjects from foreseeing rape as a possible outcome for those who are "*calienta vergas*," they do mark an important discursive change in relation to the position that maintains that all the young women who go to the bailes are sluts.

Agustín's narrative was similar to that of Sergio and his friends.[24] A fan of all styles of cumbia, Agustín, whom we interviewed in the "Pasión de Sábado" line, said that, although he liked cumbia villera lyrics, the lyrics he enjoyed the most were "the romantic ones." When asked why, he responded, "I identify with what they sing, if something like this is happening in my life, in my emotional life." Regarding what those lyrics say about women, Agustín noted, "At times it's true what they say . . . and you see them [the girls] in the dance halls and they wiggle and some of them are really fast." Thus, Agustín also qualified the statement "all of them are the same; all of them are sluts," admitting the possibility that cumbia villera lyrics describe (correctly, he believed) the behavior of only some of the young women. Once Agustín said this, though, he looked at the girls who were standing in line around him (girls who were not his friends) and said, "I hope they don't hear me, because if they do, they'll beat me to death." In an odd way, this reinforced his statement that only some cumbieras

are fast: he apparently assumed that the line contained girls who were not "fast" and who would be angered by his remark.

Also note that Agustín did not say that the girls would call their fathers, boyfriends, or brothers to beat him up, as would have been the case not so many years ago. Rather, he claimed that they themselves would beat him up. This attests to the rise of a kind of agentic violence among women that, not long ago, was the province of men only. This kind of activation of women has its own cumbia villera lyrics (see especially those by La Piba analyzed in Chapter 2). It is also something that many interviewees mentioned and that we personally saw in our observation of the bailes. The topic is also mentioned in the pioneering research done by Sofia Cecconi (2003, 192): "Violent behavior has ceased being the exclusive province of men. It has also become habitual with girls in the villa to get together in groups and practice the same kind of violence among themselves. This has made it possible to think that the idea of 'aguante' ['hanging in there' or 'enduring'], so typically masculine, has begun to be a feature of the identities of these young women. . . . [I]n bailantas, fights among girls now occur, along with the typical fights among boys." The topic was mentioned several times by our interviewees, including in the following dialogue with Fran:[25]

Interviewer: ¿Por qué se pelean los pibes en la bailanta para vos?
Fran: Porque son re tontos. En sí, porque son negros, porque no necesitás ir a bailar para pelear, sino que si vos vas a bailar vas a disfrutar supuestamente, pero hay muchos que van a pelear, la mayoría van a pelear, mujeres y hombres.
Interviewer: ¿Mujeres y hombres de la misma manera? Digo, ¿las minas se pelean igual que los tipos?
Fran: ¡Sí! Y más también, peor también.
Interviewer: ¿Y por qué se pelean las minas?
Fran: Por los hombres. No hay otra cosa, por los hombres, no hay otra cosa. "Me miraste a mi novio," ahí es pelear, esa es la pelea.
Interviewer: Nacho me decía el otro día que entre las mujeres se zamarreaban, que no se agarraban a piñas como los pibes, ¿vos opinás lo mismo?
Fran: No, se pegan, no se zamarrean más ya.
Interviewer: ¿Las minas se dan igual que pibes?
Fran: Se pegan, se pegan y mal.
Interviewer: ¿Vos viste minas pelearse?
Fran: Sí.

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Interviewer: Why do kids fight at dances?
Fran: Because they're really dumb and they're "*negros*." You don't need to go to a baile to fight. You go to dance supposedly to have a good time. But a lot go to fight. The majority do, men and women.

Interviewer: Men and women in the same way? I mean, the women fight just like the guys?
Fran: Yeah, and more, and worse.
Interviewer: Why do girls fight?
Fran: Over men. There's no other reason, only over men, there's nothing else. "You looked at my boyfriend." There's a fight, and that's the fight.
Interviewer: Nacho told me the other day that the girls push and shove; they don't hit each other like the guys. Do you agree?
Fran: No, they hit each other. They don't just push and shove anymore.
Interviewer: The girls go after each other just like the guys?
Fran: They hit each other; they hit each other badly.
Interviewer: Have you seen girls fight?
Fran: Yes.

Fran's ideas that boys fight just because they are "*negros*" and his suggestion that they go to the bailes mostly to fight, not to dance, are interesting. But what are important for the purpose of this chapter are his statements that not only boys but also girls fight at the bailes and that girls fight "*peor*" [even worse, more violently] than boys. In this regard—in Fran's perception, at least—girls can be even more "masculine" than boys, adding another layer to the already thick masculinization of behavior that is an integral part of the activation of young women.[26]

We have to consider how this violent behavior among women is related to their new sexual attitudes and how they concurrently redefine masculine identities and behavior. If gender identities, by default, are constructed using particular social markers, what happens when those social markers are used by the opposite gender to construct its own identity? If proactive sexual activity and the use of physical violence are no longer the sole prerogatives of young men, what social markers do these youth have to buttress their gender identifications; those that separate them from women? We believe that the ambiguity in cumbia villera lyrics is a sign of the heightened confusion these boys are experiencing. At the same time, the high level of violence that currently characterizes the bailanta scene can be related to the way some young men are trying to solve this identity puzzle—that is, by showing that they can be even more violent than the girls (Silba and Vila 2010).

Thus, the scenario imagined by middle-class intellectuals influenced by feminism in which women acquire some "masculine" characteristics (e.g., assertiveness, agency, autonomy) while men acquire some "feminine" traits (e.g., caring and nurturing) is not fully taking place, at least among some young people who belong to Argentina's popular sectors (although it is certainly taking place among other young men and women who belong to the same popular sectors). Instead, a kind of fierce competition has arisen between some young boys and girls over who possesses the more extreme masculine characteristics.[27]

This aggressive behavior by women can put young men in situations they do not want to confront:

Interviewer: ¿Jésica se peleó alguna vez por ejemplo?
Fran: No, nunca. Una que nunca la vi enojada y tampoco si se tiene que pelear no la voy a dejar, ni por más que sea un problema muy grande porque si la lastiman voy a tener que saltar yo y va a ser peor, entonces es mejor evitarlo. . . . [H]ablando se puede, yo ahora hablo, antes no hablaba.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué antes no hablabas?
Fran: Estaba con otra gente y la otra gente lo que hacía era pelear, era no decirte nada y pegarte.
Interviewer: ¿Tiene que ver entonces con quién te juntes vos?
Fran: Sí y mucho a veces. Puede ser que en una parte sí y en otra no. Pero si vos decís, "Yo no voy a pelear," y estoy con un grupito que pelea a pleno y "no, no voy a pelear" y después los dejás tirado a ellos, capaz que le están pegando a uno y vos estás viendo cómo le pegan, así sí te toman rencor entonces vos vas a tener que pelear con tus propios amigos. Entonces por eso tenés que saltar.
Interviewer: Siempre . . .
Fran: Siempre.

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Interviewer: Has Jésica [Fran's partner] ever gotten into a fight, for example?
Fran: No, never. In the first place, I've never seen her mad, and she doesn't have to fight, because I'm not going to allow her to, not even if there's a big problem, because if they hurt her, I'm going to have to jump in, and that is worse, so it's better to avoid it. . . . [T]alking works. I talk. I didn't talk before.
Interviewer: Why didn't you talk before?
Fran: I was with other people, and what the other people did was fight. They didn't say anything and hit you.
Interviewer: So it has to do with who you hang out with?
Fran: Yeah, sometimes a whole lot. It is true in some sense, but it isn't in another sense. But if you say, "I'm not going to fight," and [you're] with a group that really fights, . . . and afterward you leave them in the lurch—say they're hitting somebody, and you're watching—they resent that, and then you have to fight your own friends. So that's why you have to jump in and fight.
Interviewer: Always . . . ?
Fran: Always.

We know from previous research that it is very difficult for some of these boys to avoid fighting on behalf of their buddies when those friends are in trouble.

Now, Fran told us, their female partners' aggressive attitudes are also forcing them to do things that they might not want to do, such as fight other men on their girlfriends' behalf ("because if they hurt her, I'm going to have to jump in"). As we have noted, this aggressive behavior by women has very important repercussions in these young men's construction of gender identity. The boys "are forced to be 'a step ahead' of their female partners, in the sense that they have to continuously demonstrate their bravery, but now with much more emphasis than before. While, in the past, fighting among boys in the bailanta was always a male display of power and skills before a female audience, right now it is a spectacle called upon by females themselves, as a necessary corollary of their own aggressive behavior" (Silba and Vila 2010, 16). The police assigned to the bailes now use as much force to suppress fighting by girls as they do to suppress fighting by boys—revealing but one of the ways the state is reacting to the newly developed aggressiveness of these young women (Silba and Vila 2010, 16).

At the same time, taking this to the extreme, Fran appears to be saying that a boy who will not fight on behalf of his aggressive girlfriend may lose her, just as refusing to fight on behalf of one's buddies means losing those friends. Thus, aggressive girls seem to be demanding that their boyfriends constantly play at being "super-macho." This accounts for a very different kind of gender-role reversal from the one middle-class feminism dreamed about a couple of decades ago. What we are witnessing here is not a female character who is abandoning her traditional submissiveness accompanied by a male character who is discovering his "feminine" side. Instead, this is an escalation of violence in which some young women are displaying very aggressive behavior that once was associated with men, and some young men are increasing their own violence to try to surpass aggressive young women in that game. Thus, the masculinization of women in this context is not bringing about a feminization of men, because men are becoming increasingly preoccupied with retaining their "brave male traits" (Silba and Vila 2010, 17).

Fran also mentioned that some young women not only are quite violent but also seek out as sexual partners violent men or men who are linked to some kind of delinquent activity—above all, drug use:

Interviewer: Digo, ¿hay pibes que salen directamente a pelearse?

Fran: Sí, muchos, muchos, muchos. Ya, están en la casa de uno, muchos pibes juntados y decir "bueno, vamos al baile y no vamos a hacer nada," ya eso es mentira, porque van a pelear, ya salen tomando, salen fumando, porque ahora el que no se droga no tiene muchos amigos en sí. Si no te drogas, no tenés amigos directamente, sí un montón de conocidos.

Interviewer: ¿Pero es tan así? No entrás en . . .

Fran: No entrás, ponele, en las mejores pibas, el mejor grupo grande que tengas para ir a joder, todo, se divierten todos y después pelear.

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Interviewer: I mean, are there kids who go out just to fight?
Fran: Yeah, a lot, a lot, a lot. A lot of kids are at somebody's house and they say, "OK, we're going to the baile, and we're not going to do anything," and that's a lie because they're going to fight. They're drinking when they leave, smoking dope, because somebody who doesn't use drugs doesn't have many friends anymore. If you don't use drugs, you simply don't have any friends, just a bunch of acquaintances.
Interviewer: But is it really like that? You're left out of . . .
Fran: You don't get in, say, with the best girls, the best big group: you have to go and fool around, all that; everybody has a good time and then they fight.

What Fran is telling us is that those "normal" boys who are not violent or who do not consume drugs are not the ones the "best girls" [*las mejores pibas*] desire. According to Fran, some young women (but obviously not the majority) see relationships with "marginal" men, first, as carrying a kind of glamour and, second (and more important for our argument), as allowing them the opportunity to show that they are as brave as men, that they can be aggressive and defend (without male intervention) what they regard as belonging to them without worrying about what other people say about them. In other words, they are demonstrating that they have as much "*aguante*" [endurance] as the worst men (Silba and Vila 2010, 18).[28]

Fran: Porque una mujer tiene que ser más formal que un hombre, tendría que tener un poco más de respeto que un hombre, porque una mujer no se puede sentar en la esquina tomando una cerveza con uno, viendo que el otro se está drogando, creo que una mujer es más para estar en otro lado que en una esquina, y ahora todas las pibas eligen estar en una esquina, eligen alguien que se droga para salir, alguien que toma.
Interviewer: ¿Y qué tiene alguien que se droga de diferente al resto?
Fran: Yo creo que se siente más atractiva con un chabón que se droga, porque piensa que tiene plata, porque piensan que se comen al mundo y yo creo que no es así. Vos te juntás con un chabón que se droga y el chabón te está insinuando que vos te drogues. Porque el que no quiere que vos te drogues, vos agarrás y al lado de él no te drogas, si no querés que se drogue el otro, no te drogas al lado.

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Fran: Because a woman has to be more formal than a man, she'd have to have a little more respect than a man, because a woman can't sit on the corner drinking beer with you [or] watching another guy get high. I think a woman is for being in some other place than on the corner, and now all of

the girls choose to be on the corner; they choose someone who gets high [or] someone who drinks to go out with.

Interviewer: And how is somebody who gets high different from the rest?

Fran: I think she feels more attractive with a guy who gets high because she thinks he has money, because they [the guys and the girls] think they're going to eat the world up, and I don't think it's like that. You hook up with a guy who gets high, and he's going to suggest that you get high, too, because somebody who doesn't want you to get high is not going to get high with you around. If you don't want the other to get high, you don't get high with [him or her] beside you.

Obviously, Fran is advancing a very traditional gender discourse here to buttress a conventional male character who requires as his "other" a female character that is the antithesis of the one who, in his view, is like the young women who perform at the bailes. He believes that women should have "'respect,' in the double sense of the term, that is, a woman who has respect for herself (for instance, not drinking publicly with the 'bad boys of the neighborhood'), and [who] asks for due respect from others (above all, males), establishing the limits for whomever wants to trespass [on] them" (Silba and Vila 2010, 20). He also states that women should want to be "somewhere else"—that is, not drinking and using drugs in front of everybody on the streets. That "somewhere else" is, of course, the household, the private sphere that, according to Fran's discourse, is the "proper" place for a woman to be and to be a woman. At the same time, Fran sees this "non-respectful" kind of woman, the daring and aggressive one who has relationships with the "bad guys of the neighborhood," as the norm, not the exception, among the followers of cumbia villera.[29]

Fran believed that the culture of marginality and delinquency appeals to young cumbieras for two different but related reasons. First, because the traditional pathways from school to work have been broken not only for boys but also for girls in contemporary Argentina, the young women's equal participation in the world of marginality and delinquency registers as a "quotidian presence in the everyday world of the popular sectors" (Silba and Vila 2010, 20). And second, many of the young women contradictorily see themselves as the "rescuers" of their delinquent partners:

Interviewer: ¿Pero vos decís que habría como una especie de contagio?

Fran: Y sí, sí, porque si uno se está drogando. . . . [A]hora no es lo mismo de antes, antes se tenía un poco más de respeto, capaz que uno se estaba drogando, venía una mujer y se dejaba de drogar, ahora no. Se están drogando, viene una mujer y se drogan más para que la mina los mire más y capaz que piensan que la mina los va a salvar, ¿entendés? Las mujeres buscan más eso como para rescatarlo más al chabón y decir ¡uh! Es como los que salen de estar presos, "vamos a estar con uno que sale de estar preso porque tiene una fama de tira tiros, de que 'tuvo preso y mató a

un montón y que los cagó a piñas a todos," y es como que buscan eso las mujeres ahora.

Interviewer: O sea, buscan un tipo que por más que tenga cosas negativas para el resto sea como reconocido por haber hecho "cosas" . . .

Fran: Ecole.

. . .

Interviewer: But you say it's contagious?

Fran: Yeah, yeah, because if you take drugs. . . . [N]ow it's not like it was before. Before, there was a little more respect. Say you were getting high [and] a woman came along. You stopped. Now you don't. They're getting high, a woman comes along, and they take more drugs so the girl pays more attention to them, and maybe they think she's going to save them, understand? Women look for this to kind of rescue the guy and say, . . . "We're going to be with someone that got out of jail because he's got a reputation for shooting guns, for being in jail and killing a bunch of people and beating everybody up," and it's like women look for that now.

Interviewer: In other words, they look for a guy who, no matter how negative he may look to the rest of society, is recognized for having done stuff. . . .

Fran: You got it.

Although Fran was only nineteen when this interview was conducted, he talked like an adult about a "before and after" in terms of gender relations and the behavior of young women. He could do so because he is a good example of the *pibe* category—that is, young people who already have children but live at home with their parents because their fragile insertion in the job market does not allow them to live on their own. From the subject position of an adult, Fran's narrative marks a boundary between two different epochs drawn using the concept of "respect" for women in which continuing to take drugs when a woman enters the scene is the limit that is being transgressed by the new generation (kids who are thirteen to eighteen) and that, supposedly, his own cohort did not cross. In this regard, Fran's adult character constructs a narrative that creates a supposedly ideal past in which women did not consume drugs and men did not induce them to do so.

Finally, he added a dimension to his account that women prefer "bad guys" based on the native concept of "rescue." This time, however, the word is being used not in the reflexive mode (to rescue oneself), but in the traditional way it was used in Argentina until the influence of the evangelical religions started to show up among the popular sectors and introduced the reflexive mode as the predominant one. In this particular case, what Fran wanted to point out is that some young women seek relationships with neighborhood bad guys to help those men leave the life of drugs and delinquency.[30] What he is thus telling us is that these women are performing several con-

tradictory female subject positions simultaneously, which shows how traditional ways to understand gender relationships are rapidly changing in Buenos Aires. The traditional matrix of the construction of masculinity and femininity involved understanding masculinity as the constant and irrepressible capacity for desire and women's sexuality as passive so that women could control men's sexual drives (Kimmel 2005, 85). The aggressive woman–rescuing woman dichotomy proposed by Fran adds complexity to this traditional picture. On the one hand, it points to an aggressive, proactive subject position for women who need to be controlled as much as men traditionally did, but on the other, it also points to a traditional feminine subject position organized around the tropes of "restraint" and "care," of which the subject positions "wife" and "mother" are the epitome.

It is interesting to note that Fran goes back and forth between these contradictory female subject positions. In addition, it seems that he does not completely believe the "tough" character performed by the "bad guys"; instead, he says that one reason they keep consuming drugs even when women enter the scene is that they want to be rescued from a deviant life. In this regard, if the "rescuer" role puts women in the mother subject position, the "I am asking for help" role puts the deviant in the child subject position. Thus, this highly contradictory scene shows very new kinds of gender relations among these young people. It is a scene that, almost by definition, requires the performance of contrasting male and female characters who constantly move from very traditional narrative personages (housewife, mother, child) to completely new ones, such as the "activated" young women we talk about in this book.

Even though Fran thinks that young women are sometimes more aggressive than young men (to show that they have the same *aguante* that bad boys have), that they look for "bad guys" to have relationships with, and that they reject "non-marginal" boys for those kinds of relationships because they want to participate on the same footing in the appealing world of marginality and delinquency, he still does not like how cumbia villera portrays young women:

Interviewer: Y si tuvieras equipo en tu casa, ¿qué música escucharías?
Fran: Cumbia.
Interviewer: ¿Qué cumbia? ¿O qué bandas de cumbia?
Fran: En sí, te digo, a mí no me gusta tanto la cumbia como Los Pibes Chorros, Damas Gratis, El Empuje, todo eso [referring to the most representative cumbia villera bands], sino que . . .
Interviewer: ¿Por qué no te gustan?
Fran: Porque están todo el día puteando, todo el día "puto" "concha," "puto" y eso no es cumbia, para mí cumbia es La Nueva Luna, que tiene un poco más de respeto, Daniel Cardoso, Leo Mattioli, Dalila, que son un poco más cumbia romántica, no es que es cumbia zarpada, sino que es cumbia romántica.

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Interviewer: If you had a stereo at home, what music would you listen to?
Fran: Cumbia.
Interviewer: What kind of cumbia? Or what cumbia bands?
Fran: I don't like cumbia like Los Pibes Chorros, Damas Gratis, [or] El Empuje so much, all that [referring to the most representative cumbia villera bands], but . . .
Interviewer: Why don't you like them?
Fran: Because they swear all day long—"queer," "cunt" . . . and that isn't cumbia. For me, cumbia is La Nueva Luna, which has a little more respect: Daniel Cardoso, Leo Mattioli, Dalila, which are a little more romantic cumbia, not *zarpada* [raunchy] cumbia but romantic cumbia.

Fran thus created a contrast between romantic cumbia and cumbia "*zarpada*" (the one that crosses the lines of the moral code). By "*zarpada*," of course, he means cumbia villera. His musical preference is in line with the narrative identity he deployed in the interview, which required a more traditional kind of woman as its counterpart—that is, the kind of women usually depicted in romantic cumbia lyrics.

Interviewer: ¿Y por qué no te gusta que digan malas palabras?
Fran: Y porque acá estás acostumbrado, no tanto, sino que a escuchar cumbia de esa y llega un momento que también, como te cambia, te sentís con más respeto que le tenés que dar a la casa donde vivís porque . . . esta es mi casa y yo hago lo que quiero pero la que estoy no es mi casa y tenés que tener un poco más de respeto.
Interviewer: No podés estar escuchando música que bardee, digamos.
Fran: Ecole.

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Interviewer: And why don't you like them to use bad words?
Fran: Because you're used to it . . . but . . . a time comes when you like to change. You feel there's more respect you have to give to the house where you live because . . . this is my house and I do what I want, but where I am living right now isn't my house and you have to have a little more respect.
Interviewer: You can't listen to music that *bardee* [lacks respect, insults], let's say?
Fran: You got it.

Here Fran reveals the complexity and ambivalence in the life of the *pibes* and how this complexity and ambivalence is processed in how they relate to cumbia villera and its lyrics' supposed lack of respect for women. On the one hand, *pibes*

are married or in committed unmarried relationships, but they still live with their parents; they have children, but most of the time they rely on their parents to take care of them—that is, they are simultaneously adolescents and adults. The interesting thing is how they (like Fran) use the way they relate to cumbia (in this case, their love for cumbia villera before they married versus their criticism of the genre and embracing of romantic cumbia after they married) to buttress their *pibes* character. Departing from other ways to understand the relationship between music and identity, we are not saying that Fran's ambivalent position as a *pibe* is the reason that his musical taste moved from cumbia villera to romantic cumbia—that is, that his musical preferences reflect his social positioning. What we are proposing is a much more complex relationship of music and identity in which a constant back and forth takes place between what Fran and other *pibes* experience, and how they process such experiences narratively, and the cultural artifacts (music at the forefront for these kids) that they use to try to understand what is going on in their lives. In other words, we are not claiming that what happens to Fran precedes how he understands what has happened; on the contrary, one cannot be separated from the other. Fran's narrative plot creates a character, that of a *pibe*, that actively searches for discourses that can buttress it as a believable character. Severing his ties from the content of cumbia villera lyrics (the music he liked before he got married) and embracing the lyrics of romantic cumbia is the type of discourse that, among others, serves him to construct more or less coherently his current *pibe* character.

Interviewer: Y respecto de las letras de cumbia villera, por ejemplo. . . . Vos de las letras que hablan mal de las minas, ¿qué opinás?

Fran: No me gustan, no me gustan, porque yo no hablo de las mujeres, no me gusta hablar de las mujeres, es una falta de respeto.

Interviewer: ¿Y qué te parece que piensan las minas de eso? ¿Jésica qué te dice?

Fran: No, en sí no le gusta, no le gusta.

Interviewer: ¿Ella escucha cumbia villera?

Fran: No, no. Pero yo conozco un par de pibas, todo, que le gusta, ¿eh? Y que se sienten identificadas con algunas canciones, y yo creo que si es identificado tiene que ser con algo que te halague no que te hunda.

Interviewer: ¿Y por qué creés que ellas eligen esas canciones?

Fran: Y, porque están en el mismo ambiente que todos los demás, y en sí no es un ambiente bueno para una mujer.

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Interviewer: Regarding cumbia villera lyrics, for example, what do you think of the songs that badmouth girls?

Fran: I don't like them. I don't like them because I don't . . . like to talk about women. It shows a lack of respect.

Interviewer: What do you think girls think about that? What does Jésica say?

Fran: She doesn't like it; she doesn't like it.
Interviewer: Does she listen to cumbia villera?
Fran: No, no. But I know a couple of girls, they like it, you know? And they identify with some songs. I think that if you identify with something, it has to be with something that flatters you, not something that sinks you.
Interviewer: Why do you think they choose those songs?
Fran: Because they are in the same environment as everybody else, and it isn't a good environment for a woman.

Thus, Fran clearly stated that he does not like cumbia villera lyrics because they show a "lack of respect" for women and that his wife does not like the lyrics either. In addition, he cannot understand why some girls identify with lyrics that "*hunden*" [lit., "sink" (but, in this context, the best translation would be "kill")] them as women. If we remember that Fran advanced a very traditional narrative of what a woman should do (basically stay home and take care of her children), it is not at all surprising that he could not understand how some women could relate to lyrics that depict them as sluts. He explained this unexpected behavior by saying that the girls who like cumbia villera are those who, as he had told us earlier, wanted to be as aggressive, deviant, and marginal as some boys are—something that, of course, he was against.

Some of our interviewees pointed to the presence of very aggressive and sexually proactive girls in the baile scene. On the dance floor itself and outside (in the immediate environs of the baile, where people gather to enter or exit), we observed several instances of what our interviewees were taking about.

Within the dance hall, what happened to David, one of the members of our research team, when the young woman butted her head into his back and insulted him for not buying her and her friends a drink is a good example of aggressive behavior among women. According to David, this kind of provocation by young girls is common in the bailes he visited during our research, especially when the boys were well dressed or light-skinned with European features. The girls' motive is twofold: they are obviously interested in having someone buy them a drink, but they also sense that those they accost have money and will treat them well. David has observed this behavior in bailes such as Bronco and Radio Estudio in Constitución. At the same time, he has seen this kind of behavior backfire, showing how precarious and contested the new gender repertoire of the young women we are describing is. In some cases, girls accost guys who accept and later offer them cocaine or pills or, if drugs are not available, another drink in exchange for oral sex or masturbation in a dark, out-of-the-way place. He has also seen these encounters turn violent, with the accosted guy demanding immediate sex from the girl without using contraceptives. Although girls may resist at first, some end up complying out of fear or resignation.

As we can see, these young women do not have any problem directly asking for a drink from a stranger, knowing that the request, in the context of the

baile, will require some kind of "repayment." That can take a variety of forms, from agreeing to dance with the purchaser of the drink, at a minimum, to engaging in some kind of *transa* (kissing and cuddling or even a sexual encounter). They also seem to have no problem reacting in very aggressive ways when such requests are denied, as if it is impossible to understand that a young man would reject the "*regalo*" [gift] the young women are offering. The aggressive reactions can take both physical and verbal forms, as they did in David's case, which confirms what our interviewees told us about the masculinization of some young girls who frequent the bailes being very common.

What we saw outside the baile provided even more confirmation of what we are talking about. At six o'clock one morning, when the baile was closing, we witnessed a confrontation suddenly erupting between a man dressed in leather and a man in a shirt who had his arm around a visibly drunk girl. The participants were between twenty and thirty. The verbal exchange did not have any real substance; they simply called each other insulting names such as "prick," "whore," and "queer." At one point, the man in the shirt, with his arm still around the girl, came close enough to his opponent to grab the bill of his leather cap and throw it on the ground. The man with the cap responded by punching him in the mouth. The impact sent the man in the shirt back a few steps, and—to the amazement of those of us watching—he still held on to the girl; he then shoved her against his opponent, using her almost as a shield, and continued to throw punches in his direction. The blows hit the poor girl instead, knocking her semiconscious to the ground, although she was still holding on to the shirt of her partner (who by then had become the aggressor) as he half-squatted. Taking advantage of the situation, the now capless man hit the man in the shirt hard on the ear and followed that blow with a kick to the nose that left him bleeding on the ground. He then insulted and spit on the man in the shirt, now sobbing in pain, before grabbing his cap and continuing on his way as if nothing had happened.

Those of us who witnessed the fight debated about whether to intervene. Because the man in the shirt had used the girl as a shield, we decided not to help him. When one of us made a move to do so, one of the girls in our group intervened, saying, "Hang on. Leave the jerk alone. Did you see what he did to the girl?" We then turned and saw the drunk girl, now standing upright, going through the pockets of the man in the shirt and putting what she found in a bag hanging from one shoulder. After taking everything he had, she said, "What a prick you are, you fucking asshole," and gave him two colossal kicks in the head, causing him to convulse. That is when we decide to seek help. The level of brutality of this episode speaks for itself and shows that a few young women can be as violent as men, as many of our interviewees proclaimed.

Participant observation also confirmed the proactive sexual behavior of some young women that was prominently mentioned by our interviewees, in the same way that observations undertaken in middle-class dance halls by Fernando Pérez and Julián Piñero (2003) corroborate that this new behavior is not

confined to women of the popular sectors. David, a member of our research team, told us that during one of his visits to a baile for this research, an attractive young women about twenty-five years old, wearing a black skirt and tight red top and dancing close by, began to subtly approach him. They both continued to dance alone, swaying almost imperceptibly to the music, as the young woman came closer and closer, keeping herself at an equal distance between David and the friends she had come with.

It was obvious that they were attempting to eye each other without being noticed, but the subterfuge could not be maintained. The girl realized that David was looking at her and responded in kind, smiling and turning her head before swiveling around until her back was to him. David then made his move and, to the tune of "Tambo Tambo," gently took the girl's wrist and said, "A great song to dance to, right?" After turning around to face him, she made a point of taking in his friends with her eyes as if to indicate that she was with other people. She smiled again and stepped back, giving the impression that she did not want to dance with him; then, smiling and looking right at him, she grabbed his other hand and placed it over the one still holding her wrist. Our companion accepted the invitation (an important aim of our research was precisely to observe courting processes in bailes), grasping the girl's hands firmly and pulling her close to him. The two gazed into each other's eyes while executing a series of coordinated twists and turns.

After dancing together for three songs, the girl moved close to speak into his ear:

Girl: You've got a girlfriend, right?
David: Yeah, and you've got a boyfriend?
Girl: Yeah. Where is she?
David: She went out with her girlfriends. And yours?
Girl: He doesn't like to dance. And I love to.
David: I can tell, and besides, you really dance well . . .
Girl: Thanks. "Tambo Tambo," I love it to death, and "Los Angeles" works me up. Are you from around here?"
David: No, I live in the city.
Girl: How about that? You're a long way from home.
David: Yeah, a pretty long stretch.
Girl: Everything's OK, right?
David: Yeah, hey, what are you talking about?
Girl: Everything's all right with you. You really dance well.
David: You, too.

From then on, the girl danced differently, more like the couple she had come with and like the couples from popular barrios who had accompanied us that

night. It was then that David realized that the girl had made him her mark [*transa*] for that night. For ethical reasons, he decided to establish emotional distance between them. He began to avoid looking in her eyes, directing his gaze over her head or to one side. At the end of the song, he kissed her on the cheek (an Argentine custom, done even by people who scarcely know each other, that has no sexual implications), let her go, and headed for the restroom. She grabbed his hand and asked whether he would return. He said he would, but instead he decided to spend a long time in the restroom to extricate himself from the situation. When he returned to where he had left the girl and saw that she was not there, he felt great relief. The situation had resolved itself (from the point of view of maintaining ethics in the research) according to its own dynamic.

That some of the young men we interviewed have very sexist opinions about the girls who follow cumbia villera, and how these opinions must be "negotiated" in certain ways with these girls (as occurred metaphorically with David), became apparent in our interview with Cristian and Zulma, a very young couple waiting to enter "Pasión de Sábado."[31] Cristian told us that he liked La Nueva Luna and Los Pibes Chorros and stated, emphatically, that cumbia villera lyrics are "spectacular." The interviewer asked him what he liked about the lyrics, to which he responded that he liked the "romantic" part." The gestures that accompanied this statement (above all, the way the couple exchanged gazes) made it quite clear that this was Zulma's opinion more than his. What is interesting about this interview is that when Cristian was asked whether he liked what was said about women in cumbia villera lyrics, he said yes. Immediately, Zulma intervened and answered "no," stating, "*Las letras esas dicen cualquiera cosa*" [those lyrics say senseless things]. Confronted with his girlfriend's intervention, Cristian rapidly changed his position and said that, in fact, he did not like the lyrics so much. What we saw, therefore, was a change of opinion based on the real intervention of a young woman with power.

When we asked Elbio, another interviewee waiting in the "Pasión de Sábado" line, what he thought of the way cumbia villera portrays women, he answered that the lyrics were "right," because the songs stated that girls are "fast," and all of them are.[32] However, after a brief pause, he qualified his comment by noting that, actually, only "some" girls are fast. The most interesting thing Elbio said, however, was that girls really enjoy dancing to lyrics that stereotype them so negatively. Thus, when we asked him whether he believed that girls actually like those songs, his answer was an unqualified "yes"—that even his girlfriends dance to those songs. We think that an inability to understand the varied and complex reasons girls have for dancing to the songs (an issue we develop in the next chapter) leads many boys to believe that girls actually like the image of them projected in cumbia villera lyrics. That is why many of our male interviewees equated the girls' willingness to dance either with stupidity

(i.e., an inability to understand the negative characterization in the lyrics) or with acceptance of the "slut" character the songs portray.

This is what happened in the interviews with Alberto and Raúl.[33] Alberto said that he liked the lyrics—"*Estaban buenas*" [They're great]—although some cross the line. He also stated that what the lyrics say does not bother his female friends; to the contrary, they have fun with them and they dance to them. Raúl gave us a concrete example of a song that, from a feminist point of view, can easily be qualified as degrading and sexist, which he said his female friends dance to with pleasure. Thus, when we asked Raúl whether there was any song that he liked that talks about women or about love, he answered "Embarrada y Sucia" [Soiled and Dirty], which describes anal sex (see Chapter 2). When asked whether his female friends like the song, he answered, sharply and with a smile, that the girls he knows like it too.

The narrative that girls enjoy dancing to lyrics that do not appear to show any respect for them was also evident in our long interview with Sergio and his friends:

Sergio: ¿Después qué tema? De El Empuje. Les cabe a las minas. Con "nena a tu culo le falta crema," las minas se copan.
Gustavo: Dínamo.
Sergio: Y El Empuje también. Está buena, con ese tema se re prenden las minas, se bailan.
Interviewer: ¿Qué quiere decir que "le falta crema"?
Sergio: Le falta crema, le falta el empuje, ¿entendés?, no sé, que la franeleen un ratito. . . . Que le midan el aceite.

. . .

Sergio: And let me think, what other song? Most girls like [a] song by El Empuje very much. When the singer sings, "Nena a tu culo le falta crema" [Baby, your ass has no oil or cream], the girls go crazy.
Gustavo: [The group] Dynamo.
Sergio: El Empuje as well. It's quite good, that song. Girls get very excited with that song; they dance to it very enthusiastically.
Interviewer: What does it mean that her ass "lacks oil or cream"?
Sergio: It lacks cream; there's no give, no smoothness, do you understand? I don't know, it means that the girl needs to be polished a little bit; her oil has to be topped off.

Here, as we found with previous interviewees, a certain kind of fantasy or blindness is at play in relation to how boys interpret girls' reception of lyrics. Therefore, even in cases in which interviewees claimed that only some girls are "sluts," we found nuanced accounts that still showed a basic misunderstanding of what most cumbieras want and what they do at the bailes.

Context and Symbolism at the Source of Cumbia Villera Lyrics

To the nuances that emerged from these masculine voices we must now add those that come from analysis and contextualization of the discursive practice of those natives, which is not totally conscious, although it finds notable specifications from some of the actors themselves.

We must emphasize that the young people who interpret and dance to cumbia villera possess an ample and clear consciousness that the genre is only one of the spaces in the totality of their experience; it is not their total experience. Thus, in cumbia villera they allow themselves to do, symbolically and actually, what they would not do somewhere else (i.e., they may talk about rape, but the majority of them obviously never rape anybody). Thus, what is very clear to them is that cumbia villera is a fun space, as opposed to the space of intellectualization and social commitment that rock nacional occupies (a genre of which many of them at times also partake). However, cumbia villera is also a differentiated space within the broader genre of cumbia itself. In this way, the mix of lyrics and music in the villera version of cumbia maintains distance from a type of romanticism that, in other circumstances, these same listeners claim as valuable.[34]

This complexity of the position of reception (which we review only briefly here and that, in fact, is even greater) should caution us against the kind of analysis that attributes to adherence to a particular musical genre those things that nobody preaches any longer in the social sciences—that is, the full, absolute, and systematic character of identities.

Discourses, negatively paraphrasing Louis Althusser (1989), do not interpellate the individual as a subject of a unique subjection. Although the complex, fragmentary, and mobile condition of the subject's narrative construction is theorized (even predicated) through exhaustion, and even through a process of repetition that drains it of its meaning, sometimes this does not help when the analyst actually wants to understand a real symbolic activity. In other words, one cannot regard what is really only a portion of a native's interpretation as if it were the whole interpretation of his or her life experiences. In this case, we cannot suppose that following a musical genre can organize a young person's way to understand who he or she is in toto. In supposing such a thing, the analyst would be practicing the same kind of essentialism that he or she is denouncing in the subject who is being analyzed. Once it is clear that the part is not the whole, we can ask ourselves the following questions: what concrete type of partiality are we talking about? What else do the users of the musical genre do?

To understand this, it is necessary to introduce a second, contextualizing point: cumbia villera, perceived only as a partial moment in a complex array of everyday practices, is a place for dancing and mating, even though the conception of mating can be different for men and women. Cumbia villera adds

something new to the traditional characterization of the dance setting and the relationships between genders that such a scenario entails. Within the popular sectors, the dance setting typically involved the presence of men affirming their masculinity through the possession of the greatest possible number of women, counterpoised to women who were looking for a unique and definitive man who would consecrate them as spouses. The space of bailantas, however (and the space of middle-class dance halls, as previous research on the topic shows), involves the presence of women seeking men for reasons that go beyond such unique relationships. Further, the symbolic and social space of cumbia (villera and romantic) is indissolubly linked to the appearance of a form of extended youth within the contemporary popular sectors in Argentina. In a context of weak labor-market insertion, the increasing weight of cultural industries dedicated to leisure, and the construction of youth as a hegemonic model of presentation and personal development for the entire society, young people of both sexes in the popular sectors, taking different routes from those followed by the middle class, develop a lifecycle that is unlike the one that characterized the generations that preceded them.

The project of family obligations (and the narratives that those projects entail) that will position individuals as men-fathers-workers and women-mothers-housewives (even though they also worked outside their homes), is displaced toward a future that looks more and more distant; the vacuum that this displacement produces generates a self-identification of young people as *pibes*. In other words, the *pibes* category connotes life experiences of subjects who are not children, because they have autonomy in relation to their parents, but who are not responsible for others, either, because they have not built families or do not identify with the seniority categories appropriate to their social environment. Although some of them do actually have children, those children are usually raised in the context of extended families in which grandparents take on many of the "adult" roles that *pibes* cannot or do not assume.

This situation is so markedly strange in the context of these social groups' traditions that, once they are able to perceive and, in some way, reflect about it, these young people create new identifying social categories to express it. One example is the category *pibes grandes* [grown-up kids], which describes subjects who are twenty-five to thirty-five who, in the past, would have been married with children in autonomous households but who now procreate but are not responsible for their households.[35]

Under these conditions, the mating practices that take place in the cumbia environment, which unfetter the sexual dimension, are very similar to those of middle-class people imbued with the ideals of sexual liberation. However, among the popular-sector young people we interviewed, those practices constitute themselves within a symbolic framework that inscribes them (alongside the gender conflicts that such practices promote) in a very different and specific way. Thus, while middle-class misogynists usually feel shame about their gender representations and contain, repress, or justify them, the popular

classes' representations regulate themselves through a code that stresses men's prevalence. Thus, although anal sex exists as a practice within both social sectors, a middle-class interpreter would not be celebrated by fans for singing, "I penetrated her, and it came out dirty and soiled," as Los Pibes Chorros is (see the analysis of "Embarrada y Sucia" in Chapter 2).

Within the cumbia villera scene, both men and women are interested in non-procreative sex and in the gender-role changes that allow women who clearly take the initiative in looking for sex to emerge. However, neither men nor women can set themselves apart from the hegemonic meaning of the social categories that inscribe those practices in an accusatory regime whose architecture we attempt to explain. Even though both men and women want to practice it, women's sexual liberation still continues to make sluts out of women.[36] This is why a third element is needed to make sense of this strategic issue: the minimum structure of this accusatory regime that is at the base of the perceptions, accords, and misunderstandings between men and women. On the one hand, this discursive structure implicates something very familiar. In terms of gender relationships and the social categories that account for them, the fact that men still want to "conquer" women and thus want those women to be "easy" is linked contradictorily to its necessary consequence in men's system of categories. That is, if women are "easy," men have no choice but to perceive them as sluts. This contradiction is present whenever men believe they prefer women to be assertive but then stigmatize them for displaying that assertiveness—by exhibiting themselves while dancing, for example, or by offering the "pure sex" implicated in any access to the body that is not vaginal.

On the other hand, the discursive structure we are talking about shows a novel feature that not only complements the connotation of the moral categories of respectability of men and women of any age but also comes up to create the moral categories that regulate the "extended youth" period mentioned above—a life stage that corresponds to both our interviewees and the public that enjoys cumbia villera, where words such as "rescatarse" [to rescue oneself] and "respeto" [respect] play a privileged role in the universe of meaning. Thus, in these young people's narratives the use of certain terms that either are completely new in the context in which they are now used or acquire a new meaning when they are articulated with other discursive elements in the spheres where they were habitually used in the past (in other words, they are rearticulated) becomes overwhelming. To the first category belongs the expression "to rescue oneself," which, in its relatively new usage, refers to the autonomous attempts (not forced by the police or even the family) to abandon the use of different kinds of addictive substances (alcohol, drugs, etc.) at the level where these young people consider such use problematic. It is important to point out here that, in this sense, "to rescue oneself" does not necessarily mean absolute abstention from drug or alcohol consumption. It means controlling consumption to mitigate the worst consequences of their intake. In this way, the verb "to rescue" acquires a reflexive inflection that is uncommon in the Spanish

language because it draws on an individualistic ideology within a culture in which heteronomy is normative. The term "to rescue oneself" (as some of those who use it know) originated in the rise of evangelical religions in Argentina, which emphasize "freeing" oneself and "taking personal responsibility" in the struggle against evil, including that associated with drugs.

In a context in which drug use, exhibition of the body, and sexual activity have ceased to be taboo, the problem is not one of nature but of scale—that is, such behavior is not problematic in and of itself but becomes a problem when, according to the actors' perception, it endangers their physical or relational well-being. Thus, the degree to which an individual can "rescue" himself or herself makes that individual more or less worthy in almost equal measure to his or her capacity for "*aguante*" [endurance], another term used frequently by our interviewees. We could even say that a subject who is capable of rescuing himself or herself will show, in a position of relative frailty, the moral quality of "aguante" in a proportion that clearly equates him or her with very strong people. In this kind of moral economy, as much admiration is conferred on someone who can overcome an addiction as on someone who can impose physical superiority. In this way, to rescue oneself is to become respectable in the context of a very specific point in time within the lifecycle. Eloísa Martín (2004), for example, illustrates this in her study of a subject who rescues himself but, nevertheless, does not abandon the *pibe* category.

At the same time, rescuing oneself is linked to "respect" and its multiple opposites, which include being "*atrevido*" [insolent or daring], which refers to somebody who disrespects somebody else and thus deserves punishment, and "*cachivache*," a word that is very difficult to translate but that refers to both something that is so worn out or useless that it can easily be discarded and someone to whom nobody shows respect.[37] Rescuing oneself is a way to attain respect, and respect is the legitimacy or the force that keeps the actor's will from being broken. Thus, when women scandalously exhibit themselves, they show, within this moral economy and in the eyes of some men, their moral incapacity; they show that they are "*pasadas*" and in need of rescuing but unable to rescue themselves. This, in turn, results in the loss of respectability on which some men eventually base justifications of rape.

It is important to note here that the "she was asking for it" justification of rape, within this moral economy, does not describe an alleged provocation personally directed by a particular woman toward a particular man. Rather, it is grounded in the idea that women in general, in the eyes of these men, are in a continuous state of offering themselves as a gift or for sale ["*regaladas*"]. This is one of the most important ways in which the use of the term "slut" differs in American settings and the Argentine popular sectors. The "slut" label is not forced on specific girls in the cumbia villera scene, as Leora Tanenbaum (2000) found in U.S. high schools. Instead, it has become a larger discourse about certain types of girls. In the Argentine context, girls who dance to cumbia villera seem to slip easily and frequently in and out of the "slut" identification.[38]

It is here, in the context of the idea that girls are in a continuous state of offering themselves as a gift or for sale ["*regaladas*"], that the older moral economy that differentiates women as "sluts" or "ladies" is articulated, filtered, and updated with the new semantic value of respectability categories such as "rescue" and "respect." This combination is also the one that is relevant in masculine narratives that combine a certain degree of distance from the potential for violence that cumbia villera lyrics entail with the worst possibilities of such violence (i.e., rape). Thus, even Sergio, who endorsed what we call the extreme position, said that "not all the girls are like that." In the next chapter, we show that the complex relationship between these two different moral codes is much more apparent and meaningful for our female interviewees.

Taking into account the episodes of conflict addressed in the next chapter and, above all, what our young female interviewees told us about cumbia villera songs, it becomes clear that this masculine interpretation misunderstands and subverts how women understand the same songs. Many boys confuse women's restrictive and selective exercise of sensuality ("just for fun" or "just for someone in particular") with an open, generalized, and indiscriminate one. This, in turn, can lead men to intervene in ways that break the dialogic contract and interpret the women's game as something that negates the respect that should be shown to them. They cannot cease to perceive the women as sluts when, in the playful sphere of the baile, they enact what cumbia villera lyrics say about them.

This discursive mechanism has two additional complexities that we develop fully in the next chapter, because this masculine interpretation is done not in a vacuum but in relation to women's interpretation of the lyrics and what they entail, which clearly exceeds what these young men can understand. But first we end this chapter with some other possible ways these and other boys interpret the sexist messages of many cumbia villera songs. A very common interpretation that, as we see in the next chapter, girls share is that cumbia villera lyrics do not have to be taken seriously, because they are humorous descriptions of events that occur not in real life but in the jocular intention of their interpreters.

This type of narrative maintains that it does not in fact matter what the lyrics say about women, because the lyrics rely on a humoristic code ("*en joda*" [as a joke]) designed to prompt people to dance. Cristóbal, a young man we interviewed in the line for "Pasión de Sábado,"[39] provided a good example of this type of discourse. When asked for his opinion about cumbia villera lyrics, Cristóbal answered, "*No me gustan. . . . Vinieron a poner un estilo que no me gusta*" [I don't like them. . . . They've taken on a style that I don't like]. He continued, "*Ahora parece que son todos de la villa. . . . Es lo que hay*" [It seems that they're all from the shantytown. . . . That's what we have right now].

The interviewer then asked him his opinion of what the lyrics say about women, to which he answered, "*Son boludeces que hacen bailar, que te hacen*

mover" [They are stupid (words) that make you dance, that make you move], and started to sing "Se Te Ve la Tanga" (see Chapter 2) to illustrate his point. Here Cristóbal makes the same differentiation that many of the young women we interviewed also made—that is, he separates listening to the lyrics of cumbia villera from dancing to the rhythm of cumbia villera, except that he includes the lyrics, and not just the rhythm, as being capable of inciting people to dance. Therefore, according to Cristóbal and other boys who employed a similar discourse, cumbia villera uses lyrics that "cross the line" simply to motivate people to dance. In other words, he believed that people would dance less to cumbia villera if the extra motivation the lyrics create were absent. Sergio and his friends told us something very similar:

Interviewer: Por ejemplo de Damas Gratis, no hay un tema que vos digas este tema no me gusta para nada.
Sergio: No puedo, no te puedo decir, si te digo que no me gusta un tema te estoy mintiendo. Para mí fue medio, medio uno de los primeros temas de Damas Gratis que era "Laura," que parecía bastante feo, porque eso era pa' que lo baile más la gente. . . .
Interviewer: ¿Pero las letras no están un poco zarpadas?
Sergio: No.
Gustavo: Son boludas las letras.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué?
Gustavo: Porque no es un ritmo que sea más bailable, entonces hacen todo "Eh, las pibas esto, las pibas lo otro."
Sergio: Pero no todo, ahí hay también.
Interviewer: ¿Qué es lo que hay?
Sergio: Hay letras y letras. La que las re bardea es la letra "Colate un dedo" de Los Pibes Chorros. Para mí están re bien puesta: colátelo loca, cuál querés que te diga. Es medio berretín pero está bien.
Interviewer: No la escuché, ¿qué dice?
Sergio: Dice que se cole un dedo porque no sé qué historia.
Gustavo: Bueno, ya está, no querés entregar, colate el dedo.

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Interviewer: Let's talk, for example, about Damas Gratis. Is there a song about which you can say, "I don't like this song at all"?
Sergio: I don't. I can't say. . . . If I told you that I don't like a particular song, I'd be lying to you. To me it was . . . it was one of the first songs by Damas Gratis, "Laura," that looked quite ugly, because it was [done that way] to incite more people to dance to it. . . .
Interviewer: But don't the lyrics cross the line a little bit?
Sergio: No.
Gustavo: The lyrics are stupid.
Interviewer: Why?

Gustavo: Because it is not a rhythm that is danceable, so they do all the extra stuff: "The girls this, the girls that."
Sergio: But not all, there are other things too.
Interviewer: Such as?
Sergio: There are different kinds of lyrics. The lyric that shows lack of respect for [the girls] is "*Colate un dedo*" [Sneak a finger into your ass], by Los Pibes Chorros. For me, that lyric is just on the mark: "sneak it in, slut." What do you want me to say? It is a little bit nasty, but it's OK.
Interviewer: I didn't listen to it. What does it say?
Sergio: It says that she has to sneak in a finger because I don't know what story [i.e., he did not remember the reasons expressed in the lyrics that led the singer to say this].
Gustavo: Well, there it is: you don't want to surrender your ass, sneak in a finger.

Therefore, for Sergio and Gustavo, the only goal of lyrics that say "*boludeces*" [stupid things] about women is to enhance the dance rhythm of a genre that, for them, would not be easy to dance to otherwise. In other words, they saw the lyrics as an additional tool used by the artist to carry out his goal of helping people to dance.

What also comes up in this dialogue is how these young men justify some lyrics that really show a lack of respect for ["*re bardean*"] women. Such is the case with the song "Colate un Dedo," in which the protagonist rudely tells a girl who has refused to have sex with him to "sneak a finger into her ass." According to Sergio, although the lyric is "*zarpada*"—that is, it crosses the accepted social line—it also tells a story about a girl who gets what she really deserves. In his view, because the girl has provoked the protagonist to have sex with her and then refused to consummate the act, she deserves to be sent to hell ["*al carajo*"] and to be encouraged to "*meterse un dedo en el culo*" [sneak a finger into her ass].

Of course, not all of the young men we interviewed in the line at "Pasión de Sábado" or in the neighborhoods thought that the lyrics reflected the attitudes and behavior of girls who like cumbia villera. This was apparent, for example, in the case of Lucas.[40] He and his friends were avid fans of the romantic cumbia singer Karina: "*Vamos donde Karina nos lleve*" [We go where Karina takes us], he said. He told us that he does not like cumbia villera lyrics because "they're vulgar." He also noted, however, that they are the current fashion, so one has to listen and dance to them. (Girls we interviewed repeatedly pointed this out.) About cumbia villera lyrics, he commented, "*Se re zarpan, las tratan re mal*" [They cross the line; they treat them (women) really badly], and concluded by stating that, today, cumbia villera either does not exist or, if it does, is not as bad as it once was when it comes to the girls.

It is not surprising that a romantic cumbia fan would dislike what cumbia villera lyrics say about women, and other interviewees with similar characteristics

advanced these critiques (as Nacho and Fran did above). This also occurred in our interview with Javier, who seemed to be economically well-off.[41] In polite and grammatically correct Spanish, he told us that he liked all kinds of music, not just cumbia and that he listened to a great variety of bands. When asked his opinion about cumbia villera lyrics, he energetically answered, "*Están zarpadas*" [They cross the line]. In a calmer tone, but with the same conviction, he continued, "*No me gustan, no me gustan. . . . Dan a entender muchas cosas que no se tendrían que decir. . . . No pueden decir lo que dicen . . . de las drogas, de las chicas que dicen que son todas fáciles. . . . No pueden*" [I don't like them. I don't like them. . . . They imply many things that one does not have to say. . . . They can't say what they say . . . about drugs, about girls—who they say are all easy. . . . They can't say those things]. He concluded by stating that "*a los tumberos, a los villeritos, a esos les gusta cumbia villera*" [the incarcerated people, the inhabitants of the shantytowns, they like cumbia villera]. The way Javier uttered this statement showed that he clearly felt that he and the followers of cumbia villera belonged to two different social classes.

These final commentaries, which note the possibility of enjoying cumbia villera's rhythm without liking the lyrics, lead us into a discursive terrain that became prevalent when we interviewed the girls and young women who dance at the bailes.

4

What Girls Have to Say

The plurality of positions implicated in the reception of cumbia villera, with the enormous variation and complexity of its possible articulations, belies any pretension to describe its lyrics as they sound to us. As analysts, we demonstrate just one—and, perhaps, the least pertinent and least contextualized—possible way to interpret them.[1] The myriad ways in which young men interpret those lyrics proves this point, and we saw something very similar when we examined how young women make sense of the same songs.

Having said this, we can also point out that many of the possible ways to relate to cumbia villera lyrics can be grouped together into what Juan Andrade (2005, 10) learned in answer to a question he addressed to a group of girls from Fuerte Apache, a well-known poor neighborhood commonly associated with criminal activity: "When we go dancing we sing those songs, just for fun. But really, it makes us feel very angry for what they say, because they talk shit about women."[2] The aim of this chapter is to discuss the elements and possible articulations that can be lodged in this ambiguous and contradictory conjunction.

Everything Is Rejection, but Not All Types of Rejection Are the Same

The idea that the lyrics work as a deforming mirror of women's dignity permeates many other articulations of how women deal with the words of cumbia villera songs. Sometimes this works by permeating other possibilities, or "overdetermining" the reception of the lyrics, and at other times it works as a background against which other identifications are made possible. The synthesis

that we attribute to the phrase collected by Andrade is justified because we have never found full and absolute agreement about the issue. Most women share a common element of rejection in that, to a certain degree, they find in cumbia villera lyrics a deforming mirror of their dignity. Those lyrics, which many women find "slanderous," negative, and offensive, prompted them to claim that the songs "*les dan con un caño*" [lit., "hit them with a pipe" (but, colloquially in Argentina, "treat them badly")]; they make them feel ashamed. The common thread of the reaction of the girls we interviewed is a feeling that those lyrics disrespect them. However, as this chapter progresses, different forms of rejection are exposed together with different types of relative acceptance with which they conflictively coexist.

To answer the question of what girls we interviewed deemed offensive, we examine one of the terms they used to make sense of that negative feeling. Some girls asserted that the lyrics "*las bardean*" [treat them badly]. The verb *bardear* means *hacer bardo* [to act against the norm, to cause scandal (*descontrolar, armar quilombo* [to behave quite badly, out of control])]. To "*bardear*" people is to insult or offend them by not giving them the treatment they believe they rightfully deserve.

What is it, then, that these young women feel has been *bardeado*? Mainly (but, as we show below, not totally) it is their image as honorable women, their identity as "*recatadas*" [coy or modest]. This, and not their individuality, desire, or ability to express themselves freely when and where they want, is what many girls feel is questioned and threatened. The idea that women are disrespected in cumbia villera does not have the same connotation for young women that it can have for educated middle-class men and women—that is, for those who produce and celebrate cultural messages within the framework of our universe of values and practices, tinted by a multicultural, pluralist, and egalitarian ethos. This does not mean that we did not get answers that closely resemble our own (middle-class) rejection of those lyrics. We did, as the following exchange with Tina exemplifies.[3]

Tina: O sea, me da la impresión que lo que hacen en la cumbia es como que la degradan mucho a la mujer, porque siempre es como que la mujer pasa a ser una especie de objeto para el hombre y es como que siempre la está degradando, como la ordena a hacer cosas. No tanto con la música de antes sino con la cumbia villera. Y la cumbia de antes habla más sobre el amor de las parejas . . .

Interviewer: ¿Te acordás de alguna letra de cumbia villera así que te haya llamado la atención, de esto que decís sobre la mujer?

Tina: Sí, cuando hablan de . . . Damas Gratis, cuando sacó el tema ese que fue el boom, de Laura, en la bailanta, y es como que le dicen, como que le ordenan lo que tiene que hacer, o le dicen lo que le gusta a los hombres para que ella . . . después . . . [lo haga].

. . .

Tina: Let's say, it gives me the impression that what they do in cumbia is, like, they degrade women a lot, because it's always, like, the woman happens to be a kind of object for the man, and it's like he is always degrading her, like he orders her to do things. Not so much with the music from before but with cumbia villera. Cumbia from before talks more about couples' love. . . .

Interviewer: Do you remember any cumbia villera lyrics that called your attention to what you're saying in regard to women?

Tina: Yes, when they talk about . . . Damas Gratis [lit., "Free Women" (but the true meaning is "Cheap Ladies")],[4] when this song came out, "Laura," that was a hit in the dance clubs, and it's, like, they say to her, like they order her to do what they want, or they tell her what it is that men would like for her . . . afterward [to do].

Tina thus offered an abridged version of most of the criticism we advanced when we analyzed the lyrics to "Laura" from the points of view of literary criticism and feminism (see Chapter 2). In this sense, Tina sees cumbia villera not only as a kind of recipe written by men for what women must do to please them but also as a command: if she refuses, they "tell her what she has to do." However, such clear-cut (and enlightened) rejection was uncommon in our sample. Most of the girls we interviewed advanced more contorted narratives of why they dance to a musical genre, in different degrees and for different reasons, that they feel disrespects them.

Ambiguities and Tensions in the Reception of the Lyrics

A second dimension of the reception of cumbia villera among the young women we interviewed consisted of shame or qualification of the lyrics through humor—the latter, in many cases, in combination with partial acceptance of the positionings offered by the lyrics and dissociation from the possible commitments those lyrics imply. But we must point out here that this dimension is not totally different from plain rejection: it comes out over its surface—that is, it is "articulated" over it but allows one to see other ways to relate to the music.

From Denied Love to Agreed Humor

Imputing a humorous intention to the lyrics is the only condition under which many women can accept the descriptions of themselves that cumbia villera contains. Jan Fairley (2006) also found this to be true in regetón cubano, and

Peter Manuel (1998) found it in Caribbean musical genres. In fact, this seems to be common to many other Latin American women in similar situations, as Frances Aparicio (1998, 188) noted about salsa followers: "Latinas who are active listeners and consumers of salsa music continuously rewrite patriarchal and misogynist salsa texts. They engage in 'productive pleasure,' which allows them as culturally bound receptors the opportunity to produce meanings and significations that are relevant to their everyday lives."[5]

In terms of the processes of identification that often provide the source of enjoyment of music and dancing, this can mean that at the baile, the proper context for enjoying cumbia villera, for the subject position that some girls enact there, the positioning they can take from the lyrics of cumbia villera (those that disrespect or *bardean* women) is accepted only as a humoristic expression ("*en joda*," as the interviewees usually say). When those lyrics are heard outside the context of the dance hall, they take on the offensive inflection that instigates the "*bronca*" [rage] and "*vergüenza*" [shame] that these interviewees declare. In this way, the kind of rewriting of the meaning of lyrics that disrespect them that is carried out by these female listeners continues to carry on the partial and imposed acceptance of a mirror that in many other circumstances would be rejected. Thus, they accept the negative treatment they receive in the lyrics in a humorous key, but in a different context they completely reject it.[6]

However, such dichotomization of the reception of cumbia villera lyrics is not devoid of problems, because it demands that its listeners "accept" what they regard as negative portrayals to continue to enjoy the dancing. To avoid this, girls who choose this kind of narrative plot should dance only to songs whose lyrics offer what they regard as acceptable subject positions for women (e.g., as objects of love, of indirect expressions of sensuality, of feelings of abandonment advanced by melancholic men) or address their other assumed identities (e.g., class, age, migration and residential status such as being a villera). Maybe they would accept positionings that tell their social reality, although many girls we interviewed rejected not only what disrespected them but also what identified them with the shantytown and its "problems."

This practice would make the construction of their subjectivity somewhat easier, but the affective costs would be very high: they would have to quit dancing and having fun in the playful space of the baile. It seems, at least from our fieldwork and previous research on the topic (see Cecconi 2003), that few followers of the genre would be willing to take this step. That is the reason for the sort of uncertain relationship that these girls establish with cumbia villera lyrics in the context of the dance hall, an ambiguous relationship that these girls, in the pursuit of affection and pleasure, imaginarily solve, altering the form in which they listen to those lyrics—that is, changing the frame of interpretation of the lyrics to a humoristic key in which what those lyrics say about women somehow is not taken seriously. In this way, they "play" with what the lyrics say about them, knowing that they are not as the lyrics pretend they are. Or, even if they are sexually proactive and have several lovers and enjoy uncommitted

sexual encounters, they think of themselves not as "sluts" but as young women who enjoy their sexuality in the same way that boys were historically allowed to do and were not morally reprimanded for in the process.[7]

In other words, instead of accepting the exclusion that would protect them from an identification they reject, these girls, in the process of identity construction, make a concession by interpreting identifications that they do not recognize as their own, inverting the value of those identifications and taking them as a joke.[8]

Ambiguous and Contradictory Feelings: Shame, Dissociation, and Admired Horror

A very common reaction to cumbia villera lyrics is to say that those lyrics "*se zarpan*." As we showed in the previous chapter, this expression, which means that something or someone goes beyond what is socially and culturally acceptable, is very common among the Argentine popular sectors. The following exchange from an interview with Trini illustrates its use:[9]

Interviewer: ¿Y a vos te gusta cómo la cumbia villera trata a las mujeres?
Trini: No, en algunas canciones no, se zarpan.
Interviewer: ¿Cuáles por ejemplo? ¿Qué bandas son las que más se zarpan?
Trini: Damas Gratis.
Interviewer: ¿Los Pibes Chorros?
Trini: También . . .
Interviewer: ¿Y qué es lo que más te molesta que dicen las letras de la cumbia villera?
Trini: Que se refiere todo a la mujer.
Interviewer: ¿Que dicen? Hacé de cuenta que yo nunca escuché ninguna.
Trini: Que sé yo, agachate y conocelo.

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Interviewer: Do you like how cumbia villera treats women?
Trini: No, in some songs, no, they cross the line.
Interviewer: Which ones, for example? Which bands cross the line most?
Trini: Damas Gratis.
Interviewer: Los Pibes Chorros?
Trini: They do too . . .
Interviewer: And what is said in cumbia villera lyrics that bothers you most?
Trini: That they refer everything to the woman.[10]
Interviewer: What do they say? Tell me as if I'd never listened to any of them.
Trini: I don't know; go down and know it.

Thus, Trini considers a lyric that refers to fellatio as beyond what is culturally accepted, lyrically, in her social environment. But a very interesting aspect of

her comment is that she claims that what disgusts her most about the lyrics is that they "refer everything to women," not that those lyrics "address women aggressively," as if she is naturalizing the fact that any reference to sex has to be associated with women and should be regarded as obvious or as something that does not require further explanation in terms of gender. In other words, it is obvious that "going down and knowing it" means that the one who is "going down" is a girl and the thing that is "known" is a penis (not a boy knowing a vagina). This assumption is so widespread that cumbia villera lyrics and the young men and women we interviewed rarely, if ever, mentioned men performing oral sex on women. Interestingly, this absence is also prominent in discussions of oral sex in Argentine society in general, where most of the slang terms developed to address the practice are male-oriented. "*Petear*" [to suck] is a good example here, because it does not have an equivalent that characterizes what men do when they perform cunnilingus.

Implicit in Trini's comment, but much more explicit in other interviews, including one with Mariana,[11] is "shame" as another possible reaction triggered by cumbia villera lyrics.

Interviewer: Respecto de las mujeres, ¿te acordás de alguna letra de la cumbia villera?
Mariana: No, se re zarpan. Son de terror. No, te dejan re mal. A una que lo escucha te da re vergüenza.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué? ¿Qué te acordás?
Mariana: Por las letras, eso, que le chupan la verga [pene] y todas esa cosas. (*Risas.*) No digo más porque me da vergüenza.

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Interviewer: Regarding women, do you remember any cumbia villera lyrics?
Mariana: [Cumbia villera lyrics] *se re zarpan* [are totally off the mark]. They are terrible. No, they make you feel bad. They make you feel ashamed.
Interviewer: Why? Which ones do you remember?
Mariana: Because of the lyrics, that they give a blow job and all those things. (*Laughter.*) I'll stop there because I feel ashamed.

The way cumbia villera pictures women evoked not rage in Mariana (as it did for other girls we interviewed) but shame. This shame can be understood as a possible effect of the contradictory relationship in which the subject is implicated. Mariana's comments tell us that she accepts a certain morality, and it is from that position that she finds the lyrics shameful. In other words, she feels that the lyrics do not attack her personally, but they do transgress the moral code to which she adheres. It is important to note, however, that Mariana criticizes the lyrics by saying not that they "*se zarpan*" [are out of line] but that they "*se re zarpan*" [are *totally* out of line], which implies that being *zarpado* to a certain degree is not necessarily bad.

Lorena also brought out the dancing-versus-listening dichotomy mentioned earlier, with all of the ambiguity about cumbia villera that such a dichotomy implies.[12]

Interviewer: ¿Te acordás de alguna letra?
Lorena: No sé, pelotudeces, viste, dicen que las pibas muestran el tajo, cosas así. Viste, onda. A mí me da vergüenza, pero está bueno. . . . [L]a cumbia villera tiene un par de letras zarpadas pero bueno. A veces hay cosas que te da vergüenza. Las letras son re zarpadas.
Mariana: Claro, más que nada eso: por ahí la música está buena pero lo que dicen, viste . . .
Lorena: . . . En realidad eso para escuchar no es; es más para bailar. Para escuchar no, por las letras. Es más para bailar. Se zarpan mucho con las letras.

• • •

Interviewer: Can you remember any lyrics?
Lorena: I don't know—stupid things, right? They say that the girls show their cunts, things like that. . . . I feel ashamed, but it's cool. . . . Cumbia villera has some lyrics that are *zarpadas*, but that's OK. Sometimes there are things that make you feel ashamed. The lyrics are very *zarpadas*.
Mariana: Sure, above all that, maybe the music is cool, but what they say [is not], right? . . .
Lorena: . . . Really this is not for listening; it's more for dancing. Not for listening, because of the lyrics. It is more for dancing. *Se zarpan* a lot with the lyrics.

"I feel ashamed, but it's cool" provides some clues about how Lorena (the character who dances and enjoys the baile) accepts the positionings of cumbia villera as they are expressed in the music and the rhythm of the genre. Meanwhile, the Lorena who listens to music at home (i.e., the character who is a daughter and girlfriend) does not identify with the positionings offered by the lyrics. What she does, of course, is play with the relationship that any connotation of the lyrics has with other levels of signification in the songs, such as the rhythm, melody, and harmony. Thus, she foregrounds that cumbia villera songs are primarily dance pieces and that, in the context of the baile, they address her as a dancer rather than as a thinking or emotionally involved listener. According to Aparicio (1998, 226–227), this strategy of "selective ways of listening" is common: "As they generally identify a gap between the semantic and the affective, between ideology and pleasure, these Latinos also note how they, as listeners, try to reconcile this contradiction by participating in selective modes of listening practices, what we may call discriminatory listening. Within this practice, they erase or undermine those elements that may cause ideological dissonance—in this case, the lyrics—and stress the musical

aspects (the rhythm and the musical arrangements) and the song's value as cultural reaffirmation."[13]

At the same time, this strategy allows the elements that Lorena perceives as a breach and as conflicting to be reconciled. Aparicio describes this strategy in reference to the ambiguity with which her interviewees related to salsa texts (which she considers misogynist): "This strategy allows them to engage in their respective productive pleasures. . . . As a consequence of this gap between the music and the lyrics, consumers strategically choose specific listening modes and social contexts in which to engage a particular song. . . . [For instance, a particular] song is one to be played at a party and danced to. . . . [W]omen would repeat the lyrics, dance to it, but in the analysis of it, they would object to it" (Aparicio 1998, 226–227).[14]

In the "Pasión de Sábado" line, we had the opportunity to interview Flavia, Micaela and their girlfriends:[15]

Interviewer: ¿Qué dicen sobre las mujeres las letras de cumbia romántica?
Flavia: No, cosas lindas. Que sobre nosotras hay otros grupos que cantan y te dan con un caño a las mujeres.
Interviewer: ¿Cómo cuáles, por ejemplo?
Flavia: Damas Gratis, Los Pibes Chorros, ¿quién más?
Micaela: Supermerka2.
Flavia: Supermerka2, por ejemplo: a la mujer la denigran como si fuera lo peor y nada que ver.

. . .

Interviewer: What do romantic cumbia lyrics say about women?
Flavia: Nice things. But there are other groups that treat us women very badly in their music.
Interviewer: Which ones, for example?
Flavia: Damas Gratis, Los Pibes Chorros, who else?
Micaela: Supermerka2.
Flavia: Supermerka2, for instance. They denigrate women as if they were the worst of the worst, and that's not true.

Flavia and Micaela thus echoed the main topics presented in the interview with Mariana and Lorena. They identified the same cumbia villera bands as promoting "denigrating" treatment of women (a word explicitly used by Flavia and Micaela to refer to lyrics that disrespect women), yet they also defended the rhythm of their songs.

Interviewer: ¿Qué dicen los temas? ¿Te acordás de alguno que te haya llamado la atención?
Micaela: El de Supermerka2. "Pelito con Pelito".

Flavia: Son re ordinarios los temas. Qué te puedo decir. Hay temas que son . . .
Anabel: Entreguen [la cola] . . .
Flavia: Entregá trola, Anabel chupame . . . [c]osas re zarpadas. No, pero son temas que, como ya te dije, denigran a la mujer, que te hacen sentir mal. Yo qué sé, los bailas pero al momento de estar escuchándolo tranquilo en tu casa te das cuenta que te están matando a vos misma que sos mujer.
Anabel: El ritmo está bueno: las letras no.
Flavia: Claro, es pegadizo el ritmo, todo, pero cuando te das cuenta de la letra te querés matar.

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Interviewer: What do the lyrics say? Can you recall a particular song that caught your attention?
Micaela: "Pelito con Pelito," by Supermerka2.
Flavia: The songs are super-vulgar. What can I say? There are songs that are just . . .
Anabel: Surrender your ass . . .
Flavia: Give up your ass, bitch! Anabel, give me a blow job . . . things that are *re zarpadas*. Songs that, as I told you before, denigrate women, make you feel bad. I don't know. You can dance to them, but when you listen to them quietly at home, you realize that they are offensive and abusive to you as a woman.
Anabel: The rhythm is cool, not the lyrics.
Flavia: Yeah, the rhythm really gets into you, but when you realize what the lyrics say, you want to kill yourself.

When recalling the songs that they feel disrespect them the most, both Anabel and Flavia refer mainly to lyrics that talk about fellatio and anal sex—common topics in this genre—but Anabel (quite correctly, we feel) interprets the message as a collective incitement for *all* girls to "give up their asses" rather than as telling the story of a particular girl. Thus, Anabel and Flavia again articulate the different subject positions from which women can take pleasure in something that they simultaneously reject.[16]

A very interesting variant of this dichotomy was expressed by Karina.[17] Although it is true that cumbia villera lyrics "insult" women, she said, she was so used to them that, after her first (and shocking) encounter with them, they lost any semantic sense and became part of the sound.

Interviewer: ¿Y de lo que dicen de las mujeres la cumbia villera, te gusta?
Karina: No. A veces no, porque se van de tema ya, se zarpan mucho.
Interviewer: ¿Por ejemplo cuándo se zarpan?
Karina: Cuando dicen que las mujeres son trolas, bah, que no dicen así pero dicen como algo así, que se zarpan, que se van de boca ya, insultan.
Interviewer: ¿Y vos qué sentís cuando escuchás eso?

Karina: Y nada, para mí, qué sé yo, porque tantas veces lo escuché, ya está, lo dijeron.

• • •

Interviewer: And talking about what cumbia villera says about women, do you like it?
Karina: No. Often I don't like it, because they miss the point; they cross the line a lot.
Interviewer: For example, when do they cross the line?
Karina: When they say that women are sluts. Well, they don't say it exactly like that, but they say something like it. That crosses the line, that they really cannot say, like an insult.
Interviewer: What do you feel when you listen to this?
Karina: Nothing, really. For me, I don't know, because I've heard it so many times, that's it. They already said it.

It is as if what Karina identifies as an insulting message loses its negative effect through repetition; as if she feels insulted the first time but not afterward, because she is able to translate those lyrics simply into part of the songs' sound. However, one can also detect resignation in her statements about how women are currently framed by the disrespectful things cumbia villera says about them; she appears to believe that cumbia villera has extended what one is allowed to say about women in the public sphere and that returning to the more limited discursive frames of the past is impossible.

Our interview with Mariana and her friends was interrupted and had to be continued about twenty minutes later. In the second part of the interview, Mariana firmly but ambiguously criticized the lyrics' writers: "They're terrible, *se zarpan*, 'here the *pibas chorras* [thieving girls].' Sons of bitches! *La lechera*."[18] To fully understand what Mariana meant when she insulted the lyric writers as "sons of bitches" requires more than a superficial reading of the sentence. The way she said it in the interview mixed insult and admiration; the expression also meant that, although what they do is unbelievable, it is also admirable or extraordinary. Thus, to find justification for the contradiction that these women perceive—that they enjoy cumbia villera even though its lyrics "*les pegan con un caño*" [disrespect them]—they again appear to fragment their identities to close the breach that the contradiction opens. This kind of dissociation is at play in the description Lorena offered of why some girls can enjoy cumbia villera.

Lorena: Es lo que más le gusta a las pibas, todo lo villero, porque lo norteño mucho no. Es lo que más se escucha.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué? ¿Vos tenés amigas que les gusta?
Lorena: Sí, porque les gusta. Siempre cumbia villera; vas por los pibes, qué sé yo. Todos vienen por los pibes más que nada.

. . .

Lorena: That is what the girls like the most, all the *villero*, because *lo norteño* ["northern cumbia," a variety of romantic cumbia] is not listened to very much in the bailes. [Cumbia villera] is what is most listened to.[19]
Interviewer: Why? Do you have friends who like cumbia villera?
Lorena: Yes, they like it. Always cumbia villera; you go to the dance hall for the boys. I don't know. Everybody comes mostly for the boys.

Many of our female interviewees noted that they prefer more romantic cumbia to cumbia villera and that they listen to *norteña* [northern cumbia] at home.[20] Northern cumbia deals with romantic topics that offer them a female subject position to which they can attune some of their narrative identities without much trouble.[21] These same girls are attracted by cumbia villera, however, because in the dance halls opportunities to approach men are opened to them. The subject position "woman" with which Lorena identifies (i.e., the one northern cumbia talks about so romantically) needs to find a partner; one of the main sites available to do this, however, is the baile, in which women are defined (mostly by men) through cumbia villera lyrics that, many men believe, portray the girls who go to the bailes "as they really are." As a consequence, many girls feel that they have no choice but to feel, desire, and practice their femininity (at least partially) in the baile environment from that male-defined subject position. Accomplishing this requires a process of identity fragmentation in which the "woman" (who sees herself as a romantic partner, a mother, and so on) is momentarily split from the "bailantera" who is able to interact with men. What the "bailantera" has to accept to be seen as such, and to be accepted as a dance partner, is a positioning that contains elements that the same girl in other contexts rejects. (That rejection, as we will see, has specific meanings that are not necessarily familiar to the analyst's point of view.) In other words, these cumbia fans have to accept, in differing degrees, the positioning that defines and prefers them as "sluts," "ass bearers," sexually active and accessible, and even "licentious" or sex-obsessed, because, as we showed in Chapter 3, to many boys, *all* the girls who go to the bailes are "fast," or quick to go to bed.[22]

There is a kind of environmental constraint that, sometimes with the partial acquiescence of some girls and sometimes in contradiction with other girls' wishes, carries them to offer their own bodies for the masculine imaginary as it is expressed by cumbia villera lyrics and the way many boys interpret them. Girls' choices are limited by the fact that they do not have the power to influence the kind of music that is performed or played in the bailes.

Interviewer: Te acordás la vez pasada cuando veníamos de bailar y veníamos con los chicos y vos dijiste que . . . y uno de los pibes dijo que a él lo que más le había gustado era la Re Pandilla, y vos le dijiste que estaba más bueno Amistad o Nada, ¿cuál cumbia te gusta más de toda la que escuchás cuando vas a bailar?

Trini: Santafesina.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué te parece que es la mejor la santafesina?
Trini: Porque sí. O sea, la Re Pandilla es para bailar, la música para bailar, para escuchar no me gusta.
Interviewer: ¿Vos no escuchás la Re Pandilla en tu casa?
Trini: No. Yo escucho la Re Pandilla cuando voy a bailar, para joder.
Interviewer: Pero si vos pudieras elegir la música que se pasa cuando vamos a bailar . . .
Trini: Entonces todo santafesino.
Interviewer: ¿Y por qué? ¿Qué hay? ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de la santafesina? ¿La música, las letras?
Trini: Sí, las letras.

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Interviewer: Do you remember the last time we returned from the baile, and you said that . . . one of the kids had said that the group he liked best was Re Pandilla, and you said to him that Amistad o Nada [Friendship or Nothing] was best? Which type of cumbia do you like more among all those you listen to when you go dancing?
Trini: Santa Fe–style cumbia.
Interviewer: Why? Why does it seem to you that Santa Fe–style cumbia is the best?
Trini: Because I like it. . . . Re Pandilla is to dance to, the music to dance to. I don't like it to listen to it.
Interviewer: You don't listen to Re Pandilla at home?
Trini: No. I listen to Re Pandilla when I go to dance, to joke around.
Interviewer: But if you were able to pick the music that comes on when we go dancing . . . ?
Trini: Then all Santa Fe–style cumbia.
Interviewer: Why? What is it that you like most about Santa Fe–style cumbia? The music, the lyrics?
Trini: Yes, the lyrics.

Thus, although Trini would choose Santa Fe–style cumbia, a variant of romantic cumbia, she felt that she had no choice but to dance to cumbia villera (which she does not like), because it is the type of cumbia prominently played at the bailes. As Aparicio (1998, 228) suggests in her study of salsa, "Perhaps not all women are willing to sacrifice the pleasures of parties, music, and dancing, spaces meant for collective sharing and for friendship, to confront and address ideologies that affect them in their everyday lives." We qualify Aparicio's interpretation on two points. First, her observation seems to invest the actors' behavior with tactic consciousness that we do not believe is really clear to them. Second, she seems to attribute to her subjects something we

would not attribute to the young women we interviewed: a perception of the gender struggle that presumes not only unambiguousness about what is right but also alignment of the notion of what is right with the analyst's cultural assumptions.

The girls we interviewed, as we have pointed out, did not reject being called "sluts" in the name of the legitimacy of individual desire and the autonomous exercise of their sexuality; they did so in the name of the respect that they claim in relation to their future roles of "*mujer de*" ["women of" or "wives of"], "mothers of," and even "sisters of" those men who disrespect them. It is in this specific connotative context that we believe our female interviewees contradictorily experiment with approaching men under the particular ways that men's desire for women is portrayed in cumbia villera.

As part of this ambiguous experience, and linked to the joyful environment of the baile that permits certain practices and behavior that the more "serious" environments in which these young people participate do not allow, Trini introduced us to another possible way to deal with the belittling messages of cumbia villera without contradictorily experiencing a clash of subject positions and moral codes. When Trini was asked how she feels when sexist lyrics are played at the baile, the exchange went as follows:

Interviewer: Che, y cuando dicen agachate y conocelo qué . . .
Trini: ¿Qué pienso?
Interviewer: Sí. ¿Qué te da? ¿Te da bronca, te da vergüenza, que te da? ¿Te da vergüenza?
Trini: Si estoy en pedo no.

. . .

Interviewer: And when they say bring yourself down and know it [i.e., perform fellatio], what . . .
Trini: What do I think?
Interviewer: Yes. What does it do to you? Does it make you angry? Does it embarrass you? What does it do to you? . . .
Trini: If I'm really drunk, no [nothing].

Thus, Trini justifies something she would not do elsewhere—in this case, listening to the lyrics without feeling shame about their content—because she fully participates in the ritual of the baile. That ritual involves heavy consumption of alcohol by both men and women. Obviously, when a girl drinks enough to lower her moral barriers to the point that she is not ashamed when the cumbia villera being played is portraying women like her negatively, she is dangerously approaching the prototypical "slut." Thus, it is time to move in that direction.

Are We "Sluts"?

What we refer to as "dissociation" is different from what some girls do when they seem to adopt feminine positionings derived from the male-oriented voice present in cumbia villera. We asked girls in the "Pasión de Sábado" line, "How do girls dance at the bailantas you go to?" Lorena answered: "*Y re zarpadas, mostrando la bombacha, pollerita cortita. Hay un tema que se llama* 'Revolea,' *todas ahí re locas, se ponen re locas. Algunas, algunas no; algunas lo bailan re normal pero hay otras que no*" [They show their panties, wear short skirts; they're *re zarpadas* (totally crazy). There's a song called "Revolea," and they get pretty crazy with that song. Some of them (do); some others don't; some dance it normally, but there are others who don't].

In this way, according to some of the girls we interviewed, for some followers of the genre (but, of course, not for them), dancing to cumbia villera in the baile is not linked to a tactic or to an unwilling acceptance of the music to be able to enjoy the party. It is, instead, a joyful acceptance of the elements that for other girls are the reason for their "rage," "shame," or, at least, "contradictory enjoyment."

Interviewer: ¿Y a vos qué te parece: a las mujeres les gusta la cumbia villera?
Trini: A algunas sí, pero a algunas no tanto.
Interviewer: ¿Cuáles te parece que son mayoría: las que les gusta o las que no les gusta?
Trini: Las que les gusta.
Interviewer: ¿Y qué piensan de las letras? ¿Cómo les puede gustar una canción que dice que muestre la tanga, que son todas unas trolas, que hagan petes?
Trini: Y las que son trolas.
Interviewer: ¿Hay algunas que son trolas?
Trini: Las que son trolas les re cabe la música.
Interviewer: ¿Y hay algunas que son más rápidas que otras?
Trini: Siempre.
Interviewer: ¿Y se nota por eso?
Trini: Sí.
Interviewer: ¿Pero ellas están de acuerdo con que las letras de las canciones las traten así a las mujeres en general?
Trini: Y yo creo que sí.

• • •

Interviewer: What do you think? Do women like cumbia villera?
Trini: Some, yes, but others not so much.
Interviewer: Which seem to be in the majority to you: the ones who like it or the ones who don't?
Trini: The ones who like it.

Interviewer: And what do they think about the lyrics? Why do they like songs that say they have to show their thongs, that they're all a bunch of sluts, that they have to give blow jobs?
Trini: Well, the ones who are sluts . . .
Interviewer: Are some of them sluts?
Trini: The ones who are sluts, the lyrics fit them like a glove.
Interviewer: Are some faster than others?
Trini: Always.
Interviewer: And they're noted for this?
Trini: Yes.
Interviewer: But do they agree that the lyrics treat women in general that way?
Trini: I think so.

Thus, Trini claimed that most girls like cumbia villera because they can easily identify themselves and their behavior (*"a las que son trolas les re cabe la música"*) in the description of sluts that the lyrics propose and in which many boys believe. At the same time, though, she pointed out that the "sluts" do not have gender solidarity with the girls who do not behave the way they do, because they do not care that the lyrics encompass both sluts and non-sluts in their description of women.

For Lorena and Trini, those who willingly dance to cumbia villera's sexist songs—the girls who "get pretty crazy" or are "*trolas*"—are an unqualified "them." In some other narratives, this unqualified "them" acquires a proper, often racist and classist, name: villera [shantytown inhabitant]:

Interviewer: Y decime Karina, cuando en el boliche pasan las letras de cumbia villera que hablan así de las mujeres, ¿las chicas cómo bailan?
Karina: ¿Cómo, *cómo bailan?*
Interviewer: Viste, qué sé yo, mostrando un colaless . . .
Karina: Ah, se bajan para abajo, bailan, son zarpadas también.
Interviewer: ¿Sí?
Karina: Sí, son zarpadas.
Interviewer: ¿Todas?
Karina: Sí todas, aparte son villeras, más vale que van a hacer esas cosas, son re villeras.
Interviewer: ¿Por qué vos decís eso?
Karina: Y porque se rapan el pelo, se hacen los rodetes, se ponen zapatillas de resorte, se ponen los pantalones adentro de las medias, o las remeras grandes, son re villeras.

. . .

Interviewer: Tell me, Karina, when the DJ at the baile plays cumbia villera with lyrics that talk that way about women, how do the girls dance?
Karina: What do you mean by *how do they dance*?

Interviewer: You know, showing *colaless* [naked buttock][23] . . .
Karina: Oh, they go down to the ground. Some overdo it too.
Interviewer: Really?
Karina: Yes, they cross the line.
Interviewer: All of them?
Karina: Yes, all of them. Besides, they're villeras. Of course they're going to do those things; they're *re villeras*.
Interviewer: Why do you say that?
Karina: Well, because they shave their hair, they put their hair in a bun, they wear sneakers with springs, they put their pants inside their socks, or they wear those big T-shirts. They're *re villeras*.

Karina uses the word "*aparte*" [besides] in a very interesting way in this account. What she intends to convey is that the interviewer would not have asked such a question if she had known that most of cumbia villera's fans are—voila!—villeras, as if that identity is a self-evident answer to anything the interviewer could ask about their (crazy) behavior in the bailes. Karina, who spoke from a non-villera subject position, thus constructs villeras as the "others" who, almost naturally, dance and enjoy lyrics that, according to her, disrespect them as women. When the interviewer asked about how she dances to those songs, the following exchange occurred:

Interviewer: Vos decías que son re zarpadas las pibas, ¿y vos cómo bailás?
Karina: Nada, yo bailo, ni en pedo meneo así como menean ellas. Yo bailo así normal, no bailo como bailan ellas.

• • •

Interviewer: You said that the girls are always crossing the line. How do you dance?
Karina: Nothing, I just dance. Not even drunk do I wiggle my hips like those women wiggle theirs. I dance normally. I don't dance like they do.

The "I dance normally" is a very sharp way to establish difference from the "other," the "crazy villera." In this way, Karina portrays her "modest" way of dancing to cumbia as the "normal" way of dancing to cumbia. A more demonstrative style that involves moving the body in ways that excite men's desire as expressed in cumbia villera lyrics—that is, the dancing style of the "other," the one practiced by "villeras"—is thus qualified as "abnormal."

Samanta, Fernanda, and some of their girlfriends were cumbia sonidera fans.[24] From that subject position, they criticized the lyrics of songs by major cumbia villera bands because of the way they portray women:

Samanta: Hay algunas letras que están buenas, algunas cumbias villeras pero, por ejemplo, yo, ¿no?, para mí Los Pibes Chorros y Damas Gratis, eso no me gusta porque ya es muy zarpado. Se zarpan ya mucho.

Interviewer: ¿Y qué dicen sobre las mujeres?
Samanta: Y las tratan como unas trolas, como cualquier cosa, como que se regalan, todo eso. Y no, ya está muy zarpado.
Fernanda: Al menos yo la uso para bailar, la cumbia villera, para bailar. Las letras no me gustan, por ahí, un mostrar la colaless, bueno, para bailar pero después no.

• • •

Samanta: There are some lyrics that are OK . . . but, you know, for me, Los Pibes Chorros and Damas Gratis, it's just too much. I don't like it; it's way too much.
Interviewer: And what do they say about women?
Samanta: They treat them like sluts, like tramps, available, easy to get into bed. That's just too much.
Fernanda: For me, cumbia villera, . . . I like it for dancing. I don't like the lyrics, . . . maybe the music for showing a *colaless* [naked buttock], but only when dancing, not after that.

Thus, Samanta and Fernanda told us yet again that the lyrics "*se zarpan*"; they treat women like sluts; the music is only for dancing; and they do pay not attention to the words. They also brought up issues that other interviewees corroborated and emphasized. We refer here to a degree of complicity on the girls' part with the objectifying attitudes of cumbia villera lyrics—complicity that allows them to continue to participate in and enjoy the dancing, a kind of signification in which the lyrics have a literal realization. Fernanda had no problem admitting that, to keep dancing, she is willing to objectify and fragment her being as a woman into the parts of her body that excite men's desire. However, as she also noted, girls can consent to showing their naked bodies without regarding this kind of performance as necessarily turning them into "sluts." Aparicio (1998, 169) found a similar type of accommodation to the lyrics' content among salsa dancers, for whom "normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on the woman's body—not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance. . . . [These young women] internalize values of beauty and of femininity; they become the self-policing gaze of their own bodies."

As we can see, this is far from suggesting that the women dislike the lyrics, that they do not listen to them, and that they "only dance" to this music. Fernanda listens to the lyrics and positions herself in relation to them from the point of view of a character that, on the one hand, accepts showing her naked body while dancing but, on the other, rejects the idea that such a *performance* within the playful atmosphere of the dance hall transforms her behavior of baile-goer (a behavior that she gladly accepts) into the identity of a "slut" (which she does not accept). In this kind of narrative, even the "doing" of a particular action that is identified with the "easy woman" identity is not transformed into

a "being." These interviewees also mentioned the ambiguity that this perspective entails:

Interviewer: ¿Qué sienten ustedes cuando escuchan esas letras?
Samanta: Y, no sé.
Fernanda: Por un momento que debe estar bueno porque empezás a saltar, a bailar . . .
Samanta: Sí, pero después te ponés a pensar y como diciendo que estás aceptando lo que dicen al demostrarle que vos lo alentás. Todo eso como que vos aceptás todo lo que ellos dicen.

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Interviewer: How do you feel when you listen to the lyrics?
Samanta: I don't really know . . .
Fernanda: For an instant, it's really cool, because you start jumping around, dancing . . .
Samanta: Yeah, but then it makes you think that you're accepting what they say because you're cheering for it. It's kind of agreeing with what they're saying.

Both Samanta and Fernanda are aware that enjoying this type of music implies agreement with messages they recognize as offensive and disrespectful toward them. Samanta's "I don't really know" exemplifies the conflict that such an acceptance implies. It clearly shows how the different characters relate to the music, at times in contradictory ways.

Samanta, like Lorena, said she enjoyed cumbia villera, but only as a dancer in the baile. As an inhabitant of a poor neighborhood, as a working woman, and as a daughter, she did not. Ultimately, this is the reason this situation is so difficult to resolve. In the internal dialogue carried out in her daily life, each of Samanta's different characters has a good reason to believe what she believes and to act the way she does. That is why there is no solution to the apparent tension that is present in how Samanta lives and narrates her contradictory identifications. We use the word "apparent" because one can believe that a contradiction exists only if one departs from the assumption that Samanta's diverse characters have to converge (somewhere) in a unique version of who Samanta is. On the one hand, this is mandated by culture; on the other, though, it is not easily obtainable for people with fragmented identities like those that characterize these girls.

Later in the interview, Samanta provided a little more definition of what she dislikes about the message of cumbia villera:

> Están muy equivocados en eso de lo que hablan, porque no tienen por qué estar hablando así de las mujeres. Está bien, son canciones como quieran, pero no tienen por qué cantar canciones zarpadas. ¿Por qué no

> hacen como empezaron todos los grupos a cantar cumbia romántica? ¿Por qué no siempre hicieron así, que más o menos los pibes dejan un poco el faso, no le dan tanta cabida? Porque más que todo los pibes se dejan llevar por la música, y como dijeron casi todos que todos dicen que se dejan llevar por la música, y es verdad.
>
> . . .
>
> They are quite wrong in what they say, because they don't have to talk that way about women. I know they're just songs, but they don't have to sing zarpadas songs. Why don't they do like all other bands that started singing romantic cumbia? Why don't they . . . kind of . . . put away the dope, not put so much emphasis [on drugs]? But above all, the kids are carried away by the music. That's what they all say, that they are carried away by the music, and that's true.

As we can see, even Samanta, who seems to minimize the way women are portrayed in cumbia villera, pointing out that "they're just songs" (as if songs are free of real impact on people's lives or even exempt from moral criticism), understands these songs as inappropriate in how they refer to women.

This view was also present in our interview with Ana, Carina, Elizabeth, and Julia.[25] Although they said they preferred northern cumbia, they danced to cumbia villera:

Interviewer: ¿Qué les gusta de la cumbia norteña?
Julia: Los músicos.
Elizabeth: Las letras, el ritmo.
Interviewer: ¿Qué dicen las letras?
Ana: Son de amor, no son como las de cumbia villera que te dicen a menear el culito y para abajo y para abajo y para abajo. O sea, las canciones de cumbia norteña te dicen otras cosas. . . . Las letras de la cumbia villera son completamente distintas a las de los norteños. O sea, la norteña es más de amor, más de romanticismo, más de me dejaron, te dejé, cómo sufrí, en cambio la de cumbia villera es más de menear la cola, es como para ir a bailar. La norteña es como para ir a escuchar, para quedarte así en tu casa.

. . .

Interviewer: What do you like about northern cumbia?
Julia: The performers.
Elizabeth: The lyrics, the rhythm.
Interviewer: What do the lyrics say?
Ana: They're about love. . . It's different from cumbia villera, where it's all about moving your ass and going down, down, down. I mean, northern cumbia songs tell you other stuff; the lyrics of northern cumbia are

> completely different from the lyrics of cumbia villera. I mean, northern cumbia is more about love, romanticism, more about "he left me, I left you, how much I suffered," while cumbia villera is more about moving your ass, more about dancing. Northern cumbia is something you go to listen to or you stay at home to listen to.

Within the framework of the difference between dancing and listening, which aligns with the distinction between sex and love, preferring northern cumbia brings up passions and aversions. Northern cumbia offers these girls more satisfactory positionings in relation to their romantic identifications. Its lyrics offer these girls positionings through which they can understand themselves as loving subjects better than they can through cumbia villera.

These young women advanced another idea to explain why they prefer the lyrics in northern cumbia, focusing on the subject of the speech act—that is, who the authors of the lyrics are:

Interviewer: ¿Y cómo habla de las mujeres la cumbia villera?
Julia: Mal.
Elizabeth: Pero también pueden hablar mal de la policía o de alguna mina o depende.
Julia: Sí, pero generalmente hablan mal de las mujeres.
Interviewer: ¿Ustedes qué sienten cuando escuchan esas letras?
Ana: Y a mí en realidad, te digo, es un tipo de música y quizás eso lo hacen porque es comercial, no es que lo hagan porque quizás les guste. Hay muchos de los pibes de la banda, por ejemplo de Supermerka2, que hacen cumbia villera y no escuchan cumbia villera. Escuchan otra cosa. Entonces, mayormente pasa eso. Creo. Yo te digo por el tema de los conocidos que yo tengo.

. . .

Interviewer: How does cumbia villera talk about women?
Julia: Badly.
Elizabeth: It can also talk badly about the police or some girl. It depends . . .
Julia: Yes, but it generally talks bad about women.
Interviewer: What do you feel when you listen to those lyrics?
Ana: For me, it's just a type of music; maybe they just do it that way because it's commercial; it's not that they're doing it because they like it. Many of the performers, like Supermerka2, play cumbia villera but don't listen to it. They listen to something else. So I think that most of the time it's like that. I'm saying this because I know people who are cumbia villera performers.

Thus, Ana does not think that cumbia villera performers necessarily believe in what they are writing and singing. In her account, they do it only for the

money, which is not represented as a bad thing in itself. Going further, if the girls we interviewed do know the performers, they may also know that they do not actually write some of the lyrics and that they sing what their producers compel them to sing. Within this particular context, it was thus shocking to us that these girls employed a narrative that stressed that "cumbia villera's lyrics describe reality: most of the girls are sluts . . . except us."[26]

Interviewer: Con respecto a lo que dicen de las mujeres, la cumbia villera, ¿qué sentís cuando la escuchás o qué pensás?
Ana: Que la mayoría es así.
Elizabeth: Es como todos los ambientes igual.
Ana: Obvio, la mayoría acá creo que es así, son muy pocas las chicas que son recatadas y que no se tiran encima y no se meten. Nosotras somos chicas recatadas, decentes, de nuestra casa. Pero la mayoría sí son de tirarse encima . . . las famosas gruperas.

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Interviewer: In relation to what [the lyrics] say about women, what do you think, or how do you feel, when you listen to cumbia villera?
Ana: That most women are like they're pictured [in the songs] . . .
Elizabeth: It's the same everywhere.
Ana: Most of them here are like that. Few girls are coy or don't fool around. We're decent and modest. We're home girls. But most of the other girls are the ones who throw themselves all over the musicians . . . the famous groupies.

Here we have a female version of what many of our male interview subjects said—that is, that cumbia villera simply depicts the girls who go to the bailes as they really are. But it is remarkable that the narrative that the performers (masculine figures) are not to blame because girls provoke this kind of behavior is now coming from women rather than from men. In other words, this narrative criticizes not boys for being womanizers but girls for "*regalarse*" [offering themselves for free]. For this reason cumbia villera's lyrics, according to these interviewees, merely describe what is really happening out there (in this way reproducing men's discourse; see Manuel 1998 for a similar finding). Another interesting element in the narrative of these girls is that it transforms the women's *behavior* of offering themselves as objects for men's sexual satisfaction into an *identity*, with all of the immutability that such a move involves. It is not that these girls are sometimes trampy and sometimes not. Rather, they are labeled "groupies," a subject position that marks their entire existence as individuals.[27]

At the same time, however, the girls we interviewed had no choice but to admit that the "groupie" identity also applied to them as fans of some cumbia bands. They discursively "solved" this problem by distinguishing between "groupies who go to the band's trailer" and "groupies who don't," a difference

that they treated as an identity marker that separates types of groupies. They thus defined themselves as "quiet groupies," who might follow the performers but only "outside their trailers" and seeking only a "simple smile" as a way to fulfill their romantic desire. "Trailer groupies," by contrast, were literally the "easy girls" that cumbia villera describes, whose desire appears to be satisfied only when they offer sex (multiple times) to the performers. An interesting sidelight to this is that the term "*grupera*" [groupie] sounds a lot like "*rutera*" [highway girl], a name for prostitutes who solicit on the highway.

Elizabeth: Igual hay distintas definiciones de grupera.
Interviewer: ¿Cuáles son?
Elizabeth: Y grupera es seguir a varios grupos.
Ana: Y grupera es andar con todos, andar con cada uno o con todos los de un grupo.
Julia: O sea, nosotras somos gruperas pero tranquilas. Vendría a ser: seguimos a varios de los grupos pero fuera de la combi, sin hacer nada. Hay otras que se suben a la combi y bueno . . .
Ana: Pasan de a una.
Julia: Ya sabemos que pasa. Y de a una van pasando por cada uno de los integrantes. Y se bajan de esa combi y van a otra. Y así. Pasan toda la noche. Y la pasan bien. Nosotras la pasamos bien a nuestra manera.
Elizabeth: La pasamos bien cuando vienen y nos dicen: "Hola, ¿cómo estás?"
Julia: Nosotras nos morimos por una simple sonrisa y nada más. Listo.

• • •

Elizabeth: Well, there are different definitions of "groupie."
Interviewer: What are they?
Elizabeth: To be a groupie is to follow several bands.
Ana: "Groupie" also means getting with everyone . . . with each of the performers or with all of them.
Julia: You see, we're groupies, but quiet groupies. We follow several bands; we're fans, but we don't go into their trailers; we don't do anything. There are some other girls who go inside the trailers, and, well . . .
Ana: They take turns.
Julia: We know what's going on. They have sex with every one of the performers in the band. As soon as they're done, they head into another trailer. All night long. They enjoy themselves. But we enjoy ourselves in our own way.
Elizabeth: We enjoy ourselves if they come and just say, "Hi, how are you doing?"
Julia: We just beg for a smile, nothing else. That's all.

We encountered a variant of this kind of narrative when we interviewed Elena and Rosalía.[28] When we asked them for their opinion of cumbia villera, the conversation went as follows:

Elena: [Damas Gratis] vive puteando, es re machista.
Interviewer: Y respecto de lo que dicen de las mujeres, ¿a ustedes que les parece?
Elena: Depende de la mujer, si es lo que dice la canción o no, porque una piba que no es así puede escuchar esa música y no ser lo que dice la canción.
Rosalía: Hay de todo un poco, pero igual no lo tienen que decir, está mal.

. . .

Elena: [Damas Gratis] curses all the time; it's really male chauvinistic.
Interviewer: And what do you think of what they say about women?
Elena: It depends on the girl who listens to it, if she really is what the song is saying or she is not. Because a girl who is not like that, she can listen to that music, and she doesn't necessarily have to be what the lyrics say.
Rosalía: There are different kinds of people. . . . Anyway, they shouldn't say it. It's wrong.

In this variation of the symbolic dividing line between the "inside the trailer" and "outside the trailer" groupies, girls who do not feel that cumbia villera lyrics apply to them should not be bothered by those lyrics.[29] Thus, Elena implies that the lyric writers have the right to portray girls as "sluts" if they "really" are sluts, again transferring blame from the lyrics' composers to girls. Rosalía, however, did not seem to agree with her friend:

Interviewer: ¿Y a ustedes que les parecen?
Rosalía: A mí mal, ¿por qué tienen que agredir? Mal, obvio. Por más que sea o no sea, no lo tienen que decir.

. . .

Interviewer: And what do you think?
Rosalía: I think it's wrong. Why do they have to be abusive with us? It's bad, obviously. Whether [the girls] are or are not [sluts], they don't have to say it.

Thus, Rosalía viewed the lyrics as disrespectful toward all women, regardless of whether they are "really" sluts.

Liliana, Noelia, and Estefanía, who also disliked cumbia villera's treatment of women, used physical gestures to show us what other girls had verbalized as shame.[30] They insisted that when they dance to the music, they are aware that the lyrics portray them in very negative ways:

Liliana: Para mí, por un lado, con lo que dicen de las mujeres un poco se desubican.
Noelia: A nosotras no nos gusta porque nos re bardean. Para mí cuando hablan de la vida real sí, pero de las mujeres no.

Liliana: De las cosas que pasan están buenas las letras que tienen.
Noelia: Porque es la realidad.
Interviewer: ¿Cuando hablan de qué por ejemplo?
Noelia: De los choreos [robos]. . . . Que salen a laburar [trabajar] por su familia. Eso es todo verdad.
Liliana: O cuando les pasa algo así sentimental, algo de la familia, también hay canciones. No es todo cumbia villera de te meto caño [te robo] y listo. No, porque hay letras con buen sentido; a mí hay letras que me identifican, un montón de canciones.
Interviewer: ¿Cómo cuáles?
Liliana: Ay, un montón, yo qué sé, no me acuerdo, a mí me gustan todas. Te puedo decir una, del grupo que me gusta a mí, El Original, me gustan todas.
Estefanía: Damas Gratis, también están todas re buenas.
Noelia: Los Pibes Chorros y La Base también, están todas buenas.

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Liliana: For me, in a sense, what they say about women is misguided.
Noelia: We don't like [cumbia villera] because it disrespect us. When the singers talk about real life, it's OK, but when they talk about women, it's not.
Liliana: The lyrics are good when they describe things that actually happen [in real life].
Noelia: Because it's reality.
Interviewer: When they talk about what, for example?
Noelia: About stealing, for example, . . . that they work to provide for their families. That's all true.
Liliana: Or when they get sentimental about something, about their families, there are also songs about that. Not all cumbia villera has criminal or violent content. There are songs with good sense; there are some lyrics that identify who I am, many, many songs.
Interviewer: Such as?
Liliana: I don't know; there are a lot. I can't remember one in particular, and I like them all. I can tell you this: the band I like the most is El Original, [but] I like them all.
Estefanía: The songs by Damas Gratis are all pretty good.
Noelia: Los Pibes Chorros and La Base, all of their songs are good.

In this dialogue, the idea once again appears that some cumbia villera songs are outside moral boundaries (*desubicados* [misguided]), but also misguided regarding who these interviewees believe they are and how cumbia villera does not address them accordingly. When Noelia says that the lyrics do not respect women, she takes it personally; it bothers her as a woman. The distinction Noelia drew between lyrics about "real life" and those about women is

more than interesting, implying as it does that the women portrayed in cumbia villera are found not in reality but only in the imagination and desire of men.

According to Noelia's narrative identity, what cumbia villera lyrics say about women cannot be translated into a possible "experience." She even doubts that any woman has had such an experience. She can identify with cumbia villera lyrics that talk about "real" topics (e.g., stealing and working to provide for families) even though they do not necessarily relate to her everyday life (Noelia, after all, was not a bank robber and did not have a family to support). The lyrics about sexual topics, however, seemed completely unreal and unimaginable to her. Thus, Noelia's narrative plot "filters" the positioning offered by cumbia villera in terms of gender but not the positionings offered in terms of, for instance, habitat, family relationships, or social class. She did not sense a contradiction here. Instead, Noelia—who, like many of the other girls we interviewed, believed that she had to dance to these songs to continue being part of the bailanta party (where her "dancer" character allows her to be positioned by the *rhythm* of the songs)—also clearly points out that several of her other feminine characters (daughter, sister, student) do not accept the positioning that many of the lyrics try to impose on her.

Interviewer: Y de las letras de las mujeres, ¿qué me estaban diciendo?
Liliana: Hay unas que están buenas porque jodemos, porque jodemos entre todas así cuando salimos a bailar, nos cantan, todo, pero . . .
Estefanía: Lo del baile es obvio, están para bailar las letras esas pero . . .
Noelia: Cuando escuchás la primera vez ese tema, son re zarpados.
Liliana: Son re zarpadas pero después la re cantás, te re gusta. Además vamos a ver a los chicos.
Interviewer: ¿A los chicos que cantan?
Noelia: Sí, sabés que hay muchos que son re copados . . . [bárbaros, fantásticos]

. . .

Interviewer: What were you saying about lyrics that talk about women?
Liliana: There are some lyrics that are pretty cool, because we can fool around; we can fool around among us when we go dancing; they sing those lyrics to us, but . . .
Estefanía: The dancing part is obvious. The lyrics are meant for dancing, but . . .
Noelia: When you listen to them for the first time, they're kind of out of line.
Liliana: They're too much, but later you heartily sing them and really enjoy them. Besides, we go there to see the guys.
Interviewer: The guys . . . you mean the performers?
Noelia: Yeah, most of them are really great.

Now, what is interesting about this dialogue is that Noelia and her friends not only accept the positioning proposed by the music and the rhythm of cumbia

villera ("The dancing part is obvious The lyrics are meant for dancing, but . . .") but also recognize that, in the playful environment of the baile, they have often made themselves accomplices of the lyrics (when they know the lyrics are dedicated to them) and acted out what is proposed by the lyrics, although they find them disrespectful to women ("*re zarpadas*"). What we have here, on the one hand, is a difference these interviewees establish between the rhetoric and the semantic character of the lyrics, accepting the former and rejecting the latter. As Manuel (1998, 14–15) points out, "In class discussions of . . . songs, students often acknowledged how the text, with its rich alliterations, internal rhymes, and rhythmic delivery, contributed to the kinetic drive of the music; at the same time, they often seemed to regard the literal 'message' of the text as insignificant. Such an orientation would explain how lyrics could be rhetorically original and expressive while adhering to stock themes (such as boasting, or glorification of sex)." On the other hand, we also again find that lyrics considered offensive and rejected when they attempt to enter narrative plots into which they do not fit are playfully resignified and accepted in different narrative plots that are elaborated on notions of amusement and desire. In this way, the subject positions proposed by the music, the rhythm, and the lyrics of cumbia villera are evaluated differently by the multiple narrative plots that these girls use to understand themselves.

Going further, a new source of identity offerings appears in the statement of Noelia and her friends that in itself does not add anything new to the material already offered by music, rhythm, and lyrics but does modify the way in which the music, rhythm, and lyrics are decoded: those who sing the songs. When Liliana states, "We go there to see the guys," and Noelia supports it with, "Most of them are really great," they are saying that their interpretation of the lyrics is not literal, and it is not necessarily linked to their explicit content. Rather, that content is mediated not only by the music, as we saw previously, but also by their knowledge and appreciation of those who sing the lyrics. This means that a change of key is possible in the interpretation and positioning in relation to the cumbia villera lyrics that disrespect them when it becomes possible to think that the performers are not really saying what they are saying or that, actually, they are just joking around.

That is why Noelia proudly told us that "the dancing is at its best, the dance floor explodes," when the performers (whom she knows are "really great") start playing songs that in any other moment she would consider sexist. This was clearly confirmed by our fieldwork in the bailes and introduces us to another interesting dimension in the relationship between music and identity: the relationship between music and those identities that many people only dare to experiment with "virtually" but that they do not allow to go beyond virtual reality and enter their everyday life experiences. As Tia DeNora (2000, 158–159) points out:

> Music [works] as a model—for conception, for a range of bodily and situational activities, and for feeling. . . . [M]usic may serve as a model

> of where one is, is going, or one "ought" to be emotionally . . . such that an individual may say to him- or herself something on the order of, "as this music is, so I should or wish to be." Music is one of the resources to which actors turn when they engage in the aesthetic reflexive practice of configuring self and/or others as emotional and aesthetic agents, across a variety of scenes . . . In this capacity it also serves as a means of melding present to future in so far as it may be applied in ways that permit cultural innovation in non-musical realms. . . . [In this way,] music may serve as a resource for utopian imaginations, for alternate worlds and institutions, and it may be used strategically to presage new worlds.

What DeNora (2000, 53) proposes is that music has the capability to be used, prospectively, to sketch sentiments, states, or even identifications that are aspired to and partially imagined or felt. This is what we believe occurs in the way some girls construct their identifications in relation to the music and lyrics of cumbia villera.

We believe that the narrative plot of some young women does not reject the positionings proposed by cumbia villera in the (very complex) way that the majority of the girls we interviewed did. On the contrary, their narrative plots accept those positionings, but only as a virtual possibility to be performed in the playful environment of the baile. In other words, what these young women allow themselves to do is explore, virtually, in the aesthetic sphere of music and dance one possible identification (that of a slut) that they would never accept in their everyday life outside the dance hall. The following exchange illustrates what we are talking about:

Tina: Si comparás los dos tipos de cumbia, como que antes se bailaba de una manera y ahora es como que se baila más suelto, más tipo provocando. En cambio la cumbia de antes no; la cumbia de antes se bailaba más de a dos. Ahora como que está más, como que la mujer pasó a ser la protagonista en las letras, también un poco para incentivar a los hombres.

Interviewer: ¿Para incentivar a qué?

Tina: Y más como para . . . o sea, es como que en la letra las mujeres también creo que se sienten un poco identificadas cuando dicen, no sé, para bailar, como que tratan de llamar la atención al hombre por medio de la música. Cuando le ponen una música que hable sobre, no sé, que tenés que hacer más un baile sensual, entonces la mujer lo que hace también es llamar la atención. . . . [E]n los boliches así se ve mucho. Cuando pasan determinada letra salen todas y entran a bailar, y los hombres se quedan mirando.

Interviewer: ¿Bailan sólo las chicas?

Tina: Sí, la mayoría de las veces; sí, porque es como que más que nada así sueltas, después los hombres, les llama la atención una chica, van y entonces pasan otras cosas.

Interviewer: Es como que esa música sirve para eso: para que las mujeres se muestren. ¿Eso podría ser?
Tina: Sí, me parece que sí.

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Tina: If you compare both types of cumbia, it is apparent that in the past cumbia was danced one way and now it is danced in a different way, more loosely, more provocatively. Past styles of cumbia were not like this; that cumbia was danced more in a kind of choreography for couples. Now it is more like the woman became the protagonist in the lyrics, also to incite men.
Interviewer: To incite to do what?
Tina: And more like for . . . let's say, I believe that in the lyrics women also feel a bit identified when they say, I don't know, to dance, like, they try to get men's attention by means of the music. When they put on music that talks about, I don't know, that you have to dance more sensually, then what the woman does is also get the attention [of men]. . . . [I]n the dance halls this is seen a lot. When some lyrics come on, all the girls enter to dance, and the men stay watching on the side.
Interviewer: Only the girls dance?
Tina: Yes, most of the time; yes, because it's like more than anything they dance loosely. After that, if some girl got a man's attention, he goes, approaches her, and other things happen.
Interviewer: It's like music serves this purpose: for the women to show off. Could that be it?
Tina: Yes, I think so.

This dialogue is rich for several reasons. First, Tina clearly states that cumbia villera introduced a new way to dance in which individual dancing by women is a prominent feature. This was very rare in previous versions of cumbia (but very important in Cordoban cuarteto). That means not that individual dancing has completely replaced couples dancing in cumbia villera but that the two now coexist at the baile. Individual dancing by women is prominent at specific moments of the night, which can be few or many, depending on the band on the stage and the music the DJ is playing.

Second, Tina points out that this individual dancing (which is not really individual, because several female friends usually dance together) involves a kind of "provocation" of men. If individual dancing by women is a kind of special event during the night, the "provocation" that Tina refers to occurs at particular moments. It produces a kind of breach with the rest of the night, which makes both the dancing and the women very distinctive.

Third, Tina relates the new way of dancing to cumbia to the growing importance of sexual depictions of women in cumbia villera. She refers to those depictions as "sensual" in this part of the interview, but we must not forget that

she also referred to those lyrics in very harsh terms, claiming that those lyrics clearly degrade and objectify women, a claim that is more attuned to the word "sexist" than "sensual." In addition, Tina claims that the girls who dance to lyrics that ask them to do so-called sensual things do so to lure men—that is, they act out lyrics that mention the movement of their bodies (usually the movement of their butts).[31] This is precisely how these young women allow themselves to virtually explore, in the aesthetic sphere of music and dance, one possible identification (that of a slut) that they would not accept outside the performative space of bailes.

But at the same time, Tina points out that a possible outcome of such performances for girls is being picked up by a boy and, after dancing with him for a while, going out to do "other things." Here, the "virtual" performance of a role has material effects that, from the point of view of the normative men's stance discussed in Chapter 3, often acquires the name "slut."

An episode that we witnessed during fieldwork illustrates this perfectly. Quela, whom we have been interviewing and observing for the past three years,[32] goes to bailes frequently. She dresses in flashy clothes and dances moving her hips in a way (as she is fully aware) that is celebrated by men. She is conscious of the effects of her presence and the reactions that her dance performance produces in men, although she claims to be faithful to her partner (which, as noted in the previous chapter, some of his male friends do not believe). Once, as she was leaving the baile and crossing the street, someone in a vehicle called out, "*¡Puta!*" [Slut!], to which she immediately responded, "*¿Cómo sabes si soy puta si con vos no me acosté?*" [How do you know I'm a slut if I didn't go to bed with you?]

What did she mean? She meant many things simultaneously, if one believes, as we do, that several characters are present in people's behavior, even in a single behavior such as this one. Behind Quela's expression lies a more or less traditional female-gender character who wants to "defend" her honor in response to an accusation that is baseless for that particular character—that is, "I didn't go to bed with you, I don't know you, and you can't treat me like a slut. I can act crazy in the baile, but I'm neither crazy nor a slut outside the baile." However, another possible character coexists with this one who just might go to bed with someone she barely knows but who, once in bed, would not behave like a "slut." Instead, this character would exercise her sexuality within what could be considered a culturally acceptable framework for the group in question. Considering the references that cumbia villera lyrics make, this apparently means not crossing the line and falling into what could be considered "abusive" anal sex and fellatio. Here the character would seem to be saying, "I didn't go to bed with you, so there's no way you can know whether I'm a slut in bed. I can act crazy in the baile, but I am not crazy or a slut in bed." Here the term "slut" refers not to sleeping around but, rather, to how a woman acts in bed.

However, knowing Quela as we do, a possible third character could be behind her words, one who is actually (also) saying, "Maybe I am a slut in bed,

but since you haven't slept with me, you can't to know for sure." What this third character contributes would be a positive slant on this type of act and discourse.[33] She clearly was not embarrassed to say it. This is something like a transformation of the stigma into a badge of honor. In the case of a man, this might be summarized in "I'm black, and can stand up for it," to which a woman could add, "Besides being black, I'm a slut. So what?" In this sense, this third character that could underlie Quela's performance—that is, underlie the *form* in which she said what she said—would be one that inverts the stereotype and uses it like a tool of rebellion against those who want to disrespect her by using it. In this case, the character would be saying, "Yes, I can do crazy things in the dance hall, because I'm crazy outside the baile as well, but since I haven't gone to bed with you, you don't know that."

We firmly believe that the three different interpretations of Quela's sentence are valid and that, in all probability, Quela was drawing on all three. This is so because we also believe that the different characters living within Quela could be behind the ways we interpret what she said.

Several things are going on here. First, we believe that the three characters can be found in Quela and are "activated" according to circumstances. It is not that she is one or the other per se; instead, the three inhabit her, but they will appear within different types of relationships and contexts. However, we think that in the particular context in which Quela made her statement, she played with the ambivalence between the first and the second character we mentioned. In this sense, the polysemy that we found in her words is not only our post factum interpretation; it was also there when the words were spoken.

The third possible character is less visible when Quela speaks because she is on the defensive: "How do you know I'm a slut if I haven't gone to bed with you?" For the third Quela to have appeared in all her glory at this point, another type of discursive act would have been needed—in our opinion, something along the lines of, "Slut? A thousand times a slut. So what?"

Any attempt to isolate a single voice in an interview or during fieldwork observations, to make coherent what interviewees are saying or what we are hearing by chance, is erroneous, in our opinion, because it means we have lost sight of the different characters through which interviewees speak to us. As Quela's case shows, there is no need to move around in space or time in the course of an interview or during fieldwork to discover different voices and characters. Rather, their presence is often indicated in the polysemy of a single sentence.

We believe that the third character exists, but we did not really see it operating in Quela's words that night. Let us take a closer look at this character, continuing with the analogy, "Yes, I'm black. So what?" This character by nature is quite complex, as she is constantly oscillating between accepting the label to show that it does not really describe what she is and turning the negativity into a badge of honor. This ambiguity, of course, is no accident: no matter how "liberated" one feels and how proud one is to be black, one also knows that the negativity is lurking in the shadows.

In our view, this ambiguity is present in Quela herself, which is why the "real slut" character calls on the other characters to give it a hand. To decide how the interpellation "slut" applies to her, Quela might initiate an internal dialogue with her multiple characters that would run something like this: "They shouted 'slut' at me. What do I do about it? Am I a slut? What does it mean to be a slut? Am I always a slut? Because I dress and act crazy in the baile, does this make me the slut the interpellator apparently sees me as? If I tried to hook up with Nacho because I like him a lot while I was engaged to Tula [as Nacho told us in Chapter 3], is that a reason to think of myself as a slut? If I'm this way or that in bed, does that make me a slut? Am I a slut at work? Do I behave like a slut with my family?" Thus, the remark we heard while leaving the baile that night would be a product of the partial and contextualized resolution of this internal dialogue among Quela's different characters.[34]

What we hear in this resolution is a complex negotiation among the different characters and the identitary options they allow, in which the negation of being a slut outside the baile coexists not only with the problematizing of her status as a slut in terms of socially acceptable sexual practices (this can be "heard" in her words) but also with the proud acceptance that results from the reversal of the slut label that can be observed, like echoes of other performances we saw in Quela's performance that night, in which the words were less important than the way they were spoken.

Therefore, we think that Quela, like some of the other girls we interviewed, engages in practices of connotation and negotiation, limitation, and management of the signification of what they accept under the label "slut." Some girls accept multiple relationships, which for many of them (but clearly not for others), for the performers, and for the cultural categories of the social group in which the genre develops, signifies being a "slut." At the same time, though, they decide when they do not want to be a "slut." Other girls suggest sexy performances and appearances but do not go any further.

However, the possibility also exists that the narrative plots of some other girls cause them to reject acting out in the virtual space of the baile what they would refuse as a possible positioning in their non-ludic everyday life. They do, however, accept the positioning offered by other parts of the same song, even those that are considered sexist, but these girls decode and enact them in a very different way from the one imagined by the lyrics' composers. In her fieldwork notebook, Malvina Silva wrote:

> En uno de los temas más conocidos ("El Bombón Asesino," un tema original de Los Palmeras, que ahora es también cantado por La Iguana Mary, el cual hace una "sutil" alusión a la cola de las chicas) el canto del público prácticamente igualaba en intensidad al de los cantantes. Se armaron, en algunos sectores, pequeños saltos combinados con baile (una especie de pequeño pogo, aunque sin llegar a empujar brutalmente a nadie). Paty me abrazó a mí y a Karina y saltamos un ratito,

durante el tiempo que duró la canción. En total, habrán estado tocando 25 o 30 minutos.

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In one of the most popular songs ("El Bombón Asesino," originally performed by Los Palmeras [and] now performed by La Iguana Mary, where there's a subtle allusion to a girl's buttocks), the spectators' uproar was practically as intense as the performers' singing. In some areas of the dance hall, there were jumps combined with some dancing (a kind of little *pogo* that didn't mean brutally pushing others around). Paty grabbed Karina and me, and we jumped for a short time while the song lasted. They must have been performing for about twenty-five or thirty minutes.

What may look like girls' becoming accomplices of the enthusiastic reception of their own objectification, celebrating themselves from the point of view of a sexist male gaze, can have a completely different meaning from the perspective of young women whose character decodes the lyrics and the behavior in the baile from a very different standpoint. One of the female members of the research team told us that those kinds of performances are instances in which, regardless of men's objectification of them, many girls can celebrate themselves as women—not only their bodies and their movements but also (and why not?) their inaccessibility. As Malvina Silba told us, "When Los Pibes Chorros's [song] 'Andrea,' is played, you're not exclusively listening to the part that says that you're fast; you're listening to the rest of it as well. In the part that says 'and you go down down down, back and forward, back and forward,' you're not only thinking that the male singer is enunciating that you're a slut for doing that; but two complementary things occur simultaneously: the one that you think about, and the other that you perform. You *think* that such an allusion to a move clearly linked to a sexual relationship might be pleasurable for a woman, as well, and bring up a pleasant situation for her (whether real or imaginary)."

In this sense, leaving aside the subjugating masculine voice, women can recoup (imaginarily) the fulfillment of their own sexual desire. But while listening to a song like "Andrea," what many girls do is to perform a peculiar dance step that follows the music's rhythm. That step is the meneaito, as we described in the Introduction. In that celebratory moment enacted through dancing, in which women move their hips and buttocks in circles toward the floor and back up again, women often realize that they are being admired by other women, because not everyone can dance the meneaito correctly, although many dare to try. They also realize they are being admired by men, who perhaps perceive what they are missing, what they will never get, what they do not have or have lost, and so on.[35]

A very complex range of identitarian positions is displayed in the way some girls celebrate, with their own decoding of the lyrics, their own femininity. On the one hand, the girls who would accept the positioning offered by cumbia villera in this manner seem somehow to recompose "being a woman" as a totality beyond any partitioning attempt by the male gaze. On the other hand, celebrating their inaccessibility would restore a good deal of power to these girls in a context in which male discourse attempts to reduce that power in extremis. If this is so, with this kind of narrative identity, these girls would be advancing a pretty radical way of "listening as women" to the lyrics and music that cumbia villera offers them. Regarding "listening as women," Aparicio (1998, 218) writes that many of her interviewees "minimized the power of the male singer and rewrote the meaning of these lyrics from their own perspectives and their own life experiences. This feminist recourse, which I have earlier called *listening as women*, balances out the power differentials between the dominant presence of male singing and writing subjects in popular music and the multiple women listeners whose life experiences and gender locations are being systematically repressed and excluded in the texts they receive."

At the same time, this particular way to decode the content of the lyrics reminds us that, when girls listen to these songs, not all of their verses have the same importance as identitarian offerings. Many girls focus their attention on parts of the songs, discard others, and simply forget the ones that are left. Thus, they can discard the verses that position them as "sluts" and remember the ones that provide opportunities to celebrate their femininity. As Aparicio (1998, 221) says, "This signals an important listening strategy that separates and accentuates the parts of the complete song that are socially and historically relevant, those lyrics indeed from which larger social meanings can be produced from less significant ones."

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, we could say that girls who reject, accept, or negotiate the positionings that cumbia villera lyrics offer them are exercising the "productive pleasure" that Aparicio (1998, 197) talks about in terms of salsa dancing: "The sense of 'productive pleasure' that they enjoy as a result of their listening practices allows them to invest salsa with liberatory meanings. . . . It allows Latinas to negotiate power differentials with the men in their lives." In this sense, the young women we interviewed also "claim their agency in [cumbia villera] as consumers and listeners, as a gendered audience across the stage, on the dance floor, and on the receiving side of their stereos . . . consistently transforming these otherwise monologic texts into productive moments in their everyday lives" (Aparicio 1998, 235). That kind of productive pleasure, among other things, opens a gap between the content of the lyrics and the dance performances at the dance halls. As Manuel (1998, 24) notes, "So-

cial practices embedding music can effectively negate such features as sexist lyrics; thus, even the most misogynist dancehall song could in some respects come to constitute a soundtrack for the assertion of female autonomy on the dance floor."

We concur in the case of cumbia villera, as do other Argentine researchers (see, e.g., Alabarces et al. 2008, 54). What Malvina Silba and Carolina Spataro (2008, 95) found in their ethnography of bailes is that "the repositioning of women is evident . . . in the ludic instance facilitated by dancing and in the construction of new bonds with men. Within this reconfiguration, women have ceased being the object of sexual pleasure for men to take on a sexually active role of their own."

Conclusion

Gender relations have definitively changed in Argentine society and for many people—men and women alike—those changes mean trouble. Impelled by women (even women from social sectors traditionally associated with sexism and machismo), and through sexuality, a dense, conflictive sense of gender positions and gender and sexual interests is developing that has made the Argentine situation complex and idiosyncratic.

What we are witnessing in Argentina is the deployment of an ever-changing gender and sexual scenario rife with ambiguity, an uncharted territory prone to the operation of popular culture devices that attempt, in different ways, to make sense of what is going on. At the same time, performances of gender in Argentina show the fragility of gender as a social and locally constructed (and contested) category, in line with Judith Butler's well-known "gender trouble" (Butler 2006). Among those performances, and in the particular case of male and female young people of Argentina's popular sectors, what occurs in the cumbia villera scene—in the lyrics, music, performances, and discussions that surround the genre—is crucial in the configuration of a new map of sexuality and gender in the country in general, and in Buenos Aires in particular.

At first glance, it looks like sex has run amok in cumbia villera. Not only the lyrics but also the artistic performances are sexualized to a degree never before seen in Argentine popular music. At the same time, the behavior of many young women in the bailes shows a degree of sexual agency that also is novel. A shift in how young people of the popular sectors perceive and perform sex is perceptible; it is clearly moving toward the notion of sex for pleasure—as an indulgence, a treat, a luxury, and, above all, a right.

Because of what we have termed the "activation of women," expressed and fueled by the lyrics, music, choreography, and performance of cumbia villera songs, the relationships between low-income young men and women have definitively changed. And they are going to continue to change because, as our preference for the term "sexual activation of women" instead of the similar "sexually active women" reflects, we are witnessing an ongoing and more or less recent *process*, not a fully acquired new identity. "Activation" in this regard refers to the complex process through which new sexual discourses propagated by (among other sources) a highly sexualized mass-media apparatus, and the everyday performances of many young women, encounter newly defined gender narrative identities.

The cumbia villera scene is only one (but nevertheless a crucial one) of the many scenarios in which a symbolic struggle about gender and sexuality is being fought in Buenos Aires. Interestingly, a large portion of this symbolic discursive struggle is taking place around the connotation of the word "slut" and the floating signifiers that this master signifier has brought under its tutelage, including "*rápidas*," "*bombachita floja*," and the like. (Because of the way "slut" has hegemonically organized a particular discursive field, to say that a woman is "fast" nowadays does not mean that she runs fast but that she is quick to go to bed with someone.) In venues as diverse as television programs, women's magazines, and cumbia lyrics, hot discussion is under way about what freer sexual activity among women should be called, and many of those discussions relate to the meaning of the word "slut." Many women are active participants in those discussions (as were our female interviewees), with some of them defending the term by transforming a negative label into a badge of honor—that is, a label that correctly describes their newly acquired sexual repertoires. However, if it is true that the negative value historically assigned to the term they use (but whose connotation they want to change) is evidence of male domination, it is also clear that the proposed new meaning is very different from the accusative one. For these women, "slut" means much more than being fast, bad, disrespectful, or a traitor. Above all, it means being active and daring—in a word, a woman who is interested in sex for its own sake, independent of its reproductive or amorous linkages; who is proud of her freer, transient, and volatile sexuality; and who owns her autonomous desire.

Following the idea of gender as a relationship, desire was always part of the way men understood their sexual relationship with women. The open display of women's desire, however, is new, and this by definition necessitates that men modify the way they understand their masculinity. They are no longer the sole repositories of desire and have to develop new behavior to deal with the explicit and active desire of the "other." They are confronted with this new desire through the myriad discourses women use to address them. Those discourses can be linguistic and non-linguistic, ranging from the direct requests by young women for young men to perform particular sexual acts to the ways women approach and dance with men. The varied narrative identities of young men pro-

vide the particular frames they use to "understand" what these young women "really want" and to construct their actions accordingly. What spells trouble for some young men is that what women "really want" could threaten men's traditional roles and, perhaps most important, potentially create a "performance" problem for those whose sexual repertoires do not include the fundamental techniques needed to satisfy the now open desire of many young women. In Chapter 2, we showed, at least in part, how the complex and contradictory lyrical, rhythmic, musical, and performance discourses of cumbia villera allow some young men to express (albeit ambiguously) what troubles them about this new sexual activation of women.

In a very complex back-and-forth relationship between discourses and narratives, cumbia villera lyrics offer a particular instance of what the young (usually male) composers understand, imagine, or even desire is going on with the sexuality of young women. In this respect, the fantasized "sluts" of many cumbia villera songs are part and parcel of the imaginary scenario many young men (musicians and public alike) use to address the anxious question they do not seem to know how to answer: "What do these young women really want from us?" Thus, it also provides the coordinates of these young men's desires, constructing the frame that enables them to desire something.

As we showed in Chapter 2, the complex interplay between lyrics and men's and women's performances means that cumbia villera songs, as layered discourses, are plagued by contradictions and contested meanings. Not only are the lyrics themselves often internally incongruous but the context of the emission of the contradictory lyrics also adds layers of contested meaning through performances by male musicians (who often demonstrate that they do not take the misogynist words of their songs seriously) and by the female dancers who accompany them and take any opportunity to "prove" that they are not the male musicians' sexual puppets. The musical frame that surrounds the scene clearly indicates that the performance is intended for enjoyment within the broader scenario of a highly sexualized Argentina in which women's sexual practices have acquired a previously unheard-of centrality and autonomy.

We have to remember here that "the significance of lyrics is governed not primarily by their obvious denotations but by their use of conventions, and these in turn are organized in terms of musical genres" (Middleton 1990, 228; see also Frith 1981). The lyrics of cumbia villera songs do not have simple meanings, because such meanings are always modified when particular musical conventions are used in the construction of the songs (see Laing 1970). The particular musical convention associated with the cumbia villera genre is usually associated with dancing and fun.

If this is the complex discourse that reaches young audiences when male musicians perform, then with the few female performers, another layer of complexity is added to the picture. When La Piba sings, she assumes, as a woman (mixing pride and humor in a very interesting way), the insignias of the sexual activation so negatively portrayed by lyrics sung by men—the "licentious"

identity that it would seem that she should reject, considering her feminine subject position and how the "licentious" sexually active woman is interpellated by men. Thus, the sexual activation of women is not only (negatively) reflected by men but also (positively) sung by women who celebrate themselves by using men's signifiers. Therefore, the discourse generated when La Piba sings claims autonomy in terms of sexual activation processed through heteronomy in terms of the codes she uses to convey such autonomy—heteronomy that is revealed in the way those codes carry important traces of male domination.

Cumbia villera's complex messages, communicated mostly by male performers but also by a very few female performers, eventually make contact with the gender, sexual, class, ethnic, nationality, and age narrative identities of the young boys and girls who make up the majority of the genre's fans. It is the particular character that each young boy or girl constructs to understand who he or she is, either in terms of one of his or her multiple identities or in a particular version of their intersectionality (and this is contextually done—in terms of both which narrative identity prevails and how that narrative identity reacts—in the circumstance of the particular encounter with the music in question) that will process the content of the complex discourse rendered by the cumbia song with which they come into contact. In other words, different narrative identities (among different young people, but also within the same person) will process the conflictive meaning of the songs in different ways. The goal of Chapters 3 and 4 was to show the complexity of such encounters between the polysemic meanings of the songs and the varied narrative identities of the young men and women we interviewed.

This is why one cumbia villera song can signify very different things, not only for different people (men, women, villeros, inhabitants of poor or middle-class neighborhoods, and so on) but also for the same person, who may encounter the song in different circumstances or identify with the song from different subject positions. Because the discourse in the songs is so complex, the "encounter" between the polysemic meaning of the songs and the variety of narrative identities of the people who like cumbia villera makes exponential (but not infinite) the meanings that a particular song can have for the young people who Saturday after Saturday pack the bailes of Greater Buenos Aires. In that regard, Chapters 3 and 4 show only a very limited array of the meanings young people attach to those songs.

But the relationship between the songs as discourses and the narrative identities of our interviewees does not end there. Young people not only listen to and dance to these songs. They use them to understand who they are. In other words, conferring a particular meaning on the songs signifies, among other things, taking a position in relation to what the songs say about them and their varied identities. With respect to the subject matter of this book, this means taking a position regarding what the songs (complexly) say about them in relation to their gender and sexual identifications. This is at play for both young men and young women, although most of the songs talk about women's gender

positions, because, as we have said, gender by definition is a relationship and to discuss women's sexual behavior is also by default to discuss men's.

Through the contradictory relationships among their lyrics, music, and performances, as well as what people say about them, cumbia villera songs offer young people possible identifications to which they must relate, in one way or another, if they listen to the genre. Those identifications are always processed through their different narrative identities, because the narrative plots of the young people who listen and dance to cumbia villera work as a sieve with respect to the different (and often contradictory) messages that emanate from the songs.

Thus, the particular gender narrative plots of our interviewees were in charge of sorting out the intrinsically contested meaning of the message of the songs, provisionally stopping the continuously sliding meaning of those songs and (also provisionally and contextually) taking a position in relation to that provisionally closed meaning. From that process came the varied responses we got to the simple question "What do you think of the songs that depict women in cumbia villera?"

The narrative plots of the young men we interviewed ordered the conflictive messages of the songs in distinctive ways. Some of them believed that the lyrics correctly describe the newly acquired sexual freedom of many young women and that this freedom has a proper and negative name: "sluts." Within this particular type of discourse, we found very interesting varieties. Some boys pointed out that all young women are sluts, but a difference exists between those who publicly act as sluts and those who attempt at least to disguise being sluts (even when they actually are). In this sense, some young men distinguish between "open sluts" and "disguised sluts" to buttress a narrative plot that constructs them as men who have the right to take any of those girls because, in the end, all of them are sluts.

Other boys we interviewed claimed not that all young women are sluts but that specifically the girls who go to the bailes are sluts. Here a diacritic in terms of class was introduced to separate what the interviewees saw as "appropriate" versus "inappropriate" behavior for women. Once again, their narrative identities appeal to a discourse that establishes an internal difference among women, this time between upper-middle-class chetas and working-class cumbieras, to buttress a particular male character that sees treating baile-goers as sluts and actively pursuing them to fulfill sexual desire as legitimate.

An interesting variation on this type of discourse was the one that reversed the order of causation many male interviewees used to buttress their narrative characters—that is, that cumbia villera lyrics *reflect* what girls are actually doing. Here, cumbia villera becomes the *cause* of women's sexual proactiveness, which justifies labeling them "sluts."[1]

And, of course, some young men claimed that not *all* but only *some* young women were "sluts." They distinguished between "sluts" and girls who "have more respect" (in the double sense of the term—that is, a woman who has

respect for herself, for instance, by not drinking publicly with the "bad boys of the neighborhood" and who asks for due respect from others and above all men).

The narrative identities of some of our male interviewees interpreted the behavior of young women who openly display their newly acquired sexual freedom as a justification even to rape them. But in line with the complexity of the narratives and discourses we deal with in this book, such a discourse does not necessarily follow the traditional script that frames rape as a deserved punishment for women who deliberately lure men through their actions, or simply through their appearance, but ultimately withhold sex. On the contrary, such a discourse about rape is highly mediated by a native discourse on masculinity that "penalizes" girls for lacking the endurance (*el aguante*) to rein in their natural appetites the way "real" men do. According to this newly developed masculine discourse, which mixes elements of traditional morality with dimensions of sexual behavior and self-control, open and uncontrolled expressions of sexual appetite by women are equated with drug and alcohol addiction and implicate the (always relative and contextual) positioning of women as "sluts."

In the kinds of discourse we encountered among our interviewees, rape can be justified as a particular form of justice that corresponds to the level of "*bardeo*" [craziness] performed by women, to their being "*pasadas*" [out of control]. For the narrative identity of these young men, it is not the lively sexual activity of women in general that transforms them into "sluts," and thus makes them eligible for rape, but the unleashed sexual activity of women who lack the restraint that characterizes real men.

Yet other male interview subjects advanced a different narrative identity that provided room for young women to express their newly acquired sexual freedom while bypassing the "slut" label altogether. This occurred among interviewees who reversed the order of causality and pointed out that, after the advent of cumbia villera, young women became more open in the portrayal of their sexual desire. According to this kind of discourse, cumbia villera offered new repertoires of sexual and gender behavior that some girls eagerly embraced because their narrative identities were open to experiencing (and enjoying) sexuality in a different way. Interestingly, some of this new behavior includes conduct that was once associated with sexist men who treat women as objects—for instance, touching the butt of the other sex, which some young females who dance cumbia villera are now doing as well.

In the narrative identities of these interviewees, the problematic girls were the "*zarpadas*"—that is, the ones who openly look for full sexual encounters with boys—not the girls who have similar kinds of sexual relationships but within the limits that these interviewees believe a young women should not transgress. Those limits are not "being a saint" (e.g., reaching matrimony while still a virgin, something these boys cannot imagine as possible, or even desirable, for young women nowadays), but having premarital sexual relations with more or less stable partners and some casual sexual encounters in the playful context of the baile that, on the one hand, do not continue beyond such a con-

text and, on the other hand, usually do not involve the consummation of plain sexual relationships with several boys at the same time. As we can see, this is a very different discourse from the one used by interviewees who believed that both kinds of behavior made young women "sluts."

The variety of men's narrative identities that interact complexly with cumbia villera's polysemic messages are mirrored by what occurs among the young women we interviewed for this study. Young female cumbia villera followers confront a discourse about *their* sexuality that for the most part is generated by men and that consequently reflects and constructs (in a complicated manner) men's desire. Thus, the "slut" characterization in many cumbia villera songs moves out of the imaginary scenario that many young men use to answer the threatening questions lurking behind women's newly acquired sexual repertoires to become a complex interpellation to which they must respond in order to position themselves in the new sexual and gender economy inaugurated by the open portrayal of their sexual desire. In this sense, cumbia villera songs also provide the coordinates of these young women's desires but in a completely different way from that of young men—as different as the position of being interpellated is from being the interpellee.

In Chapter 4, we showed how different female characters, following their narrative identities, made sense of the same lyrics in completely different ways. Those narrative identities ranged from "We are not the sluts cumbia villera songs portray; they exist only in the imagination of cumbia villera's authors and performers" to "We are much more sexually active than our mothers were, but that doesn't mean we're sluts." This forced dichotomization obscures a wide range of in-between characters, such as "We are not the sluts the lyrics depict; those are the 'other' girls who dance cumbia villera"; "We let ourselves play the slut role cumbia villera depicts, but only in the playful context of the baile"; and so on.

We were not surprised when some female interview subjects offered discourses about the songs that closely resembled the criticisms we advanced when we analyzed cumbia villera lyrics from the perspectives of literary criticism and feminism. Feminist discourse, after all, has made some inroads among Argentina's popular sectors. For the narrative identities of the female subjects who, to buttress their characters, used discourses such as "Cumbia degrades women, turning them into objects for men [and] telling them what they have to do" and "They tell women what men like so they'll do it," cumbia villera songs are a kind of recipe written by men for what women must do to please them.

That this type of discourse was present but not overwhelmingly so shows the limits of the feminist inroads we mentioned above. Other discourses were used more frequently.

One of the discourses used the most often pointed out that, in the context of the place of enjoyment—the baile—the positioning women can take from the complex messages of cumbia villera to construct the particular character they are enacting is to accept the lyrics only in a humorous key. The girls who

employed this narrative were not willing to forgo dancing as their leisure activity of choice; however, the advent of cumbia villera has required them to dance to songs whose lyrics they believe "disrespect" them as women. In response, they establish an ambiguous relationship with those lyrics in the context of the dance hall in which, in the pursuit of affection and pleasure, they change their frame of interpretation so they do not have to take what those lyrics say about women seriously. In other words, they "play" with what the lyrics say about them; they know they are not what the lyrics say they are; and even those who are sexually assertive, have several lovers, and enjoy casual sexual encounters still do not think of themselves as "sluts." Rather, they regard themselves as young women who enjoy their sexuality in the same way that boys historically have been allowed to do.

Some of our interviewees separated the different messages a song conveys through its lyrics, rhythm, harmonies, and the like and accepted some of those messages while rejecting others. Those young women also did not want to abandon an activity they enjoyed—dancing—but used a different strategy to reach the same goal, by splitting their identities into different subject positions. The baile-goer character was then able to accept the positionings of cumbia villera as they are expressed in the genre's music and rhythm while the daughter/girlfriend character rejected identification with the positionings offered by the lyrics. Many of our interviewees expressed the different subject positions from which a woman can take pleasure in something she simultaneously rejects in terms of dichotomies between dancing and listening and between public (baile) and private (home).

Employing a strategy of splitting into different subject positions, or dissociating, to continue to enjoy the pleasure of dancing is completely different from straightforwardly adopting the feminine positionings taken from the male voice present in cumbia villera. Some of the girls we interviewed claimed that, for some followers of the genre—but, of course, not for them—dancing to cumbia villera at the baile was not linked to a tactic or to unwilling acceptance of the music. Rather, it was linked to joyful approval of elements that, for them, generated "rage," "shame," or, at the very least, "contradictory enjoyment" of the genre. The narrative identities of these young women accepted the fact that cumbia villera songs equated the free expression of women's desire with the label "slut"; however, they claimed that the "sluts" were "other" girls who go to the bailes. They themselves were not "sluts" because they did not express their sexuality that way in the baile environment. By normalizing the way they dance at the baile as the "proper" way to dance to cumbia villera, these interviewees qualified a more demonstrative dancing style (i.e., a way to move the body that is in line with the men's desires, as expressed in cumbia villera lyrics) as the dancing style of the "other," the one practiced by "villeras" or "*trolas*." At the same time, they also qualified a particular kind of relationship with boys—above all, the relationship so-called groupies establish with cumbia villera musicians—as the behavior of the "other," the "slut."

Other interviewees in our sample followed a different route to establish their relationship with cumbia villera songs. For them, the problem was not that cumbia villera erroneously depicts their newly acquired sexual repertoires. Instead, the problem resided in equating those depictions with connotations that arise from the constant use of the negative label "slut" (and its hegemonically produced equivalents "*rápidas*," "*bombachita floja*," and the like). These interviewees had no problem admitting that, to keep dancing, they were ready to become accomplices in objectifying and fragmenting their being as women into the parts of their bodies that excite men. However, although these girls felt that they could consent to showing their naked bodies in the baile setting, they did not regard this kind of performance as necessarily making them "sluts." Girls who followed this particular narrative identity listened to the songs and positioned themselves in relation to them from the point of view of a character who, on the one hand, accepts showing her body while dancing, but, on the other, rejects the idea that such a *performance* within the playful context of the dance hall transforms her behavior of baile-goer/dancer (a behavior that she gladly accepts) into the identity of a "slut" (something that she does not accept). In this kind of narrative, even the "doing" of a particular action that is commonly identified with the "easy woman" identity is not transformed into a "being."

Another very interesting narrative plot we found does not reject the positionings proposed by cumbia villera at all. On the contrary, this narrative plot accepts those positionings, but only as a virtual possibility to be performed in the playful environment of the baile. Young women who follow this narrative plot allow themselves to explore, virtually and in the aesthetic sphere of music and dance, one possible identification (that of a "slut") that they would not accept outside the dance hall. Finally, our fieldwork revealed girls who negotiate and try to resignify what cumbia villera lyrics say about them in yet another way—that is, as instances in which they celebrate their bodies, regardless of men's objectification. Leaving aside the subjugating masculine voice, women therefore can also recoup (imaginarily) the fulfillment of their own sexual desire.

If these are the narrative plots we found among our male and female interviewees, what we have is a complex process by which the narrative plot that is behind some gender characters "helps" the reduction of meaning (the provisional and local "solution" to the inherent contested meaning of the songs) that is always necessary to stop the continuously sliding meaning of cumbia villera songs and act, which in our case means taking a position in relation to what cumbia villera songs say about women. What we have attempted to show in the ethnographic chapters of our book is that, for the particular person who is using it, the selective character of a gender narrative plot (constructed within the many intersections with other subject positions, i.e., age, class, ethnicity) of the young men and women we interviewed has the power to support or dismantle the unifying task a particular signifier tries to perform within a certain discursive field. In this case, the master signifier ("slut" in the discursive field of

cumbia villera) cannot work as the nodal point that partially unifies a particular discursive field if the gender narrative plot of the actor who is confronted with this particular discursive formation does not allow it to perform such a role or, more probably, if the gender narrative plot allows it to perform such a role regarding only some floating signifiers but not others. In this sense, we think that narrative plots have the potential to "dismantle" discursive formations by preventing the articulatory process from proceeding any further.

This occurred, for instance, when the gender narrative plots of some of our female interviewees could not quilt a floating signifier—for instance, "dancer" or "teenager"—to cumbia villera's master signifier "slut." In other words, in general the nodal point "slut" confers meaning to a vast array of floating signifiers in many cumbia villera songs (not without contradictions, as we saw in Chapter 2). But in particular (i.e., in the case of the young person who is using a particular discursive formation to buttress identity claims), the narrative plot decides, first, which of those floating signifiers will finally be quilted into the discursive formation and which will not and, second, what the quality or strength of the quilting will be. How the different narrative identities of our male and female interviewees did this in Chapters 3 and 4 shows the variable nature of those possible quiltings (e.g., all women are sluts, only baile-goers are sluts, only new baile-goers are sluts, baile-goers are not sluts, acting like a slut is not being a slut) and their qualitative difference in terms of strength.

But the dialectical process that takes place between the (contested) messages of the songs and the complex ways young people negotiate what they mean through the working of their gender narrative plots does not stop there. This is true in general but much more so in the case of the cumbia villera scene, where the authors and performers of the songs are in constant and close contact with their followers. (They usually live in the same poor neighborhoods, and many young people perform some kind of auxiliary activity for the cumbia villera groups they like.) Such close contact allows the authors and performers to gauge how their songs are received by the audience, allowing the young people who follow them to have a voice in how they relate to the (contested) meanings of the songs.

The followers' gender narrative plots thus have the capacity provisionally and contextually to close the meaning of the songs. This, in turn, is transformed into a discourse that the musicians have to deal with and take a position on in relation to their own narrative plots. We do not discount that pure economics were behind recent changes in cumbia's style. It is possible that sexually charged lyrics were limiting the success of some cumbia villera artists. But the fact that many cumbia villera artists started to move away from those lyrics toward more romantic themes, and that the change was celebrated by many of our interviewees, *may* indicate that some cumbia villera performers have taken that voice into account (proving this, of course, would require extensive fieldwork). This occurred not because most of the young women believed that the sexually charged lyrics of cumbia villera totally misrepresented their newly

acquired sexual activity, but because most of them did not like how their new sexual freedom was portrayed in cumbia villera songs.

What we want to stress here is the dialogical relationship that exists between the songs (as discourses) and the different gender characters (as products of diverse gender narrative plots) that make sense of them. In doing so, we aim to add a layer of complexity to the now commonsense claim that "music does not reflect reality but constructs it." Not only did many of the young people we interviewed use cumbia villera songs to construct (at least partially) who they were in terms of gender (so much so that some claimed that cumbia villera has *caused* young women to become "easier"); in fact, music's potential to construct reality is much more complex than that.

In the dialogical relationship that exists between discourses and narrative plots, and in the case of close-knit and locally developed music scenes, followers' narratives often work as discourses that performers have to take into account (through the intervening role of the authors' and performers' narrative plots), and thus these narratives have the potential to transform subsequent musical production. As a result, not only are performers "creating" a reality that their audiences use to navigate the world; followers are also influencing musical products that, in turn, they subsequently use to understand who they are. The understanding and enjoyment of music takes place in the theater of self-definition, "as part of the general struggle among listeners for control of meaning and pleasure" (Middleton 1990, 292). In that way, nobody is really "reflecting" anything "out there." All are betting on closing (provisionally and situationally) meaning to have the possibility to act in terms of their identifications in the case of the followers and in terms of the songs they compose and perform in the case of the musicians.

Postscript

Moving away from Name-Calling

MARÍA JULIA CAROZZI

The social processes that have surrounded the emergence of cumbia villera lyrics are reminiscent of the ones that gave rise to the Milonguitas theme in tango verses that were insightfully described by Eduardo Archetti (1994). These processes involved different social sectors and historical periods, but they took place in the same city, and both link the recursive production of what, following Frances Aparicio (1998, 161), we could denominate "name-calling lyrics" to changes in heterosexual sociabilities. Around 1920, according to Archetti, daughters of recently arrived European immigrants ventured into public entertainment venues that constituted a new presence in the downtown Buenos Aires landscape. By dancing the tango in these public venues, embracing men who were neither approved nor chosen by their families, and establishing heterosexual relations on the basis of personal preferences, these young women inspired tango composers, themselves descendants of immigrants, to create an impressive quantity of lyrics portraying female figures that they named "Milonguitas." Thus, for Archetti, these tangos were a masculine reaction to women's stepping out and escaping close control by their families at a time when the appearance of unchaperoned women in public places was rare. To watch one embracing a man was downright inconceivable. Tango writers, influenced by romantic literature, did not call those women "sluts," but their lyrics attributed to the Milonguitas characteristics that bear a strong resemblance to those associated with whores. These characteristics include demeanor (the Milonguitas were always depicted as laughing and drinking champagne), an interest in acquiring luxury symbols (mainly cars, furs, silk gowns, and jewels) from their relationships with men, and a marked disposition to abandon true love in the pursuit of a good catch.

Both Archetti's analysis and the one extensively presented in this book seem to substantiate the argument that lyrics that either label women "sluts" or attribute to them whorelike traits are masculine reactions to two interrelated novelties in women's behavior: (1) dancing in new, more sensual ways and (2) establishing heterosexual relations that previously were considered improper. Thus, cumbia villera's sluttish characters and tango's Milonguitas would constitute a masculine response to new moralities that regulate heterosexual relationships adopted by women and prompted by rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions.

As this book makes clear from the outset, any analysis of cumbia villera should take into consideration that it is a musical genre that is generally disparaged by media analysts and mainstream public opinion for its association with "*los negros*," a population that has been radically stigmatized based on a combination of phenotypical characteristics and class-linked dispositions. To provide only one clear example of the strength of this association, a very popular video repeatedly uploaded to YouTube states, "La cumbia es un tipo de sonido que emiten los negros" [Cumbia is a type of noise that comes from blacks].[1]

Moreover, because from a mainstream point of view cumbia villera in Argentina has been publicly accused of exalting violence and presenting derogatory images of women, and censored on this very basis, to simply state that its lyrics constitute an example of masculine violence against women would only reproduce class prejudices. Without denying that such violence exists, this book succeeds in providing a far more complex and better-informed panorama of gender relations and tensions established within and around the genre.

As stated in Chapter 1, before the advent of cumbia villera, "*negro*" in Argentina was a label that was always applied to someone else, usually pejoratively. Cumbia villera composers and singers took the label for themselves and their audiences, performing a manipulation of prejudice so strongly evocative of that done by rap composers that it has made research into the direct influence one genre has had on the other desirable. In effect, cumbia villera lyrics consciously manipulate class and racial prejudice against *negros* by presenting characters and situations that, in a conspicuous and extreme way, incarnate the traits associated with the poorest of the poor. Thus, in cumbia villera lyrics, thieves, convicts, child beggars, and drug consumers are vindicated while policemen, snitches, and guards are invariably condemned as traitors.[2]

Sexual activities or preferences are almost never described in relation to the male characters of cumbia villera, who seem to be defined according to which side of the law—particularly the law regulating private property—they stand on. To talk about sexual practices, authors of cumbia villera lyrics instead consistently resort to female characters. While male characters allow singers to develop an alternative morality in relation to the law, female characters let them express sexual preferences other than customary vaginal penetration with one steady partner—that is, oral and anal sex with multiple, successive partners. It seems that, in the cumbia villera culture, breaking the law is a man's

transgression, while desiring sex in non-reproductive and unsanctioned ways is a women's transgression. Analyzed against the background of Argentine popular culture, this gendered distribution of transgressions makes sense, because it contests the established mainstream viewpoint that expects men to work and women to refuse sex outside of marriage while assuming that poor, dark-skinned men are naturally inclined toward burglary and poor, dark-skinned women are excessively lascivious. When seen within this context, the gender trouble thoroughly explored in this book seems to stem more from the double standards set by established culture than from the practices that necessarily mirror them to put them into question. Thus, the fact that female characters in cumbia villera are overly sexualized constructs eager to perform fellatio for various men, to take off their underwear, to go to bed with anyone who is available, and to enjoy anal penetration can be explained as a result of the manipulation of prejudice and exaggeration of stigmatizing traits that characterizes the genre as a whole.

When, following the authors' lead, we consider the emission of cumbia villera, a new kind of gender trouble comes to light: in the overwhelming majority of cases, those who write the lyrics and sing the songs are men, not women.[3]

This differential distribution of the right to speak and sing precludes the possibility that the commonly used term "*puta*" (which can be translated as either "slut" or "whore") will be self-attributed and vindicated. This gives rise to an inversion of its value similar to that undergone by other terms, such as "*tumbero*" [convict], "*negro*" [black], or "*villero*" [shantytown dweller]. While a man who sings "*tumbero soy*" [I am a convict] performs a destabilizing transgression of expectations, the same man singing "*Qué puta que sos*" [What a whore (or slut) you are] simply repeats a usual scene of gendered accusation.

Furthermore, as shown both by La Piba's lyrics and the interview statements of young women who dance to cumbia villera, this type of inversion does not match their sensibilities. Thus, in contrast to lyrics written by and for male singers, the lyrics to "La Transa," sung by La Piba and quoted at length in the book, speak about neither a one-night stand nor multiple sexual encounters with random partners. Rather, they speak about a relationship that may not lead to marriage but nonetheless involves both repeated encounters with the same partner and courtship practices.

La Transa

(This is for all the girls who are not fond of commitment and prefer *transa*;
you're not going get married, are you?)
My mother asks me
Who is that boy
Who's always with me
Who picks me up

To go dancing
She doesn't believe that he is my friend
She wants to know if "*hay onda*" [there are positive feelings]
She wants my answer
She wants my answer right away
And I'm going to answer her
To see if finally
She will leave us alone
It's a *transa*, nothing else.

The fact, signaled by the authors, that women have to resort to new words such as "*transa*" to express their desires and expectations regarding heterosexual relations appears to reflect the doubly subaltern position they occupy. Neither the words of upper-class women nor those of men of their own class seem to express their expectations.

As the authors point out, what women do in the overwhelming majority of cases in settings where cumbia villera is performed is dance while men do the (public) talking. Consequently, if one is looking for exit points to women's agency and domination in this context, in addition to La Piba's lyrics and the interpretations provided by female participants, one should probably pay close attention to their novel ways of dancing that, as this book teaches us, have become increasingly independent from those of men. A number of recent studies of movement suggest that non-linguistic bodily practices can perform identities that do not exactly adjust to, and sometimes radically depart from, those provided by discourse (Castaño Quintero 2009; Manning 2007; McCormak 2007; Worby 2009).

Applying a frame of analysis that focuses on dancing would perforce require a detailed description of new and old types of feminine body movement in cumbia villera in relation to the linguistic, social, and spatial contexts in which such movement is performed. This could allow future research to depart from describing women's practices by using value-laden words that, as the authors of this book have clearly shown, are not accepted by the female dancers themselves. It would also reveal the relationships, tensions, and points of departure between women's ways of dancing and the language that both women and men employ to describe those moves. For example, interviews with female dancers presented in this book hint that a profound meaning gap differentiates "*bailar el meneaito*" [to dance wiggling] in cumbia villera (which implies mastering precise postures and movements involving leg, hip, pelvis, lower-back, and arm muscles, as well as gaze) from simply "shaking your ass" (a phrase that designates setting in motion a part of the body in any number of possible ways, most of which would not be taken as an acceptable "*meneo*" [wiggle]). A similar gap seems to divide "*menear*" and "play the slut." If this is the case, to state that women "shake their asses" or "act like sluts," even situationally, would amount to reproducing a reduction that reflects a gender-biased gaze and disposition.

Analyzing the emergent identities to which these different ways of moving give rise could avoid the distortions that a lexicon loaded with gender—as well as class—overtones imposes on women's dancing bodies.

As the authors state in Chapter 2, popular TV shows in Buenos Aires were showing female dancers moving their legs, hips, pelvises, and—rather important when one considers the muscle control involved—buttocks for a long time before cumbia villera appeared in the 1990s. Mimetic learning from back-up dancers on TV and in music videos, and from other bailanta attendees, could have been the source of the voluptuous movements women dance in accompaniment to cumbia villera. Relating the history of dance moves to the history of lyrics might make it possible to explore empirically the question of whether women act out identities provided by the lyrics while they are dancing or whether they appropriate identities by embodying the moves of media dancers and execute them when prompted by selective listening to the words of songs.

Furthermore, and given the situational character of identities, a focus on movement might allow future research on cumbia villera to identify new complexities in the relationship between the genre's characteristics and identities. In a genre that is generally danced, preferences might be dictated more by kinetic affinities and associations provided by histories of body movement than by the appeal of the discursive identities provided by lyrics. Histories of body movement might foster understanding of the preferences for the mimetic embodiment of the moves associated more with some genres than with others.

When placed alongside the rich linguistic data provided in this book, a detailed analysis of ways of moving and dancing in their immediate linguistic, social, and spatial contexts could provide a precise illustration of the relationships between language and bodily movement, signaling subtleties of violence and unnoticed gender tensions, as well as hidden points of exit from domination and as yet unidentified loci of women's agency.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. "*Bailanta*" is the generic name for the dance halls, but because the term has acquired a negative connotation, many of our interviewees used the term "*bailes*" instead; we have, for the most part, followed suit. We use the terms "fans" and "followers" very loosely. The young people we interviewed like to listen and dance to several musical genres, not only cumbia villera. They love to go to bailes, and they end up dancing to whatever the bailes offer them. For a while, cumbia villera was one of the staples, but it was always mixed with other varieties of cumbia and even other tropical rhythms. Because these young men and women are much more than just people who dance to a particular musical genre, whenever possible, we avoid using nouns such as "*cumbiera/o*" and "*bailantera/o*."

2. The original exchange is difficult to translate because of the Argentine slang: "En ese momento cara a cara con la cabeceadora David le dice: 'Naaa, ¿estás loca amiga? ¿Cómo me vas a pegar así? Estas zarpada en cheta,' a lo que ella agitándole las manos en la cara le replica: 'Aguanta gato, te haces el lindo pancho, vos estas zarpado de careta. ¿Cómo me vas a despreciar así?'" (Note that, throughout this book, names and identifying circumstances have been altered to preserve anonymity.)

3. "Popular sectors" is an Argentine sociopolitical term that encompasses working-class and lower-middle-class people, especially in the country's big cities and, above all, in Buenos Aires.

4. We are aware that the term "activation of women" can imply that women are passively acted on by someone or something else (as in activating a credit card or a cell phone) rather than that women's activity or behavior results from their own agency. However, we still prefer to use the term "activation of women" instead of other possibilities, such as "sexually active women," most importantly because we are talking about an ongoing and fairly recent *process* instead of a fully acquired new identity. In this context, "activation of women" refers to an ongoing process of redefining the sexual repertoires of young women, implying, among other things, more proactive sexual behavior than

that of their mothers. In a sense, "activation" refers here to the complex process through which new sexual discourses propagated by highly sexualized mass media, among other sources, encounter newly defined gender narrative identities.

5. We began our research on gender issues in cumbia villera in 2005 and started publishing about it in Spanish in 2006 (see, e.g., Vila and Semán 2006, 2007, 2008). In 2008, a couple of chapters appeared on the topic that, using very similar empirical material, basically concurs with our analysis of the genre (see Silba and Spataro 2008). In parallel with our work, other Argentine scholars are researching the topic from a linguistic point of view, prominently Cecilia Serpa, who presented a very interesting paper on the topic at a conference (Serpa 2007a).

6. This is indicated in a different context in Attwood 2006, 80, and Plummer 1995, 124–125. For the Argentine case, see Margulis, Rodríguez Blanco, and Wang 2003a, 143: "The suppression of secular restrictions has occurred in an astonishingly short period of time, and this change has rapidly manifested itself, above all, in freedom of speech and expression in a very few years; this has favored the large-scale eruption of sexuality in the mass media, which, in turn, have experienced a great increase in their scope, penetration and power. No longer transgressive and subversive, sex has been installed in the communication space—the public space *par excellence* at the present time—vanquishing all obstacles in a very short time. Sex has become communicational merchandise and, as such, a notable ingredient in the development of this market."

7. One of the most important TV personalities of 2009/2010 was Zulma Lobato, a transvestite whose character made evident that he was a man playing a woman. Lobato is old and not very attractive, and he only pretends to know how to dance and sing. He has appeared on many prime-time TV programs and willingly accepts being made fun of. Another popular TV personality in 2009/2010 was Ricardo Fort, a millionaire-turned-artist who also plays with sexual ambiguity, neither confirming nor denying that he is gay.

8. An "echo effect" often occurs among mass media in which one outlet appropriates what another initially displayed, in the process amplifying the emphasis on sex and eroticism that the original outlet deployed. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from the article "The Nymphomaniac Amalia Granata," published in Argentina's most important newspaper, *Clarín*, on January 23, 2010:

> You can't tell if she's hip, above it all, or really means it. But every time Amalia Granata takes to the microphone, she talks about sex. And unlike a young lady timidly relating her sexual fantasies, she does it "with no holds barred," letting the chips fall where they may. This is what she did during an interview with Gerardo Rozín when answering a questionnaire full of daring questions. Without preamble, the interviewer opened with . . . "Casual sex, yes or no?" which [Granata], the ex-girlfriend of a soccer player called Fabbiani, answered with a hyper-natural, exaggerated, "Obviously." Specifically, she clarified that she is not prejudiced, and if she likes somebody, she has no problem having sex with him on the spot. Minutes later she laid it on, claiming that on many occasions "she wanted to die" when she found herself in a house with a man she had agreed to sleep with but didn't like anymore, and that more than once she had taken her casual conquests to her apartment in Rosario or Buenos Aires. . . . The crowning touch in the interview came when she made a declaration apparently destined to turn on the entire male audience: "I love oral sex; I like doing it myself more than having it done to me. Seeing a man's pleasure is what I get pleasure from; I don't understand women that find oral sex disgusting." At this point

in the interview, Rozín's smile seemed frozen, disconcerting an audience that didn't know whether they were watching an interview or a Playboy program.

9. For instance, Rosalind Gill (2003, 101–104) has pointed out that the current "sexing up" of culture involves a "deliberate re-sexualisation and re-commodification of bodies" that, while incorporating depictions of women as "knowing, active and desiring," works only to install a feminine "self policing narcissistic gaze." The "sexual subjectification" that new popular representations appear to offer women are simply mechanisms of "objectification in [a] new and even more pernicious guise" (Gill 2003, 105). What Gill is pointing out here is that popular culture offers women only a limited and commodified vision of active sexuality.

10. We thank Gustavo Blázquez for bringing this detail to our attention.

11. See the website at http://www.cosmohispano.com.

12. Another reason many young men and women equivocate is well described by Bauman (1999, 32), who points out that

> postmodern culture eulogizes the delights of sex and encourages the investment of every nook and cranny of the Lebenswelt with erotic significance. It prompts the postmodern sensation-seeker to develop in full the potential of the sexual subject. On the other hand, though, the same culture explicitly forbids treating another sensation-seeker as a sex object. The trouble is, however, that in every erotic encounter we are subjects as well as objects of desire and—as every lover knows only too well—no erotic encounter is conceivable without the partners assuming both roles, or, better still, merging them into one. Contradictory cultural signals covertly undermine what they overtly praise and encourage. This is a situation pregnant with psychic neuroses all the more grave for the fact that it is no longer clear what the "norm" is and therefore what kind of "conformity to the norm" could heal them.

13. The term "*pibe*" has been used in Argentina for more than a century; the difference is in how the term is used now by young men and women.

14. Míguez and Semán (2006) demarcate the theoretical conditions for fulfilling this demand.

CHAPTER 1

1. We thank Juan "Pollo" Raffo and Nicolás Ospina for their invaluable assistance in writing the musicological part of this chapter.

2. For a discussion of the musicological aspects of cumbia, see Wade 2000.

3. The Czech-American virtuoso Jan Hammer popularized the use of the synthesizer's pitch-bend control in the 1970s, and it has been part of jazz and rock-and-roll keyboard players' repertoire ever since.

4. José Jorge de Carvalho (1999, 6–7) defines a musical genre as, at one and the same time, a rhythmic pattern, a percussive pattern, a precise and recognizable harmonic circle or sequence, and a fixed literary trope that, taken all together, evoke social, historic, geographic, divine, or mental landscapes. Viewed in this light, cumbia cannot be considered a single genre because the landscapes it evokes differ according to the context that gave them rise; in addition, internal differences that are recognized by both producers and consumers are structured musically and poetically into each type of cumbia.

5. This can be seen in different areas of popular culture—for example, in the revaluing of happiness in televised variety shows and series such as "Los Roldán"; in the exacerbating of sensuality and magic realism in the stories of Washington Cucurto; in the exoticizing of "Festimex," which combines cumbia and electronic music; and in kitsch, such as the annual homage paid to Gilda in the art space called "Belleza y Felicidad" [Beauty and Happiness].

6. While the aim of adopting a uniform and elegant style in traditional cumbia is to make the leader stand out in contrast to the band, in cumbia villera the leader marks his presence by ruptures and eccentricities, although there is also room for individualizing on the musicians' part.

7. Violence and addiction in cumbia villera lyrics are the topic of several scholarly works: see, e.g., Cragnolini 2004, 2006; De Gori 2005; Martín 2004; Míguez 2004, 2006; Pardo 2006, 2007; Serpa 2009. On cumbia villera as "protest music," see Massone and Buscaglia 2006; Pardo 2006, 2007; Serpa 2009.

8. When we refer to Argentina in this chapter, our point of departure is the cultural influence the city of Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires exert on the rest of the country. This should not, however, be taken to mean that geographical variations do not exist. The popularity of certain artists and subgenres at any particular time may or may not be echoed by cumbieros in the provinces.

9. From this point forward, the term "*bailanta*" is used to refer not to chamamé dancers and the places where they danced but only to cumbia and related genres in the mid-1980s.

10. In 1947, internal immigrants living in Buenos Aires made up 42 percent of the total population. That proportion increased to 69 percent in 1960.

11. The members were Castellón (Costa Rica); Carlos Cabrera (Peru); Sergio Solar (Chile); and Hernán Rojas, Enrique Salazar, and Rafael Aedo (Colombia). They were later joined by Miguel Loubet, the only Argentine in the original group.

12. It is fairly common on the Argentine tropical music scene for bands to have an owner. As such, this person has the legal right to use the name of the group and to change its members (even the lead singer), who are considered employees he hires for pay. This is not common in other Argentine musical genres such as rock and folk music.

13. Unlike *boites*, where recorded music is played, *confiterías* are cafés that offer live music and are frequented by the middle and upper-middle classes.

14. Dance clubs such as Fantástico and Metrópolis are reminiscent of middle-class discotheques. Their dark interiors are illuminated by strobe lights, drinks can be bought at bars, and some even have VIP sections. A DJ plays music and acts as emcee. The biggest difference between dance clubs and discotheques (apart from the fact that customers are frisked before entering the former) may be the presence of a stage where musicians play each night.

15. According to an article in *Clarín* (Almi 1999), sales of 6 million records throughout Argentina and of fifteen hundred dance club tickets a week in Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires in the late 1990s brought in $130 million per year.

16. The most important cumbia website in Argentina, and one of the most important in Latin America, is www.muevamueva.com. According to data published on the website www.trustgauge.com (April 19, 2004), www.muevamueva.com was the most popular website devoted to Latin music in the world in terms of downloads and duration of visits. In the city of Buenos Aires and in Greater Buenos Aires, hundreds of so-called cyber-stores—sometimes more than one per block—have opened to provide affordable access to the Internet.

17. Gobello and Oliveri (2003, 80) list eighty singers and groups that achieved success in the mid-1980s and 1990s.

18. This did not mean, however, that the presence of bailanta on Corrientes was considered "normal." When the groups Green and Red sold out the twenty-five-hundred-seat Gran Rex Theater on a Monday afternoon in 1998, the event was considered novel enough to merit a news story headlined "The Buenos Aires Autumn Went Tropical": see www.clarin.com/diario/1998/06/10/c-00401d.htm (accessed October 8, 1998).

19. According to Gobello and Oliveri (2003, 75–76), Alcides was a farmworker who for many years combined his musical career with milk delivery. Miguel "Conejito" Alejandro and Adrián of The Black Dice were construction workers, and Ricki Maravilla was an electrician.

20. Gilda recorded her first CD in 1992, adding three more between 1993 and 1995. They were relatively successful in the tropical music market, especially the third CD, *Corazón Valiente*, which brought her some fame. For the circumstances that made her the most important female cumbia artist and led to her status as a popular saint, see Martín 2006b.

21. The Cámara Argentina de Productores de Fonogramas y Videogramas [Argentine Chamber of Audio and Video Producers] does not keep records on the sale of CDs by tropical music artists, but according to record company sources, *Entre el Cielo y la Tierra* sold more than 1 million copies, an unprecedented achievement in this genre.

22. According to an estimate published in *Clarín*, record sales for the year were 6 million, plus 50 percent for pirated copies, with dance-club tickets bringing in $450,000 each weekend from three hundred dance halls in Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires: see www.clarin.com/diario/1999/02/08/e-03101d.htm (accessed September 26, 2000).

23. According to *Clarín*, the top ten groups for both recording labels sold 2.8 million copies, 1.2 million of which were the five CDs recorded by the recently deceased Gilda: see www.clarin.com/diario/1999/02/08/e-03101d.htm (accessed September 26, 2000).

24. Ráfaga has performed in Spain, the United States, and various Latin American countries. The group's CD *Imparables* was one of the top ten in sales in 1999, and its success was crowned by an invitation to appear on "Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand" [Lunch with Mirtha Legrand], one of the most traditional programs on Argentine television.

25. Pérez (2004, 126) records similar situations among other tropical artists. Blázquez (2004) does the same for Cordoban cuarteto groups.

26. We speak here of cumbia villera in general, even though differences exist within the genre. The cumbia "cabeza" [head] primarily defends drug and alcohol consumption, while "villera" denounces the poverty and exclusion of shantytown dwellers. Other, similar types of cumbia include cumbia rapera, cumbia del barrio, cumbia callejera, and cumbia gansta or chabón. Although these subgenres are relevant to some Argentines, they are not analyzed here because their approach to gender issues is very similar.

27. The two men are not related.

28. Pablo Lescano's activity as a musical producer did not stop there. He created and produced two more groups: Jimmy y Su Combo Negro (which performed Colombian cumbia) and Amar y Yo (which combined the romantic and villera cumbia styles).

29. This percentage surpasses the global total for the same year. According to Ana María Ochoa (2003, 77), pirated CDs accounted for 40 percent of sales globally in 2001.

30. Years later, Yerba Brava switched from cumbia villera to romantic cumbia.

31. For many years, Fermín Cerdán, the creator and owner of www.muevamueva.

com, tried to persuade the city government in Buenos Aires to include cumbia in the mass cultural events it organized.

32. The program "Siempre Sábado" was five hours long, and "Tropicalísima.com" was three hours long. Both aired on Argentina's América 2 channel. "Pasión Tropical" (Channel 9) was four hours long. Currently, Saturday programming includes "Pasión Popular" (Channel 7), which is two hours long, and "Pasión de Sábado" (América 2), which is five hours long.

CHAPTER 2

1. The work of Pacini Hernandez (1995) on bachata is exemplary in many regards, and some parallels exist between the Dominican and Argentine social and economic contexts. According to Pacini Hernandez, traditional gender roles underwent changes as men found preserving their status as breadwinners increasingly difficult and women were compelled to enter the workforce. Women gained sexual and social flexibility as they worked more and men worked less, while men became more dependent on women and thus had less control over them. With less-stable home and work environments, men tended to spend more time in bars and brothels. Pacini Hernandez observes that many lyrics revolve around the bar, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the shantytown, a dark and all-encompassing locale of deviant behavior.

Pacini Hernandez notes that the sexist elements of bachata music are found in not only its explicit language regarding women but also its manner of referring to them. By the 1980s, more than half of the music Pacini Hernandez was studying referred to women only indirectly in the third person (*ella*), whereas the more romantic singers of previous decades directly addressed the objects of their love and affection (and sometimes deliverers of their emotional pain) as "you" [*tu*]. The newer bachatas are primarily directed toward other men, which serves to distance the woman from the singer and further objectifies her. No two-way correspondence or connection between men and women exists in the music; instead, women are only talked at or talked about. Songs often are delivered in a didactic tone, serving to teach men how to interpret women's acts of freedom (of choice and of expression) to reinforce patriarchal values. Bachata music is dominated by men, so there is no balance in the messages it delivers. Pacini Hernandez notes that only two female bachateras were widely known at the time of her study.

2. Our use of the concept of a web of discourses that surrounds the emission and reception of the songs, instead of the more common concept of context, has the same theoretical origin as Richard Middleton's "conditions of audibility" (1990, 250). Middleton writes that "the idea of 'conditions of audibility' can be regarded as a rewriting of the social-historical and culturalist conception of *context* (reflected in, or conditioning, a text). Establishment of 'audibility' is thus a necessary precondition for the coming into operation of the signification processes." However we depart from Middleton in our use of "web of discourses." Taking into account what Middleton considers the most important dimensions of the condition of audibility—that is, the occasion where the music is performed—we believe that the disposition to attend such an occasion, the recognition of the codes that characterize the music that is performed, and the doxic presuppositions that surround the musical performance ("This is appropriate music for the occasion") are necessary but not sufficient to address the complex web of discourses that surrounds the emission and reception of the songs.

3. This is why the very well-thought-out textual analysis of cumbia villera lyrics by Cecilia Serpa is only partially illuminating. In a very interesting paper, she writes:

> Finally, we demonstrate how the self locates itself in a position of power with regard to both endogroup and exogroup subjects. The self is not only the figure that likes, desires, wants, can, etc.; it is also the one that asserts, orders, questions, and exclaims. Thus it is that an omnipresent enunciator, all-powerful and aggressive, is constructed within the text that also monopolizes the use of words, annulling the figure addressed, who is destined to silence and obedience. We believe that we have shown in this first stage of our research that the dominant ideology is reproduced in cumbia villera and that this ideological content is reproduced in the very act of enunciation. In other words, on the one hand, we have found a set of representations that reproduce socially accepted representations such as those justifying gender and juridical-political inequality; and on the other, the dominant discourse reappears in the very act of its enunciation: it is specifically present in the figure of the enunciator and the way he constructs the figure addressed. The asymmetry at the level of the representations that appear in the text is recapitulated in the ideological gesture of pronouncing the words: the I dominates the you, imposing silence and annulling the second person as a subject who can speak. The I appropriates language and leaves the you in the place of the "dispossessed." This feature reproduces and helps to naturalize a power structure symbolized by the asymmetry and violence characterizing the context in which the pheomenon is produced, circulates and is received. (Serpa 2006b, 12; see also Serpa 2007b)

4. Eloísa Martín has done pioneering work in this area and was the first to criticize positions such as Svampa's. To our knowledge, Martín was the first Argentine anthropologist to stress the importance of the activation of women that the cumbia villera scenario entailed, writing:

> Cumbia villera makes visible and possible a new feminine role—that is, the woman as an active subject of desire—and because of this sexual freedom, [she is] portrayed by others (men and women) as a "whore." Notwithstanding, these young women do not consider themselves as such, at least not in a negative sense. Rather, they take up positively and playfully the characteristics used to stigmatize them. . . . The innovation that cumbia villera brings is based on the nuances that the representation of women as prostitutes sets: precisely, the active role of women in sexual relationships. She is not waiting for male courtship anymore, she owns her desire, and when she changes sexual partners, she does so in search of her own pleasure. . . . This new and specific nuance in female sexuality shows that it is necessary [to evaluate] the possibility that, if every woman is a "whore," the adjective can sometimes be considered a stigma and sometimes a positive value. . . . In Latin American popular music in general, and in cumbia in particular, the feminine presence is marked by the roughly complete absence of women's voices. In spite of this, women have an active role in the cumbia world as consumers and dance performers. Therefore, instead of searching for women's voices exclusively in lyrics, we need to turn to dance performances and to discourses about those lyrics to analyze the new models of the feminine among working-class girls. . . . Through choreographic movements and aesthetic arrangements, the subjects articulate a series of meanings within a stylized set of behavior and poetic prescriptions. . . . Working-class girls play gender roles when performing the whore in many ways: (1) by dramatizing the

> lyrics of dance songs in nightclubs; (2) by offering their bodies to a gaze that is not exclusively masculine, often reproducing "exotic dancer" styles; (3) through dress codes and aesthetic self-presentation; (4) by regularly changing sexual partners; and (5) in homosexual or bisexual public displays. (Martín 2008, n.p.)

5. A reflexive observation that can question its own points of departure and supposed evidence is mandatory here. It must include the following: sexualized topics in androcentric contexts are frequently the object of a certain kind of sociology directed at the popular world that always finds machismo to be pervasive. The same criteria are not applied to analogous middle-class phenomena, which not only remain uncategorized from this perspective but are not even observed. The gently sadistic eroticism promoted in the lyrics of Soda Stereo, one of the most important rock nacional bands of the 1990s, and the blatantly kitschy and ironically machista lyrics of Auténticos Decadentes, another leading rock nacional band of the 1990s and 2000s, with their "Vení, Raquel; vení con los muchachos" [Come here, Raquel; come here with the boys], are not simply unimportant counterfactual instances.

We are talking here about bands and songs that have influenced the sensibility of middle-class youth for decades and that have left no topic (including sexually provocative and denigrating ones) untouched. This observation addresses not only a historical situation but the circumstances under which certain observations carry a dangerous double standard that characterizes as "savage" that which it does not understand.

6. While Bourdieu denounces domination using its own language and makes visible its exit points, some of the feminist literature denounces masculine domination without taking into account a certain margin of feminine agency that, although it does not comply with what most feminist writers understand as "plain agency," nevertheless is opposed to masculine dominant practices.

7. In Chapter 4, we show how important this kind of theoretical approach is for our understanding of women's sexuality as performed in the baile environment. It gives us a very interesting perspective from which to explain the performances of young cumbieras who enter dance clubs and engage in extremely sexualized portrayals. Not only do they not see these performances as threatening to them as women, but they also (and more importantly) see these portrayals as an opportunity to display their own agency as sensual beings, independent of the original (male-oriented) intentions of the songs.

8. Of course, we are fully aware, and endorse, some of the criticism leveled against some of third wave feminism's proposals, including that contained in Ayana Byrd's "What kind of transgressiveness is Kim enacting when she performs a femininity that mimics misogynistic patriarchal desires?" (Byrd 2004, 12; see also Levy 2005) and in R. Clair Snyder's "While third-wavers claim the mantle of being prosex, . . . the central issue at the heart of the sex wars—how to create gender equality when women enjoy female objectification (pornography), claim the right to make money servicing male sexual needs (prostitution), and eroticize relationships of inequality (sadomasochism)—has never been resolved. . . . Oftentimes, third-wave feminism seems to have morphed into being all about choice with little examination of how chosen desires are constructed or recognition of how an aggregation of individual choices can have a negative impact on gender relations at large" (Snyder 2008, 189).

However, we still regard the research avenues that third wave feminism has opened up as very important to understanding how sexuality is constructed and how issues of domination and empowerment, heteronomy and agency, are much more complex than second wave feminists thought.

9. An example of this kind of strategy is the attempt to take back the word "bitch" by some third wave feminists, a movement fueled by Wurtzel 1999.

10. This is a very complex statement that is impossible to understand without some background. Vélez is a kind of femme fatale of Argentine television, and her performance went well beyond any previous televised sexual dance. (She ended up pole dancing nude, with two male dancers pouring champagne over her bare breasts, on daytime TV.) At the same time, "*ser gauchita*," in the context of the interview, meant "helping" her partner or pleasing him when he wants oral sex. Therefore, Vélez projected the very complex dual image of a "*come hombres*" [maneater]—that is, a very assertive woman—who also wants to please and play with her partner when he wants oral sex.

11. *Piqueteros* are social activists from impoverished neighborhoods who usually block the streets to advance some kind of petition in terms of work, health, access to education, price controls, and the like.

12. During such television programs, the public can call in to vote for the performances they like the most.

13. *Página 12*, February 9, 2007, 17.

14. According to Argentine popular lore, female French prostitutes' specialty at the turn of the nineteenth century was oral sex. One must remember that at the time, Buenos Aires was a very important destination for immigrants seeking work (many of them men moving to Argentina without their families), and prostitutes came from all over the world to "serve" this population of longing men. One Jewish ring that brought prostitutes from Eastern Europe was so well organized that it had its own cemetery.

15. In July 2001, COMFER, highly concerned about the "obscene" content of cumbia villera lyrics, published a report by the Grupo de Investigación en Sustancias Tóxicas [Research Team on Toxic Substances] titled "Pautas de evaluación para los contenidos de la cumbia villera" [Guidelines for Evaluating the Content of Cumbia Villera]. For a remarkable analysis of this document, see Serpa 2006a.

Serpa shows that, from the document's very inception, COMFER was preoccupied with the possibility that cumbia villera, a cultural artifact originating in the popular sectors of Buenos Aires, could promote drug abuse among young middle-class *porteños*. COMFER, writes Serpa (2006a, 70), was "concerned less about the incitement to harmful, morally repugnant behavior than that middle- and upper-class adolescents understand such incitement and adopt the behavior. We thus find COMFER adopting an attitude that, from its perspective, appears to protect the public only when a certain sector of society is deemed at risk while remaining inactive when only sectors defined as marginal are affected." Interestingly, COMFER had nothing to say about the explicitly sexist language of the genre. Although the document prohibited only language that promoted drug use, many cumbia villera groups started to disguise the words linked to sex and sexuality as well.

16. The female protagonist's depiction as a "treacherous woman" is similar to the portrayal of women in Mexican *charritas coloradas* [red jokes]. *Charritas coloradas* "form the core of the folklore of . . . machismo and [their] unvarying message is 'sadism toward women and symbolic threats of sodomy toward other males'" (Pena 1998, 274). *Charritas coloradas* often reduce women to a state of sexual passivity, depicting them as objects for the sadistic amusement of macho men (Pena 1998). Thus, in direct correspondence to "Entregadora del Marrón," *charritas coloradas* sometimes portray women as "heartless wenches who betray their lovers without feeling any remorse" (Pena 1998, 275).

17. In a very interesting paper, Serpa (2007a, 4) points out that the CD *100% Negro Cumbiero*, by Damas Gratis, contains several uses of the syntagma "*flor de*" [such a big],

which in the live version is complemented by the attribute "*turra*" [bitch]. Two take the form of loose panties, and two take the "she is completely drunk" form: "The context in which these forms appear shows that the shift occurs when, instead of playing the role of the I's sexual partner, the woman does so with one or more other guys, a transformation mainly linked with 'betrayal' or considered a consequence merely of the sexual preferences of a woman, who is damned for seeking pleasure for its own sake. In these contexts, the same attributes that expressed positive characteristics before . . . become negative characteristics now . . . : sexual freedom and stimulant usage (in this case alcohol). In this sense, the basis for evaluating the remaining participants is once again the I."

18. It is important to clarify that this type of symbolic construction is not exclusive to cumbia villera. In the 1990s, Macaferri y Asociados, a band often seen on television, popularized the song "Bombacha Veloz" [Fast Panties]. Thus, this type of expression had already achieved important media presence before cumbia villera was born, but only in comic venues that targeted mostly men, although in this particular example, there were no age distinctions.

19. As we pointed out in the Introduction, the preference for casual relationships that the song advances occurs not only in cumbia villera and among the social actors who dance to the genre but also in other locales in which young people interact. A good example of some of the changes that appear to be under way in gender relations in very different social settings can be found in the concept of "hooking up," which is replacing the idea of dating on some American college campuses. In a study of rape culture in college fraternities conducted by Ayres Boswell and Joan Z. Spade, a male respondent offered a definition of hooking up as "when you are really drunk and meet up with a woman you sort of know, or possibly don't know at all and don't care about. You go home with her with the intention of getting as much sexual, physical pleasure as she'll give you, which can range anywhere from kissing to intercourse, without any strings attached" (Boswell and Spade 1998, 187). Yet the women who participated in the study viewed hooking up as having relations only with men they cared about and as entailing not sexual intercourse but kissing or petting (Boswell and Spade 1998). The women who did hook up with frat brothers were subjected to derogatory remarks, such as "Who is that slut?" (Boswell and Spade 1998). The description of the gender relations in Boswell and Spade's study closely relates to how María Rosa is portrayed, in that although most of the college women were severely chastised for their sexual activity, they continued to hook up with men because they enjoyed the pleasure of sexual activity. The Argentine version of hooking up is known as *transa*, and such casual relationships are also valued by some Argentine girls and referenced in songs by cumbieras such as La Piba.

20. This is not a folk anachronism. In the everyday life of the popular sectors, "*compadrazgo*," a non-egalitarian, fictive kinship relationship that is prevalent among women, mediates women's relationships with men. It implies support networks and collaboration, as well as hierarchies that center on a particularly valued man. Women in this context are not just friends but also sisters-in-law, daughters-in-law, and so on. These relationships, which often are highly vertical, are shaken if any agent in the network behaves in a way that challenges the network's expectations. The "she doesn't care" of the song can carry severe consequences for these women. On a related note, among many members of the popular sectors, women's status is one of subordinated inclusion in hierarchical family units that have their center in a masculine vertex. Women are "*de*" [belong to] fathers, husbands, or brothers, and from a symbolic point of view that is still hegemonic (although less so in actual practice), women who work outside the household threaten the value of the household.

21. "Licentious" is another of the several adjectives used to describe women who, according to men's point of view, desire sex without love and reproduction. Interestingly, Peter Lyman found in his study of sexist jokes in U.S. fraternities that women were often thought about as sexual objects. In such jokes, "intimacy is split from sexuality in order to erotize the male bond, thereby creating an instrumental sexuality directed at women. The separation of intimacy from sexuality transforms women into 'sexual objects,' which both justifies aggression at women by suspending their relationship to men and devalues sexuality itself, creating a disgust at women as the sexual 'object' unworthy of intimate attention" (Lyman 1998, 178). The male protagonist in the lyrics to "María Rosa" also distances himself from any type of intimate or serious relationship because he views María Rosa as a purely sexual object that does not deserve his respect; he sees her as simply a source of sexual gratification.

22. In the bolero, writes Aparicio (1998, 134–135), "the object of desire is systematically alluded to mostly through her parts, yet very infrequently, if at all, as a whole subject who thinks and feels. . . . Indeed, the most central metaphor for love, *corazón* [heart], suggests the compartmentalization of the woman or the beloved into one of her bodily organs or parts as a prerequisite for its possession."

23. Although salsa has nothing to do musically with cumbia villera, we found Aparicio's book very helpful in understanding our subject matter. Her textual analysis of the lyrics basically coincides with ours, and some of the comments she received from interviewees are very similar to the comments we heard.

24. Kimmel (2005, 93) points out that these type of images "provide a world . . . of eager, available women capable of acting on sexual desire as men understand it. But most men realize that these earlier worlds of unchallenged male domination—of infantile omnipotence and sexualized control over the mother—are gone forever."

25. "Language, particularly sexual slang, is also used in a process of expelling male sexual anxieties, self doubts and confusions. . . . [This kind of approach] helps us to conceptualize male sex talk as embodying more than a simple process of sexual harassment" (Haywood and Mac An Ghaill 1996, 55).

26. As Manuel (1998, 18) points out, "Some expressions of misogyny in popular [Caribbean] music may be indicative less of the actual social subjugation of women than of angry male backlash and resentment against genuine female emancipation. . . . [T]he prodigious amount of overt misogyny in dance-hall might indicate a *greater*, rather than lesser, degree of female autonomy in Jamaican society." Manuel's analysis is in line with Kimmel's statement that it is "an ironic consequence of the *success* of feminism that men, in their fantasies, sometimes need to return to that earlier historical era in which their word was law and their desire was the only desire that mattered" (Kimmel 2005, 93).

On the basis of analyses of violence in North America, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and South America, Sara Hautzinger (2003, 103) arrived at the similar conclusion that violence is used by men to try to compensate for perceived deficits in masculine control, confidence, sense of worth, and prerogatives: "If violence does in fact serve as a last ditch resource for power, then in contexts where the cultural value of violence is associated with masculinity and male power, the use of violence may be integral to counterbalancing traditional masculine roles being disallowed, questioned, or threatened. At the same time, this may be a short-term transitional effect."

27. Although it is accurate to translate "*patas*" as "legs," readers should be aware that the proper Spanish term "*patas*" refers to animals' legs, not human legs. However, in Argentina it is common to use "*patas*" when referring to human legs—for example, in phrases such as "*Me duelen las patas*" [My legs hurt] or "*Jugando al fútbol me dieron*

una patada" [While I was playing soccer, somebody (used his legs to) kick me]. Therefore, although one might be tempted to say that in a song titled "The Cat" [Whore] using the term "*pata*" emphasizes the animal nature of the girl in question, this interpretation would not be appropriate in the Argentine context.

28. "*Se la banca*" is much more complicated than "She is proud of it," because the word "*banca*" carries connotations of endurance and suffering that are absent from the English word "proud."

29. Pacini Hernandez (1995, 180–181) and Manuel (1998, 21), respectively, note similar findings among female bachateras of the 1960s and female Jamaican DJs.

30. The singer states this before she starts to sing this particular song.

31. The singer states this at the end of the song.

32. Kathleen Gerson (1987) examines the trend among women to take a less-domestic route in their lives in which long-term relationships, marriage, and children are either put off or nonexistent. Many of the women choosing non-domestic lifestyles have been involved in unstable heterosexual relationships and realize that men may not always be there for them. She states, "The recognition that a man would not always be there to depend on prompted the development of increased self-reliance through work and the postponement (and occasionally rejection) of marriage and motherhood" (Gerson 1987, 119). Experience with tumultuous relationships and the possibility of having a male partner who is not stable is also a factor in why more women distrust marriage and view motherhood as a risk. Something similar seems to be occurring among poor young women in Argentina, above all because of the high rate of imprisonment that affects men of the popular sectors.

33. This expression possibly alludes to "We Are Also Fieritas." "*Fierita*" [little beast] is the term used by disadvantaged groups in Argentina for the new type of young men. Thus, they are describing themselves as the "new female" [*fieritas*].

34. This vindication of alcohol and drug abuse and delinquency as activities that are not only for men to practice is again addressed by La Piba in "Las Pibas Vagas" [The Lazy Kids].

35. In this context, "*negro*" does not have any negative connotation. On the contrary, it is an affectionate nickname applied to a person she knows and likes.

36. When La Piba shouts this from the stage, many women in the audience raise their arms and wave their hands.

37. Trying to solve the "pleasure or danger dilemma" that is at the core of the debate between second wave and third wave feminism—that is, how to respect the multiple sexualities of women without still problematizing the dangers for those sexualities involved in the masculine, objectifying gaze—Snyder (2008, 190–191) writes:

> One possible solution to the "pleasure/danger dilemma" as articulated by Melanie Waters using theoretical tools a la Butler is to see the "expansion of the pornographic imaginary" (Waters 2007, 256) as a solution to the key problem: that pornography constructs a rigid and hierarchal vision of male dominance and gratification as well as female submission and objectification that degrades and disadvantages women and undergirds patriarchal relations throughout society. Once this traditional vision of gender relations becomes decentered through the proliferation of alternative pornographic subjectivities, it will no longer be hegemonic; it will be reduced to just one type of relationship among many. Third-wave feminist approaches that draw on postmodern understandings of discourse allow for this new solution.

In the same vein, Kimmel (2005, 66) documents that "other women are distrustful of feminist-inspired efforts to combat pornography. Some have claimed that pornography has helped them to break away from traditional passive definitions of women's sexuality and to claim a more active, vital sexuality. Some women are even attempting to create their own pornography about lustful women who act on sexual feelings and initiate sexual encounters." We think that songs like "Pamela Chu" are doing precisely that.

38. Men who had the least interaction with women told the most hostile, misogynist jokes. They defended these jokes by differentiating between intimacy and sexuality, which ultimately turned women into sexual objects (Lyman 1998, 176, 178).

CHAPTER 3

1. For a path-breaking theoretical discussion about the complex process of identity construction see Holstein and Gubrium 2000.

2. The ethnographic data we present in this book are part of fieldwork that started in late 2005 and continues at this writing. During this extended time period, we have interviewed musicians and followers of different genres of popular music favored by young people in Buenos Aires. Because of the peculiar characteristics of the cumbia villera scene—that is, a genre whose public is very young (thirteen to mid-twenties) and belongs to the popular sectors—we could not do the bulk of the ethnographic work ourselves and had to rely on young interviewers whose social networks included people who follow the genre. Cumbia villera followers are highly suspicious of adults, even more so if those adults are not from their own socioeconomic background, and our presence on the scene (Vila is in his late fifties and Semán is in his mid-forties) could have been detrimental to the collection of meaningful ethnographic data. This was confirmed by the owners of a couple of bailes where we wanted to observe the scene, who politely discouraged us from doing so. In addition, a very important part of the fieldwork was to dance with cumbia villera followers, which by necessity required young ethnographers. For all of these reasons, we relied on our research team to conduct the bulk of the interviews and the ethnographic work on the bailes. Carolina Spataro, Malvina Silba, and José Garriga Zucal did most of the interviews, and Malvina Silba and David Drutman undertook observation in the bailes.

3. Rafa was eighteen and lived in Rafael Calzada, a poor suburban neighborhood in the first industrial corridor. He worked odd jobs here and there and had adopted a style that resembled the *fieritas* common in shantytowns and poor neighborhoods. The interviews we conducted with people who were waiting in line were brief, which is why we quote only what the boys said in response to direct questions the interviewer, José Garriga, posed to them. The interviews we conducted in the neighborhoods, which were much longer (some of them lasting four hours), we quote at length in the text.

4. "*Pasadas*" is a very difficult term to translate, because it simultaneously invokes several concepts that have their own words in English. Literally, "*pasadas*" means that these girls have missed some mark or time period in the sense that they have "passed" the event (the idea of "to move past"—i.e., the transitive and intransitive verb to move past or through a place or past a person). But the way the term is used among the Argentine popular sectors refers to the idea of having crossed moral boundaries in terms either of alcohol or drug consumption or sexual behavior—or more likely, both, with sexual behavior as an effect of intoxication. We think that the American slang term "wasted" does not work in this context, because it refers only to inebriation, and "passed out" can refer to

something for which they do not have responsibility. "Out of control" is perhaps close, but it does not capture the entire meaning of "*pasadas*."

5. Gary Barker (2005, 126–127) found a similar scenario in his research on young people in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, the Brazilian equivalent of the Argentine villas miserias, where cumbia villera originated, who attend *baile funk* [funk dances]: "The music is deafening; conversation is all but impossible. Many youth are dancing; nearly all the dance steps consist of pelvic thrusts and simulations of sexual intercourse. During one song, a young woman of 15 sings about how much girls from the *favela* adore sex. The lyrics say that all the girls from the *favela* like 'it' in the mouth, the vagina, the anus, and like it all the time. . . . [Several young women said] that when they go to the dances, guys pass their hands on their bodies without asking or insinuate openly that they want to have sex. Some of the young men countered by saying that girls go voluntarily to the dances and often dress provocatively when they do. One young woman defended her right to dress however she wants without that implying that any boy who wants can touch her."

6. Marcos was eighteen and a high-school student living in Burzaco, a lower-middle-class suburb south of the city of Buenos Aires.

7. "*Están más regaladas, siempre se gana*" is very difficult to translate. "*Regaladas*" comes from "*regalo*" [gift]. In this context, what the interviewee wanted to convey was that the girls are so inebriated that they offer themselves as "gifts" to any young man who is willing to accept them. What an American college student told Boswell and Spade (1998, 190) comes close to the meaning of "*regaladas*": "A first year man even claimed that when women get drunk, they invite sex. He said, 'Girls get so drunk here and then come to us. What are we supposed to do? We are only human.'"

8. The "more or less" here is not a loose use of an English expression; it refers to the fact that both men and women often arrive at the bailes having already consumed some amount of alcohol at what is called "*la previa*," or a pre-gathering that usually occurs between 10:00 P.M. and 12:00 A.M. Young people meet at somebody's house or on a street corner and go together to the bailes. Once they have arrived, the consumption of alcohol increases exponentially.

9. Confirming that this is neither an exclusive cumbia villera trend nor something that occurs in this social sector only, Pérez and Piñero (2003) describe very similar "*transas*" [uncommitted, fast relationships] at dance halls for the middle classes.

10. Sergio was seventeen and was unemployed at the time of the interview. He had dropped out of high school. Flaco, Daniel, and Gustavo, also seventeen-year-old high-school dropouts, were "*pibes chorros*" [thieving kids], who robbed houses and stole cars to make a living. All of them lived in a poor neighborhood in Lavallol, a suburb in the second industrial corridor.

11. Pedro was eighteen and lived in a shantytown in Longchamps, a suburb in the second industrial corridor. He had not finished high school and worked in construction.

12. "*Cheto*" refers to upper-middle-class youth. It is derived from "*concheto*," which, at the same time, is derived from "*concha*" [pussy]. It is a derogatory term originally coined by rock nacional fans to refer to those people of higher economic standing who listened to international rock and other foreign genres but not rock nacional. In current parlance, "*cheto*" refers to those who usually listen to marcha (electronic) music.

13. Mateo was twenty-nine and lived in the middle-class suburb of Remedios de Escalada, in the southern part of Greater Buenos Aires. He worked as a DJ at a nightclub in the area near his home. He was also a former drummer with a cumbia villera band and a fan of La Nueva Luna [The New Moon], a romantic cumbia band.

14. Nacho was one of the boys Malvina Silba followed in the bailes for more than six months. The interview was done two years after the baile events, and Nacho was twenty at the time. He worked in unskilled odd jobs and lived in a poor neighborhood in Lavallol, in the second industrial corridor.

15. For a thorough analysis of this interview and of how women are acquiring attitudes and behavior previously considered masculine, see Silba and Vila 2010.

16. "*Bagarto*" is a very interesting new name to refer to what young Argentine boys consider very ugly girls. The word comes from a combination of "*bagallo*," an old Argentine argot term used to refer to something ugly, and "*lagarto*" [lizard], supposedly a very ugly animal.

17. In Argentina, one of the most important gestures men use to emasculate other men is touching their butts.

18. "*Calladitas*" literally means that they do not speak much; they are silent. In this context, Nacho wanted to convey the difference between girls who have relations with other boys while they are in committed relationship but keep those relationships secret and girls who openly pursue those other relationships. "*Hacértela calladita*" means doing something but keeping it hidden.

19. As Lillian Rubin (1991, 5, 46) points out, "In the brief span of one generation—from the 1940s to the 1960s—we went from mothers who believed their virginity was their most prized possession to daughters for whom it was a burden. . . . [Virginity was no longer] a treasure to be safeguarded [but] a problem to be solved."

20. This type of discourse seems to be widespread in contemporary society. We find similar arguments in the United States, where, after being raped, high-school-age girls are assumed to have willingly had sex (even if they were unconscious at the time). The term "slut" is then used to justify the very act that produced the identity in the first place. In other words, when a girl is raped and consent is assumed, she is designated a "slut"; however, because she is a slut, she cannot have been raped. As Tanenbaum (2000, 141–142) points out, "A high school rape victim as a uniquely difficult dilemma. The rape itself transforms her, in the eyes of her classmates, into a 'slut.' Of course, calling a rape victim a slut makes no sense: it's like accusing the pedestrian victim of a hit-and-run driver of being reckless. So why do teenagers (and adults) do it? Boys no doubt fear sexual rejection and therefore don't want to consider that a girl might say no and mean it. Girls need to find a reason for rape and to separate themselves from the raped classmate because they worry that they could easily be the next victim. For both boys and girls, calling the rape victim a slut surrounds the source of their anxiety—the raped girl—with a sense of order and reason."

According to Tanenbaum (2000, 179), the issue is complicated because "the rape victim is caught in a double bind. First, she may not be believed when she claims she's been raped. If she has been sexually active, many people will find it hard to believe that she is capable of saying no (or that she has a right to say no once she has said yes). And since the sexual double standard stigmatizes 'bad' girls, any girl who has been sexually active and then reports being raped may be accused of lying to avoid the social stigma. Second, people now regard her as 'easy' and 'slutty,' leaving her vulnerable for another act of sexual violence."

Another author who explores similar issues in the United States is Emily White (2003).

21. See Tanenbaum (2000, 179) for a very interesting parallel between the Argentine scenario and the scenario in American middle schools.

22. As we pointed out, something similar appears to occur in the United States, where girls are characterized as sluts by their high-school or middle-school peers, and because of that reputation they are expected to have sex with boys. Yet there is a kind of double bind here, because if they do not have sex, then boys do not like them, yet if they do have sex, then they are not respected. Once the "slut" identity has been forced on them, they have little choice in much else (see Tanenbaum 2000; White 2003).

23. Tim Beneke found something similar in his study of rape in the United States. When men blame women for rape, the women's appearance and behavior are regarded as a form of speech. "A logical extension of 'she asked for it' is the idea that she wanted what happened to happen; if she wanted it to happen, she deserved for it to happen. Therefore, the man is not to be blamed" (Beneke 1998, 440) In addition, Beneke points out that if a woman who is viewed as attractive and dresses attractively is raped, the mentality exists that because the women "attacked" her male attacker using her weapons, he should be permitted to counterattack with his. In this way, women become victims of their own beauty.

24. Agustín was twenty and lived in Quilmes, a lower-middle-class suburb. He worked as an errand boy for an accounting firm. The interview was conducted in the "Pasión de Sábado" waiting line.

25. Fran was nineteen and, at the time of the interview, was unemployed. He had dropped out of high school and lived with his girlfriend and their child in his girlfriend's parents' house in a poor neighborhood in Lavallol. For a thorough analysis of this interview and how women are acquiring attitudes and behaviors once considered male, see Silba and Vila 2010.

26. We use the term "masculinization" here only in order to be understood. Properly, the term should be "under erasure," to use Derrida's idea, because what we are trying to convey is how power is enacted by girls who have fought for and attained new positions of power in Argentine society. That some of these performances of power coincide with typical male behavior is not by chance, because men traditionally were the principal enactors of many power relationships.

27. We use the term "middle-class imagined scenarios" instead of "middle-class scenarios" because much of what we have found among young people of the popular sectors also occurs among middle-class youngsters. Traumatic episodes of domestic violence among middle-class couples have occupied the front pages of newspapers in Argentina lately, among them the tragic death of the wife of the drummer of the rock chabón band Callejeros.

28. Although this is a male discourse about women's behavior (we did not have the opportunity to hear a woman telling us similar things), it is important because it shows how some boys imagine what girls do.

29. This has been reported as occurring in other locales, as well, such as Brazil, Nigeria, and the United States: see Barker 2005.

30. Karina told us a similar story. She had established a relationship with a much older neighbor to try to "rescue" him from his alcoholism. They lived together and had a small daughter. According to Karina, he had stopped drinking altogether. For more details, see Silba and Vila 2010.

31. Cristian was fifteen and Zulma was sixteen. Both were students and lived in a poor neighborhood in Burzaco, a suburb of Buenos Aires.

32. Elbio was fourteen. He lived in a shantytown near Monte Grande, in the second industrial corridor. He was a high-school dropout and was unemployed at the time of the interview.

33. Alberto was eighteen and lived in a shantytown in Alejandro Korn, in the second industrial corridor. He worked at odd jobs near his neighborhood. Raúl was an eighteen-year-old factory worker who lived in a poor neighborhood in Lanus, a suburb in the first industrial corridor.

34. Some interviewees who pointed out that they liked cumbia villera when they wanted to have fun also vindicated the "message" and emotional potential of romantic cumbia.

35. The data we summarize here, which buttresses our analysis, correspond to fieldwork currently under way in a poor neighborhood of Greater Buenos Aires. In such an environment, we have moved from the baile to the broader everyday life world of our subjects. Martín (2004) pioneered the discovery of the direction of this transformation.

36. As Tanenbaum (2000, 20) points out, young people experience this in the completely different setting of American high schools: "In the realm of sexual choices we are light years beyond the 1950s. Today a teenage girl can explore her sexuality without getting married, and most do. By age eighteen over half of all girls and nearly three quarters of all boys have had intercourse at least once. Yet at the same time, a fifties-era attitude lingers: Teens today are fairly conservative about sex. . . . Teens may be having sex, but they also look down on others, especially girls, who are sexually active."

Tanenbaum (2000, 24) describes the particular case of girls in American high schools this way: "Teenage girls who are called sluts today experience slut-bashing at its worst. Caught between the conflicting pressures to have sex and maintain a 'good' reputation, they are damned when they do and damned when they don't. Boys and girls both are encouraged to have sex in the teen years—by their friends, magazines, and rock and rap lyrics—yet boys alone can get away with it. . . . It is the old system, but with a twist: Today's teenage girls have grown up after the feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. They have been told their whole lives that they can, and should, do anything that boys do. But soon enough, they discover that sexual equality has not arrived. Certain things continue to be the privilege of boys alone."

37. "*Cachivache*" is a category that, in its current usage, comes from the language of detention centers and designates inmates of the worst status (in the eyes of both other inmates and the police). At the same time, and showing how the moral category "respect" and its antonyms are related to the idea of "rescuing oneself," "*cachivache*" is also used to refer to somebody who cannot rescue himself, who does not have any self-control—that is, somebody who cannot stop using drugs and who does whatever is necessary to get them. In other words, "*cachivache*" is a person who does not have any moral code and is totally lost to drugs.

38. Tanenbaum found that, in American (white, suburban) high schools, the label "slut" was most often applied to a specific individual, a girl who was singled out as the school slut. Interestingly, even later in life—after the school years ended and, possibly, moving far away and losing touch with classmates—some American girls still felt the label's sting, and it often continued to have negative repercussions in their lives. Unlike the girls at the Argentine bailes, these American girls felt they had been singled out as *the* slut and thus could not escape from the label. The girls interviewed by Tanenbaum and White claimed that other girls often were more vicious than boys in applying the slut label and the boundaries of "proper femininity," even if in practice those girls also had sex or, alternatively, the one who had been labeled "slut" was not actually sexually active.

39. Cristobal was a twenty-four-year-old musician with a cumbia band who lived in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in the Lanus suburb of Buenos Aires.

40. Lucas was a seventeen-year-old high-school student in Sarandi, a working-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

41. Javier, a twenty-one-year-old university student, lived in a middle-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER 4

1. Here we have to anticipate a point that will avert possible misunderstandings about this chapter. As we have noted, it is quite possible to attribute pejorative interpretations of women to cumbia villera lyrics. This is borne out not only by possible interpretations of the lyrics, which always are polysemic, but also by the complaints of some of the genre's listeners. In consequence, we need to make clear that the meaning of this rejection of the lyrics in relation to their disrespect for women is not the same as the meaning that can be elaborated by a cultural critic who is compromised by what is considered politically or morally correct. Not all of the women we interviewed condemned the disrespect we refer to here in the same way. Some were offended by not being referred to in tender or loving terms; others were offended by the eschatological character of an expression. Thus, they were not necessarily offended by the subordinating intention grounded in a peculiar hierarchy of genders, the denial of a feminine voice, or women's reduction to an object-like condition. In the same vein, many interviewees rejected being addressed as "sluts" because they felt that the lyrics ignored the honorable status they believed they were due. Likewise, it is unclear, and therefore must be explained in each case, what is being affirmed when a girl is called a "slut" and what is being rejected or accepted in the qualification.

2. Pablo Alabarces and his colleagues (2008, 53) claim that many young women, after initially endorsing the genre, gradually distanced themselves from cumbia villera in reaction to its sexist and aggressive messages about women and asked for a return to the traditional romantic content of the cumbia genre.

3. Tina was eighteen and trying, with difficulty, to enter La Plata's main university. She lived in Burzaco, a southern suburb of Buenos Aires, and worked odd jobs to pay for her education. Her parents were typical working-class people.

4. "Damas gratis" was, historically, the way the dance halls advertised that on certain days, or at certain hours, women could enter "gratis" [without paying the entry fee]. The purpose was to encourage women to attend, since the presence of women would, in turn, encourage men to attend. The name of the band plays with the polisemy of the term "*gratis*" ["free," or "without cost"], which is also used in this way to refer to women.

5. "Productive pleasure" is Fiske's concept. According to Fiske (1989, 57), productive pleasure is the "pleasure which results from [a] mix of productivity, relevance, and functionality, which is to say that the meanings I make from a text are pleasurable when I feel that they are my meanings and that they relate to my everyday life in a practical, direct way."

6. See Manuel 1998 for a similar reaction among his interviewees. One of his West Indian students wrote, "Sometimes my friends and I laugh at such lyrics. If I were to take everything that was said negatively about women in the songs, I think I would be a very uptight person" (Manuel 1998: 18).

7. Susan Griffin (1981) advances a similar argument when she addresses the psychological costs of sexual objectification in pornography. Griffin speaks of the need for women to create a false self, to become the pornographic ideal of the woman. Even if we do not wholly agree with the idea of a "false self," her analysis resembles ours.

8. As Malvina Silba put in one of our ongoing discussions about the issue, "All women my age have danced at least a hundred times to 'Entregá el Marrón' [Surrender Your Ass], by Los Auténticos Decadentes, and this never made me or any of the other women feel that our femininity or human dignity had been attacked. We danced to it; we had a good time; we made a choo-choo train and got on with our lives and our thoughts. At any rate, there is the undeniable fact of a basically machista culture here that makes this kind of song possible, but what [women] do with that is another story. . . . Trini, for example, dies laughing at many of the things in the lyrics, among other reasons because she knows that she and her girlfriends aren't much like that, and in any event, when the lyrics refer to some of her 'secret' experiences, she laughs. She might remember it as something naughty but nothing more serious than that."

9. Trini was twenty. When the interview was conducted, she was working part time and on call at a vegetable stand near her home in San Vicente, a poor neighborhood in the second industrial corridor. She had dropped out of high school after several failed attempts to pass the ninth grade.

10. What the interviewee wanted to convey is the idea that cumbia villera's lyrics place the supposedly loose morality of women at center stage.

11. Mariana was a twenty-four-year-old high-school graduate who worked as a clerk in a small grocery store. She lived in Florencio Varela, a working-class suburb of Buenos Aires.

12. Lorena was twenty-one and was unemployed when the interview was conducted. She also had finished high school and lived in Florencio Varela.

Cecilia Serpa (2009) found very similar arguments in her outstanding research on cumbia villera forums. One of the participants in those forums stated, "'Your sister's great!!! [i.e., "I want to fuck your sister"]—what a disgusting lyric.' . . . I'm flipping out that we're reaching the kind of violence we're having right now. Unfortunately, I like the rhythm of this music, but there are really a lot of songs that disgust me when I hear them because they attack me as a girl." In her analysis, Serpa (2009, 19) points out that the participant

> likes the rhythm in spite of herself ("unfortunately") precisely because she feels insulted as a woman when listening to the lyrics of these songs. Other messages make clear that the same process for characterizing women (gender problem) in the lyrics extends to other social groups; thus, the question of social class is also present, as shown by [another] commentary . . . in the forum . . . where what is ugly (aesthetics) is associated with injustice (ethics), in other words, elements from two different orders are joined: "the lyrics are horrible, first because they irrationally attack women, and second, because they attack well-dressed people (THOSE WHO ARE CALLED CHETOS)." These commentaries elicit several observations. First, the content of the lyrics is evaluated separately, not only with regard to its linguistic form, but also to the music, the arrangement, the rhythm ("this is what 'zafa [is saved]'"), which allows some people to accept one aspect while rejecting another.

13. Manuel (1998, 14) found something similar among his interviewees, dancers to different Caribbean rhythms: "Most Caribbean popular music is in fact dance music, in which the literal meaning of the text may be functionally secondary to purely musical aspects providing rhythmic drive. Accordingly, students testified that they often ignore lyrics of songs, especially in the quintessential listening context of the dance floor."

14. In the same line of thought, Aparicio (1998, 214) says that one of her male interviewees "recognized his affective engagement and participation in this patriarchal discourse in spite of his ideological dissidence toward its semantic aspects and gender politics. Thus, he envisioned himself enjoying the pleasures of the song, its music and rhythms, without paying much attention to the words: 'I imagined myself dancing to this song. I could block out the words. I can see it being part of a good night.'"

Some of her female interviewees said:

> This is the type of song that people never listen carefully to the lyrics, people like to dance [to] it. . . . [I]t is not that people don't listen to the lyrics, you may sing something and not think about what is behind that simple lyric that you are listening to.
>
> Because you know the lyrics and you sing them, it doesn't mean that you share that opinion.
>
> I like the song because of the rhythm, not because of the lyrics. (Aparicio 1998, 227)

Considering these different forms of listening to songs, Aparicio (1998, 227) says, "Both men and women consistently referred to this mode of discriminatory listening as a practical tactic that allows them to enjoy the music without semantic dissonance. These observations speak to the need for scholars to identify the various types of listening practices that are deployed by particular audiences and molded by the spaces in which music is received. The Latina who mentioned . . . that she tends to listen to bolero lyrics more than to the texts of a salsa song is attesting to the ways in which the musical form itself always already prompts a process of emphasizing particular elements while subsuming or nullifying others. In addition, the particular social context also influences listening modes. At a party, talking to others and listening to music as background or while dancing, music may be received secondarily as a background staple that sets the ambience or as background sounds to other cognitive activities."

15. Flavia, Micaela, and their girlfriends were twenty-one and lived in Rafael Castillo and Aldo Bonzi, working-class neighborhoods in the first industrial corridor. All were employees of a hair salon.

16. Rosalind Coward (1984) reported similar findings in her study of the ways in which pop records are used in different contexts for different purposes by the same kind of people. Comparing the use of those records in discos and parties with their use at home, she found that when the same songs are listened to in the dance halls, they are used to support the transgression and negotiation of desire. When they are listened to at home, they are used to address the privatized nostalgia that surrounds women's roles at home.

17. Karina was fifteen and lived in Lavallol, a poor neighborhood in the second industrial corridor. She was a student and a part-time clerk in a grocery store and one of the girls who went dancing with Malvina Silba for six months.

18. "*La lechera*" [lit., "the milk sucker"] refers to women who swallow men's sperm while performing fellatio. We analyzed the song "La Piba Lechera" in Chapter 2.

19. Other people we interviewed did not agree with this statement. Our informants and our associate Malvina Silba (based on fieldwork in which she accompanied a group of adolescents in their dancing routine for six months) think that romantic cumbia and northern cumbia are very popular and that both genres are listened to and danced to a lot.

20. Northern cumbia is a subgenre of cumbia that is popular in northern Argentina and in the neighboring countries to the north (Bolivia and Peru). Many of the girls we interviewed referred to this kind of cumbia to compare it with the lack of romanticism of cumbia villera.

It is important to point out here that, to identify musical preferences within cumbia, participants were presented with an extended series of alternatives that helped them to find the subgenre they preferred. But these operations are not made on the basis of a unique, precise map. The categories emerge from chats with friends and partners who share information, they circulate in the media, or they can be advanced by musical leaders (DJs, musicians, television hosts, and so on). As a consequence, we must point out that the references to subgenres of cumbia that appear so clearly delineated in the narratives of girls we interviewed do not necessarily correspond to a clear lyrical or musical reference that sustains them, or even to a concrete and articulated series of oppositions among musical genres attached to possible interpretive communities. For some of the girls we interviewed, the terms "traditional cumbia" (related in some way to a Colombian version of cumbia that became popular in the 1960s) and "northern cumbia" had the same meaning, while for others, they were different not only from each other but also in relation to, for example, Santa Fe–style cumbia. Nevertheless, something we saw repeatedly in the commentaries of the girls we interviewed was a counterposing of cumbia villera with any other cumbia variant, in which cumbia villera was always identified as the subgenre that reviles women while other subgenres were valued for their romantic exaltation of the feminine figure. For a very good description of the different variants of cumbia that are now popular in Argentina, see Cragnolini 1998.

21. This does not mean that romantic cumbia, like bolero, is not a possible source of sexist and misogynist discourses and that it does not also reify women. What we want to show here is how different narrative identities (even those used by the same girl) are connected, in different forms, to lyrics and musical genres—one that supposedly respects women, and another that clearly disrespects them.

22. Another possibility, and a very common one in our sample, is that the girls who go dancing with groups of boys (friends, brothers, boyfriends) dance only with their acquaintances. This kind of dynamic generates other acts of violence around music, because it promotes the girls' constant defense by the boys to stop harassment by male "outsiders." In this dynamic, the young women not only have to fragment their identity; they also have to reinforce the hegemonic identity proposal that talks about their chastity and how defending that chastity is a "man thing." This particular dynamic was prominent in the group of adolescents Malvina Silba followed for six months.

23. "*Colaless*" refers to a bikini that is so brief that it allows a full view of the buttocks of the girl who wears it.

24. "*Cumbia sonidera*" is yet another term many of our interviewees used to distinguish subgenres. It refers to a style linked to the kind of cumbia the Mexican band Los Ángeles de Charlie play. Samanta was twenty-two and unemployed; Fernanda was sixteen and still in high school. Both lived in the Lomas de Zamora suburb.

25. Ana and Carina were twenty-two, Elizabeth was twenty, and Julia was twenty-three. Julia lived in Pablo Podestá, a poor neighborhood in the second industrial corridor. The rest of the group lived in the city of Buenos Aires. All worked as store clerks in their neighborhoods.

26. Debbie Weekes (2004, 145) also found this kind of narrative among African American interviewees who listened to and enjoyed "slack lyrics" and gangsta rap. They

clearly stated that what those lyrics say about girls applied not to them but to "other girls." Regarding "slack lyrics," they had this to say:

> ***Bianca:*** I said I don't mind slack lyrics, I don't really listen to them, it's the ones what apply to me. (*Justine starts singing a song to demonstrate.*)
> ***Justine:*** Your body's good!
> ***Bianca*** *(laughing)*: Yeah, them kind of songs, because my body's good! My body is good. It's not run-down.
> ***Justine:*** Because what they're chatting about is reality, 'cause it does happen. Say if they're cussing down people in the songs, how they're slack and they're dirty, sometimes it's true, 'cause you do meet people like that. Some of the songs relate to the slack women, some of the songs relate to the women with big . . . [vaginas] and all that. . . . [I]t is dirty-like, but I think it's true.
> ***Weekes:*** Some people say that slack lyrics degrade all women, so it makes all women look bad.
> ***Justine:*** No!
> ***Bianca:*** Women that say that are . . . the song probably applies to them, and they don't like it.

In relation to the women who liked gangsta rap, Weekes recorded these comments:

> ***Weekes:*** Well, what about the way that some ragga artists talk about women, for example?
> ***Francine:*** I don't think it's right, but then again, it don't bother me 'cause I know I'm not like that.
> ***Rochelle:*** It depends how you take it; if you take it personally, then you won't like no music at all then, but . . . I mean, I know they call us bitches and everything, but I know I'm not a bitch, and you've just got to hope that if you meet somebody that they'll appreciate who you are and not what you are.

Nia, age fifteen, held similar views:

> ***Nia:*** That's bad, that is, when you use them kinda language . . . "you [a] bitch and a ho" . . . not bad as in terrible, but I like it. It livens it up, when you're talking about your bitch and your ho. I only like it on the songs, but if they was calling me a bitch, I'd tell 'em that their mum's a sorry bitch for having them. No. They've never said that to me. Kevin said it to us lot, but he just says it for a joke, he's just joking. He goes, "What you bitches and ho's saying?" I goes, "I'm not answering him cos he can't be talking to me." (Weekes 2004, 146–147)

Bakari Kitwana (2003, 86) notes how one woman on a rap music panel explained why this derogatory behavior did not bother her: "Without pause, the hip hop generator explained why it didn't bother her that rappers referred to women as 'bitches' and 'hos.' Setting aside the historical weight of such words, she expressed her ambivalence to this name-calling: 'I don't think there's anything wrong with it. Some women act like that and deserve to be checked. I know I'm not a bitch or a ho, do I don't care 'cause I know they ain't talking to me."

A very good analysis of slack lyrics in Jamaican dance halls can be found in Stolzoff 2000. According to Stolzoff, women's increased role in the dance hall was accompanied

by the rise of slack lyrics (which express explicit sexual content that focuses on women as sexual objects and men as lovers who are well endowed both financially and sexually). Especially in urban Kingston, women began to wear increasingly ostentatious and revealing attire. The most visible role women play in the dance halls are as dance hall models who design "bare as you dare" outfits and compete against other groups of women. As the music became more sexual in nature and the fashion followed suit, the dances also evolved and became more erotic. Stolzoff (2000, 105) points out that slackness has appeal in its defiance of prominent Protestant social mores and its role as an avenue to openly converse about sex, and he notes that Carolyn Cooper, a Jamaican cultural critic, has argued that "slackness provides a carnivalesque overturning of the society's repressive attitudes toward sex, [and] it also recognizes the power of women's sexuality."

27. In *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting (2008, 88) writes that "groupies are integral to safeguarding a seemingly fragile masculinity that is heavily contingent upon female acquiescence and accessibility." At the same time, and in line with what we also found in our sample, she states that because groupies are largely disparaged by male rappers, the women who engage in these sexual exploits often resist the label. A "perverse sort of agency" is at play when the groupies identify themselves as adventurous, sexually assertive women, Sharpley-Whiting (2008, 109), says. She describes the groupie lifestyle as a game or sport in which women collect famous male artists as one would collect trading cards. Some women she researched even positioned themselves as merely emulating the practices of men, saying that if men could have careless sexual relationships without being stigmatized, why shouldn't they? Sharpley-Whiting proposes that low levels of internalized self-esteem cause the devaluation that the hip-hop generation feels and result in an ethos that regards sex in a purely transactional sense—that is, as something that can be bought and sold frivolously. Therefore, sex becomes a tool used to exert control. Women, especially those who have "fucked a famous person," claim that their sexual activities are well within their own control, that they choose to participate in this game of conquering men and receiving the financial rewards.

28. Elena was sixteen; Rosalía was seventeen. Both lived in San Antonio de Padua, a poor neighborhood in the western part of Greater Buenos Aires. They were both students.

29. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) suggest two basic ways in which people evaluate the positionings they are offered by different discourses. The first, which they call "indexical extension," is when people in a determined situation interpret an attribute imposed by a certain position in such a way that the consequences of such a positioning are evaluated on the basis of indexical meanings developed from prior experiences. For example, the "easy woman" positioning presented in cumbia villera lyrics, in our case, can be understood by female fans of the genre as what they felt in the past when treated that way. In the second type of evaluation, which they call "typification extension," the extension of meaning arises out of culturally well-established attributes that are hailed by such a positioning. In this case, Davis and Harré are metaphorically thinking of a person who explores her prior experience until she finds a situation typified as similar on which to construct an interpretation of the position assigned, which can be accepted or rejected. In our case, this would occur when girls who have never been treated as easy call up a stereotype of "slut" to evaluate the positioning of "easy woman." In both extensions, the particular narrative plot adopted by the person in question is a critical element in establishing the meaning of a particular positioning.

In the narratives of Rosalía and her friends, the gender positionings offered by many cumbia villera lyrics correspond to neither type of extension; in other words, those lyrics

do not talk about them, and that is why they do not assume those positionings as their own and why they are not concerned about what the lyrics have to say about them.

30. Liliana was sixteen and still in junior high school; Noelia and Estefanía were seventeen-year-old high-school students. All lived in Santos Lugares, a lower-middle-class suburb northwest of Buenos Aires.

31. A large number of Manuel's students referred to a particular kind of behavior by women on the dance floor. Some recounted hearing a song by the Jamaican reggae artist Beenie Man titled, "Slam" whose lyrics included, "You have to get a slam from a real ghetto gal/if you want to know how good lovin' feel." These words suggest that ghetto women are more eager to attract men and thus make better lovers. Instead of taking offense at the lyrics when this song was played in the dance hall, the students noticed, many of the women danced harder and gyrated faster. The women at the dance hall understood the song to be almost a proud tribute to their class and a celebration of women's sexuality (Manuel 1998).

32. Quela was nineteen. She worked as a low-skilled clerk for the federal government and was finishing her secondary education by taking night classes at a high school for adults. She lived in Lavallol, a working-class suburb.

33. We thank Malvina Silba (personal communication, November 12, 2008), who knows Quela much better than we do, for drawing our attention to this third character.

34. Of course, Quela's reply came so quickly because she has confronted similar interpellations in the past. We do not mean to imply that these complex internal dialogues occur in the course of the brief, spontaneous acts we are depicting. Nevertheless, such a dialogue undoubtedly occurred the first time somebody shouted "slut" at Quela and she did not know how to respond.

35. Manuel (1998, 22–23) describes a similar situation. When a very misogynist song, whose lyrics "constitute a tribute of sorts to ghetto women who, in their eagerness or desperation to attract men, allegedly make better lovers," is played at parties, "female dancers 'put their hands as a salute to it and wind themselves up [gyrate] more than usual." He continues, "The numerous female fans of this song evidently choose to interpret it positively as a . . . celebration of female sexuality. Arguably, a certain sort of empowerment might also be implicit in the associated erotic dancing, in which women could be said to taunt men with their desirable sexual skills, over which they themselves retain control."

CONCLUSION

1. The same logic was applied by some of our interviewees even when they did not chastise young women for their newly acquired sexual freedom (and, accordingly, did not use the label "slut" to qualify this kind of sexual behavior). Instead, they accepted it in some way as a complex, but not necessarily negative, development.

POSTSCRIPT

1. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRmovpEhDcQ (accessed May 3, 2010).

2. Daniel Míguez (2004) provides a detailed analysis of male characters in cumbia villera.

3. La Piba was the sole woman to attain popularity as a cumbia villera singer.

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